Blackdown Hills National Landscape

Minutes of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership Management Group held on Thursday 05 November 2026 at Kentisbeare Village Hall, Kentisbeare

Present:

Cllr Bob Nelson (BN) (Chair)	Blackdown Hills Parish Network
Cllr Natasha Bradshaw (NB)	Mid Devon District Council
Jonathan Farey (JF)	Co-opted Member
Stephen Dury (SD)	Somerset Council
Cllr Martin Wale (MW)	Somerset Council
Josh Bennett (JB) (Teams)	Devon County Council
Jan Keeling (JK)	Blackdown Hills Parish Network
Daniel Lazar (DL)	Co-opted member / Blackdown Hills Parish Network
Carolyn Dare (CD)	Blackdown Hills Transition Group
Cllr Graham Long (GL)	Blackdown Hills Parish Network
Cllr Simon Clist (SC)	Devon County Council Member
Tommy Muncie (TM)	National Trust
Yehudi Levine (YL)	East Devon District Council
Cllr Sarah Wakefield (SW)	Somerset Council
Chris Gibbard (CG)	Forestry Commission
Sarah Jennings (SJ)	30x30 presentation
Nic Clarke (NC)	Drought in farming presentation

Blackdown Hills National Landscape staff team:
Tim Youngs **(TY),** Lisa Turner **(LT),** Hannah Metson **(HM),** Di Weeks **(DW)** (Minutes)

Apologies: Pat Lehain (NE), Graham Guyett (EA), David Northcote-Wright (DWT), Jason Ball (MDDC), Philip Hackett, Jasmine Sheppard (SC), Janette Ward, Gordon Field, Robert Derryman, Fiona Rew (National Farmers Union), Alex Swan (Environment Agency), Paul Spearing (Co-opted Member), Charlie Plowden (East Devon District Council), Tristan Peat (Mid Devon District Council), Ross Henley (Somerset Council), James Divall (Somerset Council), Martin Turner (Blackdown Hills Hedge Association), Doug Eltham (Devon County Council), Adam Powell (Co-opted Member).

Members of the public/ Parish Councillors: none

ITEM 1 Welcome and Introductions		**By whom**
Welcome, introductions and apologies were made, no members of the public present. Tim started the meeting with Elections for the Chair & Vice-chair positions, both Natasha and Bob are happy to remain in post and All present voted in favour of them continuing. Declarations of interest: Connecting the Culm CiC – Tim explained that himself & Lucy Jefferson are both Directors and Dominic Acland and Natasha Bradshaw. The Chair reminded members to complete an updated Register of Interest form (regardless of whether they have one for their own organisation). **Action: Circulate ROI form.**		**BN** **TY** **DW**

ITEM 2.1 Questions from the public		
Action: Contact Parish Councils to make them aware of further PMG meetings so can be advertised locally.		**DW**
ITEM 2.2 Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2026		
The minutes of the meeting held on 24th June 2026 and any matters arising - The minutes were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.		**ALL**
ITEM 3 Presentations		
Nic Clarke and Jonathan Farey Very interesting Presentations from both farmers about tackling and working with Drought on their farms. Conversation continued after the presentations with SC, NC & JF ref farming practices. **Sarah Jennings** Presentation on 30by30. MW asked what is the incentive to be signed up to 30by30, SJ replied it's important that there are sites in the pipeline and then we need to keep pushing Defra for financial support. **Action: Circulate presentation slides ref 30by30.**		**NC/ JF** **SJ** **DW**
ITEM 4 Workshop/ discussion		
The setting of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Lisa gave a presentation highlighting some key points from the briefing paper included with the agenda. The setting is more than views, although views to and from the Blackdown Hills are part of the special qualities. The setting of the Blackdown Hills has no fixed geographical limit and it is not the setting itself that is being protected but consideration of the impact of any changes in the setting on the designated area. Conversation continued and JK said she would send LT some comments. BN asked if the statement on the setting could be added to the Management Plan and LT replied, as the Management Plan has been adopted we couldn't directly, but could certainly link from the relevant part of the plan text to other material. MW spoke and said its very important in planning terms and he is currently working with a Local Plan sub group in Somerset very much focusing on National Landscapes. GL asked if with more planning decisions being made by the Officers, would this be something that Local Planning Officers should be taking into account. NB asked if Local Authorities could use the criteria if an application is contradicting the principles and NB said she would ask the LA. YL commented that in East Devon 2/3rds of it is in the National Landscape, yet we have huge pressure to build properties to meet housing demand and targets. SW commented that this needs to inform planning policy. BN suggested plotting the principles onto a photo to illustrate how they may effect the setting and define the visual envelope.		**LT**

The topic of compensation being paid to the National Landscape for destruction of the natural beauty that has been seen in other National Landscape areas was raised, agreed as a group that this would need to be discussed in much more detail if appropriate. **Action: Circulate Setting papers again with minutes.** **Action: comments to Lisa by the end of November 2026.**		**DW** **LT**
ITEM 5 National Landscape Team		
Tim gave an update on our Core work and reminded the group to publicise our available funding, as there is a lot of different pots of funding available that need to be spent by the end of March 2027. Bob referred all to look at the Annual review, which is now available online. Tim gave an overview of Phase 1-3 of the Connecting the Culm project. **Action 1** - Members to liaise with Officers regarding providing case studies or examples of good practice in complying with the duty – NB asked if we should be asking the Officers for examples. LT replied yes. **Action 2 &3** – Members to promote Access for All funding and promote funding opportunities [30x30 and creation of wildlife rich habitat. **Action 4 –** Pathway to Net Zero - Members to indicate if they wish to be involved in commenting on early drafts and links to organisational plans and strategies – BN asked for anyone who would like to be involved to get in touch. BN mentioned the Risk assessment that himself and Tim will be looking at for the BHNL ref loss of funding, staff, and asked what can we do to minimise these risks. Asked for anyone to approach him after the meeting if interested in being involved in this focus group. **Action 5** – Members to promote FiPL. NB asked if Amy had been promoting to Farming groups, and this was confirmed. BN asked if there were any questions on the Team Report and SD asked if 32 million was an achievable figure to achieve for funding for Connecting the Culm, TY replied we have had 5 million already and have the 25 year Blue-print. JF asked what ongoing monitoring will be planned, TY replied, a PHD student from Exeter University is conducting on-going monitoring, HM added, drone data, time lapse cameras, wildlife cameras, citizen scientists, AVRA so lots being done to monitor these works.		**TY**
ITEM 6 National Landscape Partnership – briefings from Partners		
YL no updates. **JB DCC update via Teams -** Planning & Landscape: Continued ecological and planning support to local authorities, including integration of LNRS priorities into planning policy and development management Team Capacity: Interviews are currently underway for a new Landscape Officer, recruitment of the Devon Local Nature Partnership (LNP) Chair these will be in place by January, and we will shortly be looking to strengthen capacity within the LNRS team.		**ALL**

Successful Innovate UK application confirmed - Likely to bring in FWAGSW to take the landowner engagement, will come to the Protected landscapes potentially for engagement of farmer clusters around woodland creation.

SW said that Somerset Council has been awarded 50 million for flood projects after the flooding last winter, 10 million has been put aside for community projects, local flood issues, which needs to be spent in 2 years.

JF explained his daughter has been completing some filming and it's available on Instagram at **'Folly farmyard'.**

CD mentioned that the kilns have been busy making bio-char, not much was completed during the summer due to the fire risk, thanks to Access funding the track is now in place, making access safer. Looking at a FiPL project with Trim Plants for saving water and over 6500 meals provided with the help of the community vegetables and community food larders.

DL Blackdown Hills Parish Network AGM was well attended and they also showed the climate emergency film where over 20 people came to watch it, happy to show to others at an event if required. Chardstock Harmony garden has been a brilliant addition to the community and would like to thank he BHNL for their funding. Would suggest the next PMG to be held in Chardstock and we can then visit the garden. Thermal imaging camera is available, 2 bookings so far.

NB mentioned MDDC currently looking at a grey water policy, Exeter University doing research on renewables, wind, solar, with a view there may be a new policy made. Some LA's are pushing 10% BNG and will be urging MDDC to do the same. Culmstock neighbourhood plan discussion will be held on 21/11/26.

SJ mentioned Devon Botany Group which has a Devon Rare Plant group, if anyone would be interested in getting involved then speak to Sarah.

HM mentioned that a new trustee is needed for Otterhead Lakes.

SD work continues on the LNRS, interactive map on website, working with partnership to turn LNRS priorities into ways to move forward.

CG talked about the Forestry Commission focussing on tree canopy cover, also water quality, NBS, flood reduction and tree cover. Woodland Officers may be able to help / support with advice if required and keen to be involved in landscape recovery projects.

SC mentioned LGR and unsure of what the next steps will be, highways programme where 25 million is being used for white lines and drainage. Also mentioned anaerobic digestor plants and issues with some being used incorrectly. Roof water needs to be looked at as a priority on new properties.

TM 01 December Woodland CS scheme starts which covers the Blackdowns and Quantocks, all woodland will be part of the plan but mainly small areas.

MW echoed what SW said regarding flooding and there is an excellent flood warning system in a local village that gauges the river levels and then send out a warning message, great example of what can be done locally with communities working together.

GL mentioned that at the recent Upottery Parish Council meeting, they discussed very few council houses being available in Upottery and one has remained empty for over 2 years which seems like a massive shame when the demand for housing is so high. The Parish Council would like to explore options of buying the house and renting it out locally.

ITEM 7 Any other Business		
Next meeting will be held on Tuesday 23 February 2027 from 9.15am – 12pm, venue TBC.		**ALL**

Signed as a true record:

Chairman…… **Date…….**