

Quantock Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee Meeting took place at Halsway Manor. It was chaired by District Councillor for Somerset West and Taunton, Dixie Darch, as Councillor Trollope-Bellew was unwell.

There were 6 presentations made.

1. Iain Porter, Quantock AONB Manager, presented the **Partnership Activity Report**. He introduced two new members of staff: Abby Wilkinson the Community Engagement Officer (who is sharing her time between the Quantocks and Blackdown Hills) and Mark Baker, the new Project Manager, who will be taking on Farming in Protected Landscapes, Greater Quantock Development Fund, Landscape Improvement Scheme, Land Management Skills Scheme, and Nature Recovery Plan. Ian's report focused on recent communications with DEFRA about proposed changes to AONBs and National Parks, including name change and purposes and duties.
2. Friends of Quantock Treasurer Robin Stamp made a presentation about iNaturalist and the launch of **Quantocks Wildlife Watch** on the App, which they hope will help identify the biodiversity in the area and also invasive species which could be then targeted by the rangers.
3. Katie Read, Landscape Project Officer for Quantock AONB, presented her report about the progress on the local projects under the **Farming in Protected Landscapes** (FiPL) grants which are being offered until 2024 to farmers in AONBs, etc, as part of DEFRA's agricultural transition plan. 13 projects are being supported with 11 completed. These include woodland creation, soil quality improvement, reducing flood risk, carbon sequestration, woodland management, public engagement, hedgerows planted, orchards created, and historic structures conserved. There is still a lot of money on offer for other projects in the coming months but they are happy with the engagement so far.
4. Dan Broadbent, Historic Heritage Officer for Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme, presented his report on recent projects such as the **archaeological digs** at Bicknoller, Cothelstone Hill, Crowcombe Manor and Dowsborough Hill Fort.
5. Alex Meletiou, Landscape Planning Officer for Quantock AONB, gave a brief synopsis of his report on **planning applications** in the AONB and also the three large applications in the surrounding areas including the caravan park extension at Inwood Farm in Nether Stowey, the Solar Farm in Washford and the Battery and Energy Storage Site (BESS) in Thurloxton.
6. Ian Porter then came back to present the **Business Plans Progress Report**. Many of the nature recovery work elements are due for delivery this autumn/winter, such as hedgerow, woodland and orchard planting. The Health and Wellbeing projects were delayed due to Covid but are picking up now. The rural skills training has been delayed due to recruitment issues and is due to launch in September. The overall budgets are on track.

AOB:

Some PC representatives asked the chair if she had any more information about the **Local Community Networks** and also expressed interest in working together with other parishes on the South West side of the Quantocks as they felt they had different issues to those on the North East side.

Date of next meeting is 18 October 2022.

A copy of the minutes will be available on the website, once approved:

<https://www.quantockhills.com/jac-papers>

Emily Heckscher
20 July 2022