

Report to: Overview Committee



Date of Meeting 30<sup>th</sup> September 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## **Blackdown Hills National Landscape annual review 2024/25**

### **Report summary:**

Blackdown Hills National Landscape to present their 2024/25 Annual Review to Overview Committee and update on progress being made with reviewing their Management Plan 2025 – 2030. It is an opportunity for Overview Committee to understand the work programmes and activities that have been carried out by the Blackdown Hills National Landscape team over the last 12 months and also to hear about the plans for 2025/26 and how they align with the Council's own priorities for the environment. The team is hosted by Devon County Council, with East Devon DC (along with Mid Devon DC and Somerset Council) as key match funding partners, alongside Defra.

### **Is the proposed decision in accordance with:**

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### **Recommendation:**

That Overview Committee note the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Annual Review report 2024/25 and update on the Management Plan Review 2025-2030.

### **Reason for recommendation:**

To enable the Annual Review 2024/25 to be presented to Overview Committee for noting and receive an update on the review work being progressed with the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025 – 2030.

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### **Portfolio(s) (check which apply):**

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk;

**Links to background information** [Blackdown Hills National Landscape Annual Review 2024-25 Background Report](#)

**Link to [Council Plan](#)**

Priorities (check which apply)

- A supported and engaged community
  - Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
  - Resilient economy that supports local business
  - Financially secure and improving quality of services
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## Report in full

### 1. Blackdown Hills National Landscape (BHNL) Team

- 1.1 BDNL has continued to grow over the last year. Large externally programmes, namely Connecting the Culm and the Triple Axe project continue to develop, with new projects starting as a result of increased funder/ stakeholder interest. Such projects are very much partnerships, run in conjunction with EDNL and Dorset NL in the case of Triple Axe. The current chair is Cllr Bob Nelson (Broadhembury parish council).
- 1.2 The team continue to advise on planning applications (via Lisa Turner, Planning Officer) as well as deliver the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme, alongside other more core activity.

### 2. Blackdown Hills National Landscape finances

- 2.1 The BHNL total combined budget for the 2024/25 year totalled £1,595,000. Of this, £1,242,000 was project specific, the remainder £353,000 comprised of a majority Defra core grant and Local Authority match contributions with East Devon District Council contributing £9,510
- 2.2 The BHNL Partnership have allocated all available funds including rolling over £36,000 into delivering projects during 2025/26 which will help support the reduction in DEFRA core finding for this period The BHNL Partnership indicative core budget for 2025/26 is £250,000 which represents a reduction of £103,000 on last year due to the Capital Uplift being reallocated to the Capital 30x30 project fund However the project budget for 2025/26 is anticipated to be £2,240,000

### 3. Blackdown Hills National Landscape projects

- 3.1 Through the BHNL Project Fund, the Partnership have allocated and committed £80,000 which supported a diverse range of 16 projects across the National Landscape and the Annual Review 2024/25 highlights more on this area of activity. However, as a “snapshot” of these projects, they have included a festival of heritage, purchase of a hybrid taxi cab for charitable use, compost toilets for a Community Interest Company (CiC) in Awliscombe, establishing a Network Support Group and contributing to the Culm Crayfish project.
- 3.2 The Blackdown Hills Farmers Group delivered 9 events this year to a group of over 130 landowners and land managers. Events included slurry management, public events on farms, bracken management water quality and citizen science, soil health and carbon, river

restoration and introduction to the new Sustainable Farming Incentive & Agri environment schemes. 2025/26 is the last funded year of the programme and we are already researching how this valuable project can be funded to continue into the future.

- 3.3 The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Festival of Heritage was a great success, with strong attendance and delivered seven free-to-attend events, each focusing on different historical periods and set in a variety of locations. These events were designed to engage diverse audiences and included the events such as Archaeological Finds Day (Chardstock Community Hall), Tombs, Headstones and Graveyards of the Blackdown Hills (Blackdown Healthy Living Centre), RAF Upottery Airfield Guided Tour and Pop-up Heritage Stall: Crafts and Stories for Young Families (Thelma Hulbert Gallery)
- 3.4 Through the BHNL Access for All programme, the team committed and spent £54,462 which supported 6 projects. The projects included installation of a double electric charging point in Hemyock, supporting the creation of Nature Connection group, developing the new website to be fully accessible and the resurfacing and creation of disabled spaces at the Otterhead carpark along with new information boards. .
- 3.5 This year the BHNL Partnership were accepted as a 'spoke' for the National 'Nature Calling' project led by the National Landscapes Association. The BHNL Partnership as a spoke has enabled a collaboration with East Devon National Landscape, Dementia Friendly Honiton Group and Honiton Community College to deliver a series of events throughout Spring/Summer 2025. Final details of this programme are still being worked out, but it will be a spectacular artistic initiative.
- 3.6 Funding of £4150 was secured for a National Landscape Association led project called Generation Green 2 which in total delivered more than 41,500 day and overnight nature connection experiences to young people who would otherwise be the least likely demographic in the country to spend time in the nation's most beautiful landscapes. We are one of eight National Landscapes to have bid for funding and delivered 30 spaces for Devons Young Carers with three sessions at Wildside, a nature connection and outdoor activity space in Madford, along with 20 places for overnight stays however due to time limitations were given permission to support Magdalen Farm (a close partner on Axe projects) within the Dorset National Landscape to deliver these stays.
- 3.7 It has been another hugely successful year for BHNL Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. In total the BHNL Partnership supported 63 projects worth a combined £526,039. With £407,305 originally allocated and a further successful bid for additional funding securing £118,734 The BHNL Annual Review 2024/25 provides a summary of the projects delivered.

#### **4. Wider Strategic Initiatives**

- 4.1 As ever, the Blackdown Hills National Landscape team is involved in a wide range of regional and local partnerships. The team sit on many of these groups as part of the core steering group and are partners on some of them.
- 4.2 A new project for this year is Rivers Run Through Us, a partnership between Blackdown Hills, East Devon National Landscape, Dorset National Landscape and the Environment Agency. The new project team has been recruited, and the project aim is to restore natural heritage of the Axe through focussing on 3 key strategic themes: River, Soil and People. The work programme has just started for this project.

#### **5. Management Plan 2025-2030**

5.1 The BHNL Partnership have secured adoption of the Management Plan from all Local Authorities over the summer, underpinned by detailed evidence gathering, publication of a State of the BHNL report and comprehensive stakeholder engagement. The Management Plan will be published on the BHNL website.

## **6. Planning and Consultation**

6.1 The BHNL team continues to advise the Local Authorities on planning matters by responding to consultations on applications, input into pre-application advice where appropriate, and contributing to formal and informal local plan consultations.

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### **Financial implications:**

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report

### **Legal implications:**

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to the report