

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held
at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford. on Monday,
4th March, 2019 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor P. Cutter (Chair) (Herefordshire Council)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: D. Dovey, M. Lane and A. Webb

Gloucestershire County Council

County Councillor P. Molyneux

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillors: G. Davies and B. Hogan

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers

HALC – Mr. R. Gething

One Voice Wales – Councillor G. Powell

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire – Mr. B. Nash

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Gloucestershire – Dr. G. Peterken

National Farmers Union – Mr. M. Price

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mrs. V. Morgan

Recreation Sector – Mr. A. Lee

Local Wildlife Trusts – Mr. A. Nixon

River Wye Preservation Trust – Mr. R. Hesketh

Technical Advice Officers:

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

Gloucestershire County Council - Mr. R. Niblett

APOLOGIES:

Councillors T. Hale, J. Hardwick and E. Swinglehurst

Mr. D. Price, Mr. C. Barron and Ms. H. McDowell

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1. Introductions

On behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee, the Chair welcomed Mr. M. Price, representing the National Farmers Union, to the meeting. The Chair also welcomed Mrs. V. Morgan to the meeting, as she was representing the Wye Valley Society in place of Mr. C. Barron, who was unable to attend today's meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by the Joint Advisory Committee members.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee meeting dated 5th November 2018 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

4. Public Question Time

There were no members of the public present.

5. Live Streaming of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Meetings

We received a report regarding filming and broadcasting Joint Advisory Committee meetings.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) traditionally holds its meetings in the Forest of Dean District Council Chamber.
- The Forest of Dean District Council has the facility to film, record and webcast meetings held in the Council Chamber.
- The constituent local authorities of the Wye Valley AONB all have the facility to record and broadcast meetings from their respective Council Chambers.
- Some National Park Authorities also film, record and broadcast their meetings.
- However, no other AONB Partnership or Joint Advisory Committee is known to film, record or broadcast their meetings.
- The low response to the public question time and low public attendance at Joint Advisory Committee meetings would indicate that there is currently not much demand for viewing these meetings.

We resolved that the Joint Advisory Committee does not pursue the opportunity to film and broadcast its meetings at this time.

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6. AONB Unit 2019/20 Work Programme

We received a report outlining the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit during the forthcoming financial year.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The table in the report sets out the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit in the form of the Work Programme 2019 / 2020.
- During the year it is anticipated that the AONB Unit will reduce from 5.6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff to 4.4 FTE staff and the Work Programme is built to accommodate this 20% decrease in capacity.
- Priorities include progressing the review for the AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 and continuing a range of existing activities and projects while retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.
- The budgets in the Work Programme have been approved by the AONB Steering Group and submitted to DEFRA and Natural Resources Wales (NRW).
- This is the final year of a four year core funding settlement with DEFRA and the second year of a three year funding agreement with NRW.
- It will be the second year of Welsh Government's confirmed allocation of £55,000 for the Sustainable Development Fund.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), in the sum of £55,000, is a delegated grant that is administered by the Wye Valley AONB. £52,329 SDF grant has been allocated with £2,671 remaining to be spent in the 2018/19 financial year.
- In response to a question raised regarding woodlands work, it was noted that Sarah Sawyer, AONB Community Links Officer, has been liaising with Natural England in respect of Highbury Woods SSSI and National Nature Reserve management with AONB volunteers. The AONB Manager is liaising with Gwent Wildlife Trust regarding Piercefield Wood SSSI in respect of the management to be agreed for the site.

We resolved to endorse the AONB Unit Work Programme for 2019 / 2020.

7. Sustainable Development Fund Update

We received a report regarding the revised membership of the Assessment Panel for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

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- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) is a delegated grant from Welsh Government administered by the Wye Valley AONB Partnership and confirmed for 2019/20 at £55,000.
- The SDF Assessment Panel is established as a sub-group of the Joint Advisory Committee and consists of public, private and voluntary sector representatives with two appointees from each sector to ensure a balance across social, community, economic and environmental interests.
- At the previous Joint Advisory Committee meeting it was agreed to refresh the membership and appointees to the Panel. The revised Panel membership is as follows:

Public Sector representatives:

Councillor Mrs Ann Webb, Monmouthshire County Council (Joint Advisory Committee)

Councillor Gethyn Davies, Forest of Dean District Council (Joint Advisory Committee)

Private Sector representatives:

David Price, NFU Wales (Joint Advisory Committee)

Antony Smith, Wyastone Estates Ltd.

Voluntary Sector representatives:

Ashley Thomas: Monmouthshire Voluntary Conservation Sector representative (Joint Advisory Committee)

To be confirmed – Herefordshire Community Foundation

Local Authority officer:

Colette Bosley: Principal Green Infrastructure & Landscape Officer, Monmouthshire County Council

Statutory Agency officer:

Sarah Coakham, Partnerships Officer, Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

Wye Valley AONB officers in attendance:

Andrew Blake, AONB Manager

Sarah Sawyer, AONB Community Links Officer

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- The current allocation of SDF grants has £2,671 remaining to be allocated in 2018/19.

We resolved to endorse the new membership of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Assessment Panel.

8. Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales

We received a report in which the Joint Advisory Committee was provided with an update in respect of the Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales and the Minister's interest in greater parity between AONBs and National Parks.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Officers from the Welsh AONBs, the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) met with the Welsh Government Minister, Hannah Blythyn AM, to discuss how to provide greater parity for AONBs with National Parks in Wales.
- In December 2018 the Welsh AONB lead officers, NAAONB and NRW submitted detailed proposals to the Minister on the parity issue.
- Following a Welsh Government reshuffle, Hannah Blythyn retains the responsibility for AONBs with National Parks although she has moved from being the Minister for Environment to Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government.
- Welsh Government officers are currently considering the submitted proposals on how to provide greater parity for AONBs with National Parks in Wales. A subsequent meeting is expected shortly.

Having received the report, it was noted that as devolution in Wales increases, there is the on-going challenge to manage the Wye Valley AONB as a single entity via two separate funding systems, as the AONB straddles two countries.

We noted the report.

9. Review of Designated Landscapes in England

We received a report in which the Joint Advisory Committee was provided with an update in respect of the Review of Designated Landscapes in England.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Review of Designated Landscapes (National Parks and AONBs) in England was launched by Environment Secretary Michael Gove MP last year with a small advisory panel chaired by Julian Glover.
- The 'Landscapes Review call for evidence' closed in December 2018.

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- A small Joint Advisory Committee task group assisted the AONB Manager in preparing a response on behalf of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership.
- Sarah Sawyer, AONB Community Links Officer, provided evidence to a meeting on Volunteering in AONBs and National Parks with Julian Glover.
- Sarah Mukherjee, one of the Review advisory panel members, recently visited the Wye Valley AONB.
- The AONB Manager has provided advice to DEFRA officials on the Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales and will attend a meeting with Julian Glover and the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) in April 2019.
- The Review Panel is expected to present its report to the Minister in the autumn of 2019.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The Joint Advisory Committee had received information from Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) which had called for better access to English landscapes. It had been identified that more than a third of people could not easily enjoy England's most beautiful countryside.
- However, it was considered that the general outcomes contained some flaws with some assumptions having been made that could be questioned.
- It raised questions regarding what our priorities should be as, unlike National Parks, it is not a purpose of AONB designation to 'Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public' and adequate resources are not available to do this.
- In response to a question raised regarding the Forest of Dean, it was noted that this area was on a list to be considered for AONB designation.
- The remit of the Review is to look at the general designation process and not specific locations. However, there is a need to revise and speed up the process.
- It was noted that there is a need to provide areas for the public to access the countryside and explore the natural environment. However, local authorities are under pressure to build more houses and better infrastructure.
- It was noted that Sarah Mukherjee and Dame Fiona Reynolds had visited the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean respectively and the latter had enquired about the status of the Dean Forest and Wye Valley National Forest Park.

We noted the report.

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10. Wye Valley River Festival 2020+ Update

We considered a report regarding the current situation with the Wye Valley River Festival 2020.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- Grant applications to Arts Council of Wales and Arts Council England for the Research and Development phase of the Wye Valley River Festival 2020 have been unsuccessful.
- An initial Creative Camp one-day workshop for the Wye Valley River Festival 2020 attracted nearly 40 people and generated many good ideas around the theme of 'Time'.
- The final report is awaited on a study of governance options, audience demographics and funding models to inform a new five year business plan to take the Wye Valley River Festival forward.
- Further opportunities and funding bids are being investigated.

We noted the report.

11. National Association for AONBs

We received a report regarding activity through the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB).

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The AONB Manager attended the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) Chairman's Conference and Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 29th November 2018 which focused on "The Designated Landscapes Review in England".
- The AONB Development Officer and the AONB Community Links Officer are both participating in the professional training 'Taking the Lead' programme as part of the Future Landscapes Programme. The AONB Manager sits on the steering group for the Future Landscapes Programme, which is supported by Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).
- The NAAONB has proposed an amendment to the Agriculture Bill and provided DEFRA with proposals for a post Brexit Environmental Land Management Scheme.
- The annual National AONB 'Landscapes for Life' Conference will take place in Colchester on 9th -11th July 2019.

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We noted the report.

12. Partner and AONB Unit Progress Reports and Updates

We received a report of the activity of the AONB Unit and partners, relating to:

- Ecosystem Services checklist.
- Fixed Point Photography.
- Herefordshire Meadows Facilitation Group.
- Lower Wye Catchments NFM & GI Project.
- Ross riverside.
- West Midlands Deer Priority Area.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The beavers that had been introduced to an enclosure near Lydbrook were being re-captured as a precautionary measure to check for parasites that can affect dogs and other wildlife. When captured, the beavers will be replaced with beavers from Devon which are known not to carry the parasites.
- Fixed point photography - The first 20 sites were photographed in October 2018 and the next 21 will be photographed in May 2019. As a catalogue of photos is built up over time, this will provide a valuable insight into the changing landscape.
- Ash dieback has been located within the AONB. The subsequent consequences will be dealt with as it sets in.
- The Forestry Commission is stepping up its management of wild boar in order to maintain manageable levels within the area.
- The Herefordshire Meadows report highlighted the various groups working within the AONB which conserve and enhance grassland management. Dr. George Peterken was thanked for the work that he had undertaken in respect of the Parish Grassland Project and promoting meadow conservation.
- The pine marten project is progressing well. A detailed feasibility study and social science study has been completed, showing the area has abundant suitable habitat and strong local community support. Both are available on the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust website. It has not yet been formally announced that the project is going ahead until sufficient funding is available. However, the minimum budget is close to being raised and it is hoped that an announcement will be made in the coming months. If this goes ahead this year it would involve the release of 20 radio-collared pine martens in September 2019. Two dedicated

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staff members would help monitor the species and their impacts, and be on hand to help with any enquiries or assistance. The project is a collaboration between Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission, Vincent Wildlife Trust, and the Woodland Trust.

We noted the report.

13. Dates of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee meetings for 2019/20

Future meetings of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee will be held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford, on the following dates:

1st July 2019.

4th November 2019.

2nd March 2020.

The Chair thanked the Committee for its interest in the work being undertaken by the Wye Valley AONB Unit and also thanked officers for their support.

On behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee, the Vice-Chair thanked the Chair for his excellent chairmanship over the year and previous years.

It was noted that David Lovelace had been involved in a serious accident and was currently in hospital. On behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee the Chair expressed his good wishes for a speedy recovery.

The meeting ended at 3.17 pm.