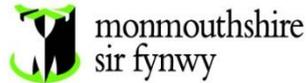


Public Document Pack



County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

Monday 25th October 2021

Notice of meeting:

Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Monday, 1st November, 2021 at 2.00 pm
Remote Attendance

AGENDA

Item No	Item	Pages
1.	Apologies for Absence.	
2.	Declarations of Interest.	
3.	Public Question Time.	
3.1.	Preservation of Rural Beauty proposal to extend the Wye Valley AONB.	1 - 4
4.	To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting dated 5th July 2021.	5 - 14
5.	AONB Annual report 2020/21.	15 - 16
5.1.	AONB Unit Annual Report.	17 - 28
6.	Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & HCF AONB Fund.	29 - 32
7.	AONB 50th Anniversary Programme.	33 - 34
8.	Wye Water quality update.	35 - 38
9.	Monmouthshire Wye Valley Villages Plan.	39 - 40
10.	NAAONB update.	41 - 44
10.1.	Global Statement on climate change in Protected Areas for COP26.	45 - 48
11.	AONB progress reports.	49 - 52
12.	Dates of next meetings:	

<p>Monday 7th March 2022 at 2.00pm Monday 4th July 2022 at 2.00pm Monday 7th November 2022 at 2.00pm</p>	
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Subject to Covid-19 restrictions the meetings will be held in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

Paul Matthews

Chief Executive

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CYNGOR SIR FYNWY

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:

Local Authority Members with Voting Powers

Gloucestershire:

T. Hale
G. Morgan

Herefordshire:

B. Durkin
J. Hardwick
P. Symonds
Y. Watson

Monmouthshire:

C. Edwards
M. Feakins
M. Lane
A.E. Webb

Forest of Dean:

D. Wheeler
C. McFarling

Town / Parish Community Councils with Voting Powers

C. Evers – Gloucestershire Association of Parish / Town Councils
R. Gething – Herefordshire Association Local Councils
Councillor R. Edwards – One Voice Wales

Co-opted Members with Voting Powers

Dr. G. Peterken – Voluntary Conservation Sector in Gloucestershire
B. Nash - Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire
A. Thomas - Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire
H. Dale – Country Land and Business Association
M. Price – National Farmers Union

Co-opted Members without Voting Powers

L. Taylor – The Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales
C. Barron – Wye Valley Society
R. Hesketh – River Wye Preservation Trust
A. Lee – Recreation Sector
K. Ballard – Local Tourism Sector
A. Nixon – Local Wildlife Trusts
D. Price – National Farmers Union Wales

Public Information

Access to paper copies of agendas and reports

A copy of this agenda and relevant reports can be made available to members of the public attending a meeting by requesting a copy from Democratic Services on 01633 644219. Please note that we must receive 24 hours notice prior to the meeting in order to provide you with a hard copy of this agenda.

Welsh Language

The Council welcomes contributions from members of the public through the medium of Welsh or English. We respectfully ask that you provide us with adequate notice to accommodate your needs.

Aims and Values of Monmouthshire County Council

Sustainable and Resilient Communities

Outcomes we are working towards

Nobody Is Left Behind

- Older people are able to live their good life
- People have access to appropriate and affordable housing
- People have good access and mobility

People Are Confident, Capable and Involved

- People's lives are not affected by alcohol and drug misuse
- Families are supported
- People feel safe

Our County Thrives

- Business and enterprise
- People have access to practical and flexible learning
- People protect and enhance the environment

Our priorities

- Schools
- Protection of vulnerable people
- Supporting Business and Job Creation
- Maintaining locally accessible services

Our Values

- **Openness:** we aspire to be open and honest to develop trusting relationships.
- **Fairness:** we aspire to provide fair choice, opportunities and experiences and become an organisation built on mutual respect.
- **Flexibility:** we aspire to be flexible in our thinking and action to become an effective and efficient organisation.
- **Teamwork:** we aspire to work together to share our successes and failures by building on our strengths and supporting one another to achieve our goals.

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PRESERVATION OF RURAL BEAUTY Herefordshire & Gloucestershire

PROPOSAL FROM PRUB* THAT THE WYE VALLEY AONB BE EXTENDED TO INCLUDE THE EASTERN RIDGE FORMING THE WATERSHED BETWEEN THE RIVER WYE AND RIVER SEVERN FROM WOOLHOPE TO THE FOREST OF DEAN

This is an appeal to extend the Wye Valley AONB eastern boundary to include the eastern ridge from Woolhope down through south eastern Herefordshire into North Gloucestershire, Kempley, Dymock, to Newent and south to the Forest of Dean. We leave the precise boundary to be determined officially.

We understand that this area was, at least in part, included in the Countryside Commission's original recommendation for the Wye Valley AONB. We believe this area was eventually excluded due to pressure from the farming lobby concerned that visitor numbers would impact the animal husbandry of sheep and cattle in this then largely pasture based agricultural economy. Of course that visitor impact did not materialise in the Wye Valley itself and decades of experience now point to there being little interference from visitors in day to day farming activities of the AONB.

We believe that this proposed extension would add to the existing Wye Valley designated area by providing complimentary context for the Valley floor itself by adding its eastern watershed and catchment, that is, the ridge defining the Wye Valley and dividing it from the River Severn. This ridge has a distinctive landscape of narrow often incised lanes inherited from medieval times, as are the field patterns which retain ancient hedgerows so providing a distinctive landscape dotted with surviving medieval farmsteads and old Courts or manors.

This area sits in the south eastern corner of Herefordshire and northern area of Gloucestershire being therefore on the boundary between the West Midlands Region and the South West Region for Government purposes, an in-between area often on the fringes of consideration when policies are being developed. In local County terms too, the area misses out sitting between the protected areas of the Cotswolds, Malvern Hills, and the Forest of Dean. But this eastern ridge is no less valuable, if always forgotten by the specialists concentrating on the more famous nearby locations.

The landscape of the Wye Valley has undergone considerable change since the creation of the AONB with the advent of intensive horticultural development and polytunnel use making some tracts of the valley floor distinctly unattractive in landscape terms. By contrast the agrarian landscape on the eastern ridge has largely escaped intensive agricultural development. Although there has been loss of old traditional orchards and some hedgerows, the narrow lanes, ancient woodlands, traditional field patterns and the many listed buildings remain. These are often not grand houses but the more modest working buildings of distinctive still intact, even if converted, large barns in their farming context.

The geomorphology of this area is such that there are many small valleys running from the ridge to the Wye and east to the Leadon eventually into the Severn. Therefore this ridge forms the watershed between the Wye and Severn Rivers being an important geomorphological feature of the Ice Ages shaping the Wye Valley and its landscape that became the first ever tourist area valued for its natural beauty.

This area in more modern times has been famous for its wild daffodils which became a tourist destination in its own right – The Golden Triangle, and today those wild daffodils form the largest remaining area of wild daffodils in the country. However, there is no protection for these sites of

daffodils and the species is not itself protected either. But daffodils alone are not this area's only interest beyond the sheer beauty of the landscape. The area is home to a wide range of birds of prey. The wide range of species in this group demonstrates that as creatures at the top of the food chain pyramid, there is currently a diverse and plentiful range of species and habitat supporting this raptor population. The ridge is rich in diverse habitat, and species range from wild orchid and other protected wild flower populations through a very diverse range of insects, including listed butterflies and beetles, nearly all the amphibian and aquatic species, as well as most common and threatened British mammals e.g. hedgehog, hare, and a range of protected mammals, otters, dormice, horseshoe bats (in fact most British bat species). There is a diverse range of bird species too such as nightingale, snipe, as well as birds of prey.

The habitats associated with these species provide a vibrant natural environment that adds to the Wye Valley AONB interest for tourism and public enjoyment. Yet relatively speaking this area has few SSSIs or Local Nature Reserves which means development on this ridge is protected only by Neighbourhood Development Plans as pressure builds from developers.

It is little wonder that this pressure is building because with the M50 motorway linking the area with Cardiff and Birmingham it is becoming a desirable area for tourists and developers alike. There is a thriving local tourist industry largely based on B&B as a part of agricultural diversification, and the area is now a key day trip location for walkers, photographers and those with environmental interests. However, it is also becoming a desirable location for second home ownership being described by estate agents as 'the new Cotswolds' – we would argue it is better than the Cotswolds in landscape beauty and diversity of environment.

Therefore the area needs protection from the wrong kind of development – speculative large properties which fetch high prices providing excellent returns for developers so pricing local people out of the housing market. Current planning regulations coupled with the area having lost out to the protection afforded to the adjoining AONB areas, means this area is a target for developers. This is now even more pressured due to the recent pressure to limit housing development in the Wye and Lugg Valleys. This will inevitably lead to added pressure on the Herefordshire part of this proposed addition to the AONB. At the same time the transport links of the M50, M5, Severn Bridge / M4 motorways make the area a target for those seeking to relocate to the countryside post pandemic from further afield from the urban centres of Birmingham, Bristol and Cardiff, even London. This landscape is special and distinct and its value and beauty needs to be recognised.

The area is visually very beautiful, at least as desirable as the Wye Valley and Malvern Hills, yet different in scale and type of landscape. It has historical interest from Roman settlements and remains, medieval land use patterns and many listed buildings of different kinds, churches, farmsteads, manor houses and castles. The area has direct ancient links to the Bishopric of Hereford – for example, Upton Bishop derives its name from the Churches ownership of lands in the parish. The area is largely within the Domesday Book's Grey Tree Hundred and the Forest of Dean St Briavels Hundred. It has different kinds of natural interest, native woodlands, old orchards and pastures, diverse wildlife, interesting geological features, streams and valleys with excellent views from the ridge and hill tops. There are many bridleways and public footpaths suitable for both long, middle and shorter distance walks across the ridge, its small valleys and woodlands, beside its lakes and orchards.

In summary this area meets all the criteria of 'exceptional landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are precious enough to be safeguarded in the national interest for nature, people, business and culture'. It also provides context for the creation of the Wye Valley thereby bringing something new of added value to the existing AONB.



There will be many who are unfamiliar with this eastern ridge and therefore we present in the accompanying photo annex a series of photos demonstrating the landscape, the economic activity, tourist interest, and wildlife and its habitats on which so much depends. Yet all is outside the Wye Valley AONB and is mostly simply open countryside without any special status or protection. We urge you to recognise how special it is and to add the area to the Wye Valley AONB.

Liz O’Sullivan
Chairman PRuB
12.10.2021

*PRUB – Preservation of Rural Beauty is a private residents group that straddles the south east Herefordshire/Gloucestershire border. We originally formed some twelve years ago to stop a major mobile home development in Upton Bishop but soon became involved in defending this beautiful area from other development either of an unsuitable or unacceptable scale. We monitor planning applications across the area from Lyne Down in the north of our patch to Lea in the south and from Kempley in the east to Phocle Green in the west down to Ross on Wye. We also respond to County consultation documents on Planning and Transportation policy and County Plans, as well as respond to national consultations on Planning and related special provisions. We have some two hundred members from across the area but we also find ourselves being consulted from further afield, for example in Hampshire and Powys when our profile becomes raised through our responses to consultations.

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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor: A Webb (Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: C. Edwards and M. Feakins

Herefordshire Council

Councillors: B. Durkin, J. Hardwick, P. Symonds and Y. Watson

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillors: C. McFarling and D. Wheeler

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers

Herefordshire Association Local Councils - R. Gething

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire – Mr. B. Nash

Country Land and Business Association – Ms. H. Dale

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

Gwent Wildlife Trust – Mr. A. Taylor

National Farmers Union Wales – Mr. D. Price

Technical Advice Officers:

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

Also in attendance:

Mr. M. Quine	-	Environment Agency
Mr. S. Thomas	-	Environment Agency
Ms. H. Sisley	-	Natural Resources Wales
Councillor E. Swinglehurst	-	Chair of the Nutrient Management Board

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor M. Lane, Dr. G. Peterken, Mr. M. Price, Mr. R. Hesketh, Mr. R. Niblett, Mr. J. Bisset, Mr. C. Rees, Ms. C. Grimstead, Mr. G. Parry and Councillor S. Phelps

1. Election of Chair

We elected County Councillor A. Webb as Chair.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

We appointed Councillor Y. Watson as Vice-Chair.

3. Introductions and new members

The Chair welcomed to the meeting County Councillors Christopher Edwards and Mathew Feakins representing Monmouthshire County Council.

The AONB Manager introduced Sam Taylor representing the Environment Agency and Holly Sisley representing Natural Resources Wales who would be providing the Committee with a presentation on water quality in respect of the River Wye.

Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst, Chair of the Wye Nutrient Management Board and Adam Taylor representing Gwent Wildlife Trust were also in attendance.

4. Declarations of Interest

None received.

5. Public Question Time

No questions had been received.

6. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 1st March 2021 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Gloucestershire County Council had yet to update its representation on the Joint Advisory Committee.
- The AONB Manager will be advising the Joint Advisory Committee later in the meeting regarding the Glover Review and the implementation of the agricultural transition plan with respect to farming and protected landscapes.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

- A question was raised regarding the review of designated landscapes in Wales in respect of progress being made of plans for a nature recovery network nine year strategy. The matter would be discussed outside of the meeting.

7. Water quality presentations

We received a joint presentation from Sam Thomas, Environment Agency and Holly Sisley, Natural Resources Wales, regarding water quality on the River Wye.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- With regard to phosphates and mercury levels within the River Wye, it was noted that the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are now able to detect these element in the tissues of living organisms within the river. These investigations are ongoing. It is anticipated that further information on this matter will be published in due course, nationally.
- There have been issues relating to phosphates in the River Wye for a long period of time. High rainfall events and flooding occurrences within Wales in recent years could have further exacerbated this problem causing soils and sediments to wash into the river.
- There are studies being undertaken investigating how phosphates, once in the river gravel systems, can re-mobilise into the water column. Research into these issues is ongoing so definitive answers are not yet available in respect of this matter.
- It was noted that the sense of urgency has been recognised by the EA and NRW and it has been instilled already to restore the health of the River Wye. There is a vast amount of work being undertaken via the Nutrient Management Plan Board. The new asset management plan for the water companies began this year with the majority of required measures being put in place between now and 2027. Further measures identified would be for the next five year cycle.
- It was recognised that diffuse input of phosphate from the wider catchment needs concerted effort across multiple sectors applying pressure to create change.
- This matter should not be looked at in terms of water quality alone. Issues occurring on the land such as climate change is having an impact on our water bodies.
- There is a need for more resource to not only monitor the changes but also to monitor the interventions that are planned to ensure that the Wye remains a healthy river for now and future generations.
- In response to a question raised regarding spot checks on water course consent forms and the inclusion of an ecologist being a part of the consultation process, it was noted that the EA representative would take this matter back to the EA for consideration.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

- The Chair of the Nutrient Management Board informed the Joint Advisory Committee that the phosphates in the River Wye has been a long standing issue that needs to be addressed. A study is being brought forward from the University of Leeds and Lancaster looking at legacy phosphate. It was noted that the soils around the River Wye contain high quantities of phosphate already and phosphate tends to mobilise in peak events. There needs to be a sense of urgency to address this issue. Citizen Science is working with the EA to bolster the data flow to identify a more detailed analysis of what is happening within the River Wye. Flooding and water quality are linked. Therefore, solving one of these issues will help towards solving the other issue.

On behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee, the Chair thanked the representatives from the EA and NRW for providing their presentation on water quality on the River Wye. The Chair also thanked the Chair of the Nutrient Management Board for attending the meeting.

8. Wye Valley River Festival Community Interest Company

We received a report regarding the Wye Valley River Festival Community Interest Company (CIC) and the relationship with the AONB Partnership, going forward.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Joint Advisory Committee had previously supported the proposal to progress with establishing a possible Community Interest Company (CIC) as an autonomous body to secure the future of the Wye Valley River Festival.
- The Wye Valley River Festival CIC has now been established with three Directors, all hitherto involved and integral to the previous Festivals.
- A Working Agreement is proposed between the Joint Advisory Committee and the CIC with a lead AONB staff member invited to have a non- executive role on the Wye Valley River Festival (WVRF) CIC Advisory Board. The CIC is now commencing plans for the next Festival and is submitting grant applications to secure appropriate funding.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The AONB Manager would continue to provide the Joint Advisory Committee with update reports in respect of the work being undertaken by the CIC in respect of the Wye Valley River Festival.
- Going forward, it is anticipated that a member of the Joint Advisory Committee could have a role on the CIC Advisory Board.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

We resolved to:

- (i) welcome the establishment of the Wye Valley River Festival Community Interest Company (CIC) to take forward the Wye Valley River Festival;
- (ii) endorse the Working Agreement between the Wye Valley River Festival Community Interest Company (CIC) and the Joint Advisory Committee, with an AONB staff member taking a non-executive and advisory role with the CIC, on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee and AONB Partnership.

9. Glover Review & Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

We received a report regarding the Ministerial Statement on the Government's response to the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes in England and the launch of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The 'Glover' Landscapes Review of National Parks and AONBs in England was published in 2019 with 27 'Proposals' for Government.
- The Written Ministerial Statement published on 24th June 2021 provides the Government's initial response to the Landscapes Review.
- The Minister also launched the DEFRA funded 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' programme, originally announced in the Agricultural Transition Plan.
- Natural England has also announced proposals for new protected areas across England.
- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) continues to work closely with DEFRA and Natural England and has responded formally to both.
- Each AONB and National Park in England has an allocation from DEFRA to administer the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme for farmers and land managers to provide benefits for nature, climate, people and places.
- The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme requires and enables the AONB Unit to establish a Local Assessment Panel and recruit a Farm Advisor to assist farmers and land managers applying to the programme.
- It is proposed that the Local Assessment Panel is adopted as a Joint Advisory Sub-Committee with at least one Joint Advisory Committee member, augmented by other sector representatives as outlined by DEFRA 'Expectation'.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding the Golden Valley being designated as an AONB, the AONB Manager stated that an annex to the Glover Review included the Herefordshire Marches as well as the Forest of Dean. Natural England has been empowered to take this matter forward. However, it was noted that there was a further list of unfinished AONB designation business to be considered. There are discussions being held to map out the potential areas for National Parks and AONBs.
- Natural England has funding for the designation process. Central Government has announced the 30 by 30 target to designate 30% of the Country by 2030 for nature recovery.

We resolved to:

- (i) welcome the Ministerial Statement of 24th June 2021 outlining the forthcoming response to the Glover Review and the launching of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme;
- (ii) note the accompanying announcement by Natural England and the respective responses by the National Association for AONBs to the Ministerial Statement and Natural England announcement;
- (iii) endorse the establishment of a Local Assessment Panel for the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme, with at least one Joint Advisory Committee member and the recruitment of a Farm Advisor to assist applicants in the Wye Valley AONB.

10. **AONB Funding bids**

We received a report regarding various funding allocation secured by the AONB Unit and to seek endorsement on behalf of the AONB Partnership.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Unit has successfully secured the following funding for projects:
 - Severn Trent Boost for Biodiversity - Brockweir Riverside Invasive Non-Native Species Treatment (BRINNST).
 - NRW Biodiversity & Ecosystems Resilience Funding (BERF).
 - Environment Agency Natural Flood Management (NFM) and Riparian Tree projects.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

- The AONB Unit is leading on a partnership bid to the Nature Networks Fund (NNF) through National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.

We resolved to:

- (i) welcome the various funding allocations secured by the AONB Unit on behalf of the AONB Partnership;
- (ii) endorse the Lower Wye Nature Networks application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the Nature Networks Fund in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.

11. AONB Partnership Study Tour - 17th September 2021

We received a report regarding the proposal to hold an Annual AONB Partnership Study Tour, if Covid-19 restrictions allow.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour was cancelled last year due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.
- It is proposed that, subject to restrictions allowing, the AONB Partnership Tour be held on Friday 17th September 2021.
- The programme will be finalised nearer the time but will focus on using individuals' private vehicles to reach sites and may only be for half a day instead of a full day, depending on logistics.

Following discussion, we resolved that the AONB Manager would make appropriate arrangements for Friday 17th September 2021 within the Covid-19 restrictions which will be as informative as possible due to the circumstances. He will then email the Joint Advisory Committee in due course, as plans are firmed up.

12. Annual Report 2020/21

We received the annual report figures for 2020/21 and noted the delay in the completion of the tabulated achievements for the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The 2020/21 Annual Report figures were outlined in the report.
- There is a delay in finalising the full report tabulating the achievements of the year against the annual Work Programme. This will be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

- The AONB Unit has levered in over £12 for every £1 of local authority contribution during 2020/21.

We welcomed the Annual Report figures and await the finalised Annual Report on AONB achievements for 2020/21.

13. **Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & HCF AONB Fund**

We received a report regarding the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF).

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) currently has £43,823.25 allocated from the £100,000 offered by Welsh Government for 2021/22, with £56,176.75 remaining.
- This is the 21st year of the SDF and Welsh Government may make some minor modifications to the SDF Grant Guidance. These will be reported on in due course.
- Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) host the Wye Valley AONB Fund for which the 2020/21 Quarter Four balances were £2,916.19 for immediate funding and £54,531.59 in the Endowment Fund.
- Applications are welcome for both sets of funding for 2021/22.

We noted the report.

14. **NAAONB update**

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

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The national 'Landscapes for Life' Conference 2021 is on-line on 7th & 8th July 2021, 'hosted' virtually by the five Devon AONBs with the theme of 'A Climate for Change - Climate Change and Nature Recovery in National Landscapes'.
- The NAAONB have signed a joint Memorandum of Understanding with Natural England and National Parks England.
- The new Chief Executive of the NAAONB will be John Watkins, formerly Head of Landscapes and Outdoor Recreation at Welsh Government.
- The NAAONB Strategic Plan for 2021-2023 has been published.

We noted the report.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

15. AONB updates

We received a report regarding the activity of the Wye Valley AONB Unit relating to:

- AONB Volunteers & Youth Rangers.
- Appointment of a Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer.
- Wye Valley Villages Transport Plan update.
- Lower Wye Green Infrastructure (GI) work (Monmouthshire).
- Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) AONB Office refurbishment.

Having received the report the following points were noted:

- Local Authority members of the Joint Advisory Committee were asked to notify the AONB Manager of any planning applications within their authority that were located within the AONB boundary. This matter could be discussed further at the next Joint Advisory Committee meeting. The AONB Manager stated that planning applications located within the AONB are monitored but welcomed any notifications from members or the public.
- In response to a question raised regarding the AONB unit acquiring a Planning Officer, it was noted that this matter is subject to resources. Currently, the resources are not available to employ a Planning Officer. The AONB Manager has requested to Welsh Government that each AONB should employ a Planning Officer.

We noted the report.

16. Dates of next meetings:

- 2pm Monday 1st November 2021 (Subject to Covid-19 restrictions the meeting will be held at Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford).
- 2pm Monday 7th March 2022 (to be confirmed).

The meeting ended at 4.01 pm.

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ANNUAL REPORT

Purpose

To present the annual reports for 2020/21 on the achievements of the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

Recommendations

That the JAC welcome the Annual Report of AONB achievements for 2020/21

Key Issues

- The 2020/21 Annual Report on the Work Programme for the AONB Unit is appended, along with a summary financial report.
- High standards of achievement were maintained by the AONB Unit despite the Coronavirus Pandemic restricting many activities.
- The AONB Unit has levered in over £16 for every £1 of local authority contribution during 2020/21.

Reasons

The Annual Work Programme Report for the AONB Unit is usually presented to the July JAC. However the Report was delayed due to work pressures in completing projects carried over from 2020/21 due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. The impacts of Covid-19 have obviously affected many aspects of life over the past 20 months.

Upon Covid-19 Lockdown in March 2020, a comprehensive review was undertaken of the AONB Unit Work Programme Plan for 2020/21. AONB Unit Initiatives were risk assessed and categorised as Green=ok; Yellow=possible disruption; Red=severe disruption, in relation to Covid-19 guidance. This was reviewed again in May 2020 by the AONB Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP). The majority of works could continue with AONB staff 'Working from Home' with extensive use of Microsoft Teams and occasional outdoor site visits as appropriate/ necessary. TOWP reviewed the Covid risk-evaluation again in October 2020 with some minor variations to the Work Programme.

Implications

Collaboration and partnership working with established stakeholders managed to be reasonably effective on-line, primarily using Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Consequently delivering the revised Covid-assessed programme was not dramatically effected beyond

physical restrictions of lockdown. However, convening new partnerships and generating fresh initiatives with different individuals or organisations was felt to be less effective. More meetings could be held but with less rapport for any new members. It is unclear whether this will adversely impact on future project development and funding bids.

Site works and commissioning contractors on the ground was difficult at times, working with/around Covid & lockdown restrictions. This created delays with gaining specifications for works, tendering, site visits and site works. However funders were invariably accommodating of these issues, mostly extending claim deadlines to allow for extended delivery time.

Similarly all tasks and events with volunteers, whether practical conservation tasks or guided walks etc. had to be severely curtailed. It is difficult to evaluate the impact of this beyond the 'work not done' during the year. It is hoped old volunteers will return with vigour and new volunteers come forth inspired by the need to connect with nature after lockdown.

Pressure on the natural environment has been significant in places, particularly near to populations, as lots of people were taking local walks and lots of mountain-bike trails have been and are being built in woods (often illegally). However in other places wildlife was left relatively undisturbed. Management of all these activities and public expectation was challenging without the access, resources or jurisdiction to deal effectively with the impacts, particularly given the constraints noted above.

However, the AONB Unit was able to progress most aspects of the Work Programme to some extent. The Wye Valley River Festival and the 50th anniversary programme were both rearranged to deliver activities online for the most part. The River Festival, as previously reported, was considered a significant success, given the constraints. Many lessons are being learned and fresh opportunities and ways of working accommodated. For example, the AONB Unit is utilising more video and digital engagement as a way of sharing content about the AONB Management Plan, Special Qualities, SDF etc.

There have been a number of highlights in the 2020/21 that will carry AONB Partnership activity forward. Progress with the Wye Valley River Festival governance and handover options; the recruitment of the Lower Wye Project Officer and co-ordination of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) control and Natural Flood Management (NFM) initiatives; The progression of the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB Villages study; finalising of the AONB Management Plan 2021-26 and AONB Memorandum of Understanding 2021-2024; new government programmes of the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places in Wales and the Farming in Protected Landscapes in England.

The overall turnover of the AONB Unit increased in 2020/21 from 2019/20. This was accounted for by the income and expenditure of the Wye Valley River Festival 2020, the increase in the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the introduction of the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places programme by Welsh Government. Consequently, the leverage of the AONB Partnership in 2020/21 means that for every £1 of local authority contribution, the AONB Unit has brought in over £16 to the Wye Valley AONB.



Annual report 2020 – 2021 including financial summary

Upon Covid-19 Lockdown in March 2020, a comprehensive review was undertaken of the AONB Unit Work Programme Plan for 2020/21. AONB Unit Initiatives were risk assessed and categorised as Green=ok; Yellow=possible disruption; Red=severe disruption, in relation to Covid-19 guidance. This was reviewed by the AONB Technical Officers’ Working Party (TOWP). The majority of works could continue with AONB staff ‘Working from Home’ with extensive use of Microsoft Teams and occasional outdoor site visits as appropriate/ necessary.

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AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> <i>Strategic Objectives</i>		Outcomes 2020-2021
AONB Management Plan <i>WV-L1</i> <i>WV-P3</i>	AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise adoption of Wye Valley AONB Management Plan • Publicise and distribute Wye Valley AONB Management Plan • Monitor use of Management Plan in Planning Applications, Public Inquiries and by stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public consultation comments assimilated on Public Consultation Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-25 • Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment for the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) Screening Report was consulted on and Screening completed • Post Consultation Draft Management Plan endorsed by JAC • JAC endorsed change of Plan period to 2021-2026 • Management Plan 2021-2026 finalised for adoption by Local Authorities • State of the AONB Report produced. • All stages of the AONB Management Plan process were available on https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/management-plans/ • AONB Management Plan referred to in planning application responses and reports.
AONB Partnership events <i>WV-P1</i> <i>WV-P6</i> <i>WV-P7</i>	AONB Partnership events For JAC members, AONB Ward members, representatives from partner organisations and local Town/Parish/Community Councils and stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour cancelled but usual invitees encouraged to explore Wye Valley River Festival Re-Imagined digital programme, as postponed Festival coincided with cancelled Tour date. • AONB Unit Annual Report 2019/20 presented to JAC in July.

Agenda Item 5a

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> <i>Strategic Objectives</i>		Outcomes 2020-2021
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run AONB Partnership Seminar/forum for 50th Anniversary of designation of Wye Valley AONB Organise AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour of key sites &/or issues in late September 2020 Promote & disseminate JAC contacts & processes for other organisations & individuals to feed into JAC & AONB Partnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AONBM gave public on-line presentation to launch 50th Anniversary. 65 people attended, available on the AONB's Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ve5iuGRZmsA .
Planning, Development Control and Strategic Policy WV-D1 WV-D2 WV-D3	AONB Planning, Development Control and Strategic Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renew contract for year to support AONB Manager with planning advice. Comment on relevant Planning Applications and strategic planning documents Annually monitor & review development trends and the approach taken by planning authorities to issues that affect the AONB Engage in development and consultation on national strategy in liaison with NAAONB Deliver CPD & training for LA Planning staff & members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 602 planning applications received across the Wye Valley AONB. AONBM & FAO monitored and reviewed development trends that affect the AONB. Contract renewed with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) Planning Department, shared with Malvern Hills AONB Partnership. AONBM provided comments on 3 significant planning applications; 2 in Herefordshire and 1 in Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire and also provided advice on the 'setting of the AONB' to Herefordshire Council and local residents. AONBM liaised with NAAONB over Planning White Paper response and status of AONB as Planning consultee.
AONB Farming Awards WV-L5 WV-F1 WV-F5 WV-C2 WV-E2	AONB Farming Awards Promote & publicise 13th Awards for farmers, landowners and land managers that make an outstanding contribution to conserving &/or enhancing the features, special qualities and natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote Awards and handle entries Site visits of all farm entries for short-listing Judging Present the prizes at the Monmouthshire Show 4th July 2020 Involve winner in Open Farm Sunday event. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These were cancelled due to the Coronavirus pandemic, as was the Monmouthshire Show 2020, where the Awards are presented. AONBDO liaised with NFU, CLA, Herefordshire Meadows Group & Herefordshire Rural Hub to promote the NAAONB's Environmental Land Management (ELM) Advocacy programme and a national workshop on Countryside Stewardship, the new Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and update on the ELM scheme. 1200 farmer & landowner contacted in & around Wye Valley AONB. 22 attended workshop.
Habitat Conservation WV-L2 WV-L4 WV-B2 WV-B4 WV-F4	Landscape & Habitat Conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise monthly volunteer task days, including on partner sites and Reserves Implement as appropriate the recommendations of the venison marketing feasibility study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AONB Volunteers were unable to work on site in large groups due the pandemic. Only small amount of conservation work undertaken by local individuals or small family groups. Control of Japanese Knotweed & American Skunk Cabbage co-ordinated

<p style="text-align: center;">AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> Strategic Objectives</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Outcomes 2020-2021</p>
<p>WV-W3 WV-W4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue Lower Wye Green Infrastructure (GI) and Natural Flood Management (NFM) Project working with local land owners, managers & stakeholders • Manage control of Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) particularly identified stands of Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Skunk Cabbage • Pursue opportunities to continue Phase 1 and priority BAP habitat surveys to complete coverage of the AONB • Liaise over national roadside verge & B-Line initiatives with local authorities, Highways Agency & other stakeholders • Continue collaboration with Ross Town Council over management of Ross Riverside. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Natural Flood Management, Riparian Tree management & Farm Advice project with EA & Herefordshire Wildlife Trust enabled 6 farms to receive targeted advice on riparian tree and riparian habitat management. • NFM project in Valley Brook, Gloucestershire, with EA funding enabled 6 farms to receive targeted advice on NFM and sensitive land management practices. 1 pond restored and livestock restricted to prevent poaching. Other NFM interventions agreed. • NFM & Riparian tree work was able to progress where farmers & land managers undertook work themselves. Commissioning contractors was usually curtailed by Covid restrictions. • INNS control programme expanded and community engagement undertaken via social media & local press, increasing knowledge and understanding. 126 stands of Japanese Knotweed were treated and 19 stands of American Skunk Cabbage, working with 63 landowners across 4 sub-catchments in the Lower Wye Valley. • In line with the Colchester Declaration, AONB staff worked with local wildlife and conservation experts to choose a list of 5 species, or assemblage of species, around which conservation effort can be galvanized over the coming years. The species are representative of the AONB Special Qualities [SQ], as identified in the AONB Management Plan, and will benefit from positive landscape scale management. The following have been selected: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Woodland [SQ2] - Woodland Butterfly assemblage (particularly Wood White / Pearl Bordered Fritillary) ○ River [SQ3, SQ10] - Water Crowfoot ○ Grassland [SQ4] - Bumblebee assemblage (particularly Shril Carder Bee, Brown Banded Carder Bee, Redshank Carder Bee, long horned bee) ○ Orchards & Veteran Trees [SQ27, SQ18] - Noble Chafer beetle ○ General [SQ1, SQ4, SQ5, SQ26] - Hedgehog • DO continued to provide advice on Floodplain Meadow Restoration work undertaken in partnership with Ross-on-Wye Town Council and Herefordshire Meadows Group.

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> <i>Strategic Objectives</i>		Outcomes 2020-2021
Landscape scale conservation <i>WV-L1</i> <i>WV-L2</i> <i>WV-B3</i> <i>WV-P3</i> <i>WV-P4</i>	Landscape scale conservation Develop and support partnership projects that deliver landscape scale conservation activity and initiatives within and adjoining the AONB. Potential target area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host Woolhope Dome workshop and collaborate over outputs and outcomes • Support landscape connectivity initiatives including Wentwood to Wyre and collaborative projects with orchards, veteran & riverine trees. • National Grid Visual Improvement Programme (VIP) for area between Ross & Goodrich with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust & others • Work with partners in Monmouthshire on Long Forest and Usk to Wye initiatives • Continue work with Herefordshire Meadows Network, Monmouthshire Meadows and Parish Grassland Project. • Pursue roll-out of Natural Flood Management initiatives throughout the AONB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaison with partners over Wentwood to Wyre - Forests without Frontiers project proposals • Nature Recovery mapping work initiated with Gloucestershire and Herefordshire Wildlife Trusts, Natural England and Malvern Hills AONB Partnership. • Downard landscape management meetings with Woodland Trust, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and Forestry England • Woolhope Dome Workshop postponed due to Covid restrictions.
Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) <i>WV-F1</i> <i>WV-F2</i> <i>WV-F5</i> <i>WV-B6</i>	Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) Support 2 Catchment Advisors working in AONB & adjacent Garren & Gamber catchment in partnership with Wye & Usk Foundation through Water Environment Grant (WEG) funded project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage farmers & land managers with tailored advice and produce c100 Farm Plans • Promote land management practices to reduce impacts in the Wye catchment. • Improve understanding and acceptance amongst Farmers, land managers & stakeholders • Host demonstrations of effective working practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2 farm advisors employed by the Wye and Usk Foundation (WUF) and hosted by the AONB were furloughed for 4 months. • Reviewed outputs with Wye & Usk Foundation and Catchment Advisors resumed farm advice work either socially distanced or on phone & on-line.
Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) <i>WV-L1</i> <i>WV-B3</i> <i>WV-C1</i>	Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of SDF to potential applicants • Assist potential applicants with application process and project development • Collate SDF project applications for the SDF Assessment Panel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLO liaised with project proposers and advised applicants. • SDF Panel met in December 2020 & March 2021, both via Zoom. • 11 project applications submitted and all approved with full allocation of 2020/21 SDF delivering £366,600 of spend in AONB with average SDF rate of 25%.

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> <i>Strategic Objectives</i>		Outcomes 2020-2021
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service SDF Assessment Panel for allocating SDF funds. • Training for SDF Assessment Panel members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR on social media and website, plus promoted through JAC, Community Councils and local interest groups. • New member recruited to Assessment Panel & introduction of updated WG guidance & HCF AONB Fund. • WG officers monitored projects & outputs remotely/on-line.
Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) <i>WV-L1</i> <i>WV-B3</i> <i>WV-C1</i>	Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) to potential applicants • Assist potential applicants with application process and project development • Collate HCF AONB Fund project applications for the SDF Assessment Panel and liaise with HCF • Service SDF Assessment Panel recommending allocations to HCF. • Training for SDF Assessment Panel members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First 4 applications assessed by SDF Panel and grants awarded by HCF • CLO liaised with applicants and HCF over refining processes and procedures. • SDF Panel induction during on-line meeting.
Wye Valley River Festival <i>WV-A1</i> <i>WV-L5</i> <i>WV-C2</i>	Wye Valley River Festival 2020 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver Festival with 'Time' theme including outreach pre-Festival & follow-on throughout year. • Host 'Art in the Landscape' conference for National Association for AONBs • Pursue additional funding from other contributors & sponsors. • Complete all claims and evaluations • Evaluate future prospects & governance for Festival. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fourth Wye Valley River Festival on theme of 'Time' had to be completely re-imagined because of the Coronavirus Pandemic, and postponed from an outdoor art & environment festival on 2nd - 17th May to an on-line festival on 21st - 27th September 2020. • Nearly all site based events were cancelled/abandoned. But Wye Valley River Festival Re-Imagined provided fresh opportunities for outreach and community engagement activities, including filmmaking workshops and some schools' engagement. • New website successfully launched www.wyevalleyriverfestival.co.uk was the main platform for the Festival, hosting a broad range of shows, performances, talks, podcasts, music and workshops for all ages. In total 141 new pieces of work were commissioned during the Festival plus 19 short films in early May. Over 90hours of content was created, commissioned, produced or coordinated and uploaded, including by 222 paid artists and contributors, as well as a range of local community volunteers. A diversity of artists and environmental &

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> <i>Strategic Objectives</i>		Outcomes 2020-2021
		<p>scientific experts prepared and presented material inspiring us to change the way we think about the Wye Valley and Time in all its many facets. It is estimated there were nearly 90,000 downloads or views of content from an approximate audience of 11,000.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As much of the programme as possible was made accessible with British Sign Language, captions and audio descriptions. • Post- Wye Valley River Festival review all carried out on-line. • Evaluation report and funding claims progressed along with potential future new CIC governance options, endorsed by the JAC, taking account of the five tests previously endorsed in the Wye Valley River Festival Business Plan 2019-2024. • Postponed Festival meant National Association for AONBs' (NAAONB) 'Art in the Landscape' conference no longer aligned or incorporated, but Art in the Landscape strategy endorsed by JAC.
MindSCAPE – Foresters' Forest HLF funding 2018 - 2022 WV-W5 WV-C2 WV-P9	MindSCAPE Initiative enabling people living with dementia to reconnect with the landscape, through arts and creative environmental activities, both in Care homes & established activity group. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage project and submit reports & claims to Foresters' Forest LPS for HLF • Supervise contractor, Artspace Cinderford, organising regular creative sessions, workshops and social activities for participants. • Develop opportunities to expand project • Share good practice with other AONBs & stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite Covid lockdown, ArtSpace continued project on-line, maintaining virtual contact with participants. ArtSpace rang all participants weekly during lockdown and established flourishing Facebook groups. • 4 creative activities videos made available for all on Facebook, website and YouTube, with over 1,100 views/plays. • 2 Care home continued engagement with activity through online sessions. • Project received CPRE Gloucestershire Award
Youth Rangers – Foresters' Forest WV-F4 WV-C2 WV-P6	Youth Rangers – Foresters' Forest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue structured programme of activity for 5th Cohort of young people (14-16 year olds) that will increase their skill set in landscape and heritage conservation and management. • Develop the next phase of the scheme and further opportunities to continue the model of engaging young people in conservation and heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one face to face/on-site activity held for Youth Rangers due to Covid restrictions, but events and activities arranged remotely for individual participation within Youth Ranger's own locality: • Equipment packs supplied including wildlife ID cards, magnifying glass, pooter, hammock, fire-stick & OS map along with on-line guidance and self-guided challenges, eg. Geocaching, camp-making, film making & wildlife ID & participation in Big Garden Bird Watch • 4 new volunteers recruited to run Youth Rangers going forward.

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> <i>Strategic Objectives</i>		Outcomes 2020-2021
Website and social media WV-C2 WV-A1	Website, Public Relations and social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular press & social media releases and magazine articles / advertorial On-going updating and management of www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk and social media sites e.g. Facebook, Instagram and twitter. Maintenance of www.wyevalleywalk.org and hosting of www.overlookingthewye.org.uk & www.wyevalleyriverfestival.org.uk websites. Investigate re-establishing 'Picturesque' as a regular on-line AONB newsletter, to provide information and interpretation to increase awareness and appreciation of the AONB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website refinement & updating on going IO co-ordinated regular social media posts on Facebook & Twitter and social media take-overs 'Documenting Now' captured 13 local people's feelings, fears and hopes as they lived through the pandemic in the AONB. Monmouth-based photographer and film maker Emma Drabble documented the impact of Covid-19 on these rural lives and local businesses. 8 of the audio portraits are on the AONB website https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/our-work/our-projects/documenting-now-life-in-the-aonb-during-the-pandemic/ and the full 13 on the Wye Valley AONB YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnSKF3l8yvje2Cb1gyY1trQ/videoS.
Public Relations & Outreach WV-C2 WV-E4 WV-A1	Exhibitions, Activities & Outreach Promote the AONB through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talks/presentations to local groups Stands at the Wye Valley River Festival, Monmouthshire Show and other relevant shows. Gilpin2020 events, local exhibitions and other local appropriate / prestigious events. 50th Anniversary of designation of Wye Valley AONB programme of events Promote & lead guided walks, events, children's activities and countryside craft /rural skills courses in and around the AONB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AONB Office handled significant increase in enquiries following lockdowns as people searched for "nice places to go for a walk or picnic by the river", as most local tourism staff were furloughed and AONB Office phone number comes top in Google searches. Gilpin2020 events cancelled due to Covid restrictions, but 2 online talks/ lectures delivered: on Gilpin and the Wye Tour in partnership with the Gloucestershire Historical Association Wye Valley AONB 50th Anniversary events programme revised due to pandemic and Anniversary Talk given on Zoom by AONBM with all 100 (free) tickets taken (see above) IO co-ordinated regular social media take-overs and led planning & promotion of 50walks@50 https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/50-walks50/
Undergrounding WV-U2 WV-P4	Undergrounding Continue working with Western Power to identify power-lines within the AONB suitable for undergrounding, via Western Power South Wales Protected Landscape Undergrounding group and the West Midlands Undergrounding group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DO contacted all Parish Councils and asked to put forward schemes. Interest shown by 8 Councils and numerous private residents. Negotiations with Western Power DNO on-going The JAC endorsed the proposed undergrounding of overhead power lines across Offa's Dyke Path National Trail on The Kymin.
Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places	Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welsh Government (WG) and Wales Designated Landscapes Partnership (WDLPP) approved 4 projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decarbonisation of AONB Office

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> <i>Strategic Objectives</i>		Outcomes 2020-2021
WV-C1 WV-S2 WV-S4 WV-R4	Welsh Government capital investment scheme for Designated Landscapes focussed on decarbonisation, more resilient rural economies and more sustainable tourism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Decarbonisation of Old Station Tintern (Yr 1 of 2) ○ Wye Valley AONB Travel & Transport (Year 1 of 2) ○ Wye Valley Access improvements (Yr 1 of 2) ● <i>Decarbonisation of AONB Office:</i> AONB diesel van replaced with EV van. Old port-a-cabin meeting room removed and building work commenced on new extension for meeting room, new insulated roof & walls, full double glazing of windows and more efficient heating & lighting. ● <i>Decarbonisation of Old Station Tintern (Yr 1 of 2):</i> Asbestos & Ecology surveys completed also Café refit and Planning & Listed Building pre-application advice sought for Yr2 work. ● <i>Wye Valley AONB Travel & Transport (Year 1 of 2):</i> Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) tendered and commissioned ARUP to undertake Wye Valley (AONB) Villages Travel & Transport study. Meetings (mostly on-line) held with stakeholders MCC, AONB & 4 Community Councils. ARUP on-line workshops & presentation of Stage 1 Report with SWOT analysis, baseline data/evidence & stakeholder mapping. Draft Stage 2 proposals, Vision and principles on-line workshops with stakeholders. ● <i>Wye Valley Access improvements (Yr 1 of 2):</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chapel Hill Lane, Tintern: 20 NFM cross-drains and log water-bars embedded into the road's surface. ○ Cleddon Shoots: Preliminaries (consents, designs, tendering, identification of ecological risks etc.) & contractor appointed & site supervision meeting held. ○ Piercefield: repairs made to Grotto viewpoint & monument and 4 interpretative ceramic plaques replaced. ● AONBM liaison with WG and WDLP over monitoring and Yr2 projects and proposals.
Wye Valley Walk WV-S1 WV-S2 WV-R1 WV-P5	Wye Valley Walk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support Wye Valley Walk Partnership, including refreshing way-marking ● Monitor counters along Walk ● Manage evolution of Passport scheme ● Review Cicerone Route Guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● IO & FAO dispatched Passports & information as requested. ● 2 riverbank landslips following floods necessitated closure and diversion of route at Biblins and Ganarew. LWVPO assessed landslips and signposted diversions with MCC, Balfour Beatty Living Places/Herefordshire Council and Forestry England

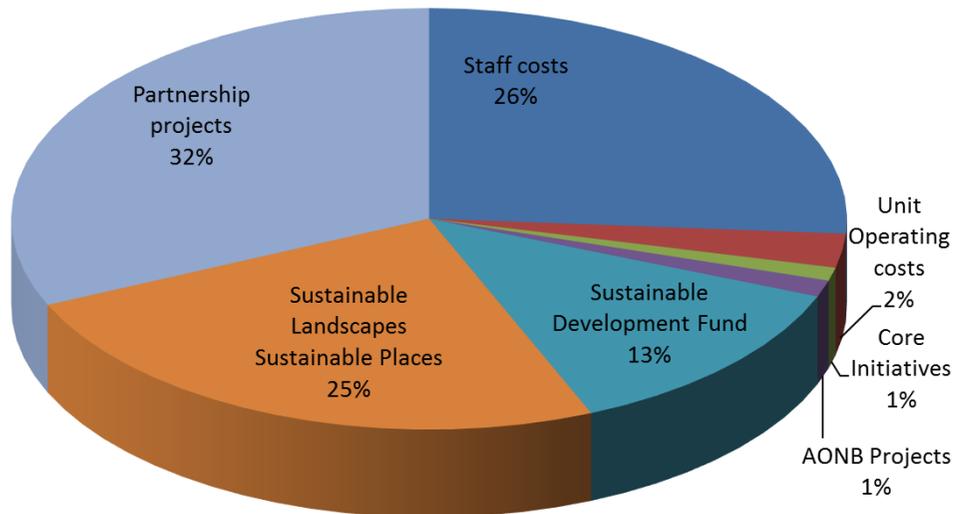
AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> <i>Strategic Objectives</i>		Outcomes 2020-2021
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate future options for Lydbrook Bridge, Redbrook Bridge and Tintern Wireworks Bridge. Progress Monmouth riverbank erosion solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lockdowns prevented timely collection of counter data along the route. Walking & reviewing whole route for revised Cicerone Route Guide postponed due to Covid restrictions. Work commenced on revising http://www.wyevalleywalk.org/ AONBM in liaison with Gloucestershire County Council over repair & maintenance of Tintern Wireworks Bridge. LWVPO coordinated preliminary assessment of 600m of path at Wyesham, Monmouth, in liaison with NRW & MCC, & commissioned contractors for topographical survey & cross-section designs.
Offa's Dyke Collaboratory <i>WV-H1</i>	<p>Offa's Dyke Collaboratory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate opportunities for future cross border partnership projects along the corridor of Offa's Dyke, promoting archaeological research and investigation into the landscape significance of the 8th century monument Participate in Collaboratory conferences, meetings and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All archaeological activity suspended due to Covid restrictions AONBM & fellow Convenors met on-line. Edition 2 of Journal published.
Overlooking the Wye legacy <i>WV-H1</i> <i>WV-H3</i> <i>WV-P5</i>	<p>Overlooking the Wye legacy</p> <p>Continue to develop heritage & Community projects as part of the legacy of the Overlooking the Wye Landscape Partnership Scheme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gilpin2020 Support & promote the collaborative programme of events to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Gilpin and the Wye Tour, including walks; talks; exhibitions; and Big Draw event in October 2020. Reprint of Walks leaflets Ongoing repair & maintenance of Overlooking the Wye infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preliminary review of interpretation & infrastructure, some repairs & maintenance initiated where Covid guidance allowed. Gilpin2020 events and exhibitions cancelled due to Covid-19, with possible review as to whether to resurrect programme in 2021.
Partnerships (local / regional) <i>WV-R2</i> <i>WV-P3</i> <i>WV-P5</i> <i>WV-P6</i> <i>WV-P7</i>	<p>Partnership</p> <p>Influence & attend partnerships as appropriate; eg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Nature Partnership (LNP) in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire Environment Partnership Wye Catchment Management Partnership Wye Navigation Advisory Committee (WyeNAC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement and support with NAAONB work including on 'Art in the Landscape' (CLO on Steering Group, & Strategy adopted by JAC), Green Recovery and Glover Review (AONBM providing evidence on proposed National Landscapes Service). Active participation in Wye Catchment Partnership (DO & AONBM), Wye Navigation Advisory Committee (AONBM), Herefordshire

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> Strategic Objectives		Outcomes 2020-2021
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism Association, South East Wales Tourism Forum, Visit Monmouthshire, Visit Herefordshire and Eat Sleep Live Herefordshire Wye Valley AONB Woodland Projects group Creative Canopy 	<p>Meadows Network (DO), Offa's Dyke Collaboratory (AONBM), Dark Skies Wales (AONBM), South East Wales Tourism Forum (IO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AONBM involvement in discussion and feedback with local authorities, DEFRA & Welsh Government on lockdown & opening-up impacts and implications for Designated Landscapes & wider countryside
Collaboration (Designated Landscapes) <i>WV-P5</i> <i>WV-P9</i>	Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) and Europarc seminars & events Work with Welsh Government and Designated Landscapes in Wales taking forward the National Landscapes Partnership Work with DEFRA and others in progressing Proposals in Glover Review of Designated Landscapes in England 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AONBM contributed to NAAONB Lead Officers meeting, AGM, training, CEO recruitment sounding board, agri-environment workshops (with DO) and collaborative discussions and sharing of good practice. CLO on Art in the Landscape Steering Group, The Designated Landscapes in Wales collectively published the Scenic Wales calendar 2021. NAAONB Wales Development Manager co-ordinated regular on-line meetings of Welsh AONB lead officers and occasional AONB Staff meetings.
Governance <i>WV-P1</i> <i>WV-P2</i>	Governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service and set agendas for JAC, TOWP and Steering Group Prepare grant bids and claims for Natural Resources Wales and Defra, and other funding bodies as required. Continue implementation of recommendations from AONB Good Governance Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP) meeting held in June on-line, also in October & February. Relevant JAC agenda items prepared by TOWP and AONBM and distributed by Monmouthshire County Council as JAC Clerk Steering Group met in October to progress AONB Memorandum of Understanding 2021-2024 and scrutinise 2020-21 spend profile. Met in February to finalise AONB Memorandum of Understanding 2021-2024 and endorse provisional budgets for 2021-22 & onward projections. July Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) meeting cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. Information Paper circulated in lieu of meeting. JAC AGM held in November on-line (MSTeams) likewise March JAC.
Monitoring <i>WV-L4</i> <i>WV-B5</i> <i>WV-H2</i> <i>WV-S3</i> <i>WV-P8</i>	Monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing updating of the AONB GIS and State of the AONB data, including habitats and species, heritage, tourism and recreation etc. Monitor and review implementation of the AONB Management Plan Action Plan Undertake Fixed point photography across the AONB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1 Habitat mapping continued where Covid guidance allowed AONB Fixed Point Photography of 41 sites completed under Covid guidance NAAONB KPI Metrics collated and submitted. Data collation for State of the AONB Report

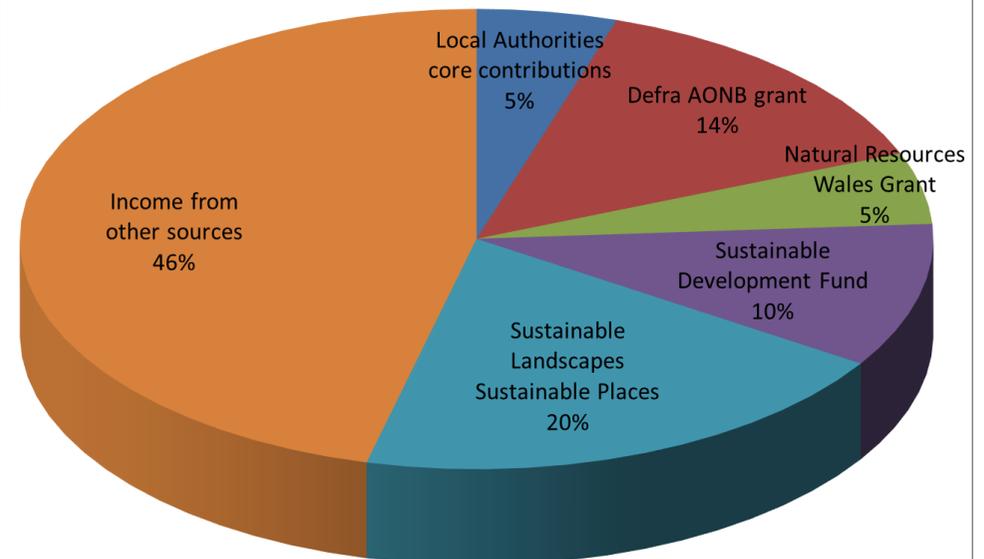
AONB Unit Work Programme <i>Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025</i> <i>Strategic Objectives</i>		Outcomes 2020-2021
Funding and resources <i>WV-P1</i> <i>WV-P2</i> <i>WV-P3</i>	Funding and resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue pursuing funding and develop opportunities for external funding and securing sources for strategic and partnership projects Commence fundraising campaign for Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley AONB Fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding bids submitted for aspects of Wye Valley River Festival; NFM & Riparian Tree projects in England; NLHF #15 Minute Heritage project in Wales. AONBM collaborated with Welsh Government, Welsh AONBs & National Parks on development of the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places capital funding programme. Welsh Government offer accepted of additional revenue funding for 'Resilient National Parks and AONBs – Financial Support for Biodiversity, Decarbonisation and Sustainable Tourism' All bids and claims submitted on time, where HC sign off processes permitted.
Work placements <i>WV-P5</i> <i>WV-P9</i>	Work placements Support the needs of student placements/group projects. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate new under-graduate and post-graduate research opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unable to host or support due to Covid restrictions.

Wye Valley AONB Unit Accounts						
	Expenditure	2019/20	2020/21	Income	2019/20	2020/21
	Staff costs	211,010	206,732	Local Authorities core contributions	49,002	49,002
	Unit Operating costs	22,202	20,623	Defra AONB grant	130,614	137,645
	Core Initiatives	7,465	8,005	Natural Resources Wales Grant	49,600	49,600
	AONB Projects	17,733	10,050	Sustainable Development Fund	55,000	100,000
	Sustainable Development Fund	55,000	100,000	Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places	-	194,700
	Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places	-	194,700	Income from other sources	218,557	260,024
	Partnership projects	189,363	250,862	TOTAL	502,773	790,971
	TOTAL	502,773	790,972			

Expenditure Chart



Income Chart



The Wye Valley AONB Unit is the lead delivery agent for the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership dedicated to conserving & enhancing the nationally designated Wye Valley AONB, guided by the statutory Wye Valley AONB Management Plan and staffed by employees of the representative local authorities; Forest of Dean District Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council. The AONB Partnership is led by the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) with the key funding partners, being DEFRA, Natural Resources Wales, Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council, making up the AONB Steering Group. The Host Authority responsible for the AONB Unit's finances is Herefordshire Council. The AONB Steering Group annually review and agree the budgets for the AONB Unit, endorsed by the JAC. The audited accounts of the Host Authority are available from:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/download/2155/council-accounts-202021>

Key Officers' abbreviations: AONBM = AONB Manager; DO = Development Officer; CLO = Community Links Officer; IO = Information Officer; FAO = Finance & Admin. Officer; LWVPO = Lower Wye Valley Projects Officer

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND (SDF) AND HEREFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (HCF) WYE VALLEY AONB FUND

Purpose

To endorse the recent allocations of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Assessment Panel and update on the Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF).

Recommendation

That the JAC endorses the recent allocations of the SDF for 2021/22 and 2022/23 subject to minor variations and funds being available.

Key Issues

- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) delegated by Welsh Government is £100,000 for 2021/22 and is yet to be confirmed for 2022/23.
- The SDF Assessment Panel has allocated £99,138.75 for 2021/22 and £25,000 for 2022/23 to date, subject to funds being made available (see attached table).
- Negotiations are on-going with some applicants and full project delivery and spend may not be achieved this year leaving up to £5,000 unallocated and a commensurate transfer of grant offer to next year, subject to funds being available from Welsh Government.
- The JAC had previously endorsed the principle of allocating any remaining SDF at end of year to specific AONB projects that meet the SDF criteria.
- The first of a number of podcasts on successful SDF projects has been produced.
- The Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley AONB Fund latest balances were £966.19 remaining in the immediate impact fund and £58,554.32 in the Endowment Fund. There were no applications in the current round meaning £9,520 is available for grants.
- Applications are welcome for both sets of funding, including under the Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grant element.

Reasons

Welsh Government allocated £100,000 of SDF again in 2021/22. This is the 21st year of the SDF which continues to provide an exceptional opportunity for organisations, individuals and community groups to apply for grant aid for innovative, sustainable, environmental projects, which benefit the Welsh part of the AONB.

The Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) was established in 2019 with a £10,000 Immediate Impact fund and a £50,000 Endowment Fund. The Endowment Fund is currently growing at a modest rate and is open to receive donations and legacies. Opportunities will be sought to grow the AONB Fund further over time. The HCF AONB Fund Agreement identifies that interest and income from the Endowment Fund may be utilised for project grants, retaining a base Endowment Fund of £50,000.

Implications

The SDF Assessment Panel met in August and nearly fully allocated the available SDF for 2021/22. The Welsh Government have not yet determined the level of SDF for 2022/23. However, the SDF Assessment Panel have provisionally approved £25,000 of SDF grant aid for 2022/23 on the assumption that the Welsh Government will not decide to decrease the SDF below this level. All SDF offers to date for 2022/23 are conditional on the funding being available.

Some SDF applicants have subsequently identified that they may not be able to complete or fully spend the grant this financial year. AONB staff are negotiating with relevant applicants to ensure maximum spend and project delivery. However it may necessitate some realignment of grant offers and modest transfer of grant allocations into 2022/23. This may release about £5,000 this year for further SDF grants.

The AONB Community Links Officer has been working with a number of SDF recipients to produce podcasts about the SDF and successful projects. The first podcast is available on the AONB website here: <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/grants/grants/>.

The Wye Valley AONB Fund with the Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) has, based on the last account balances, £58,554.32 in the Endowment Fund and £966.19 remaining in the Immediate Impact fund. Once the Immediate Impact fund is exhausted income generated each year from the Endowment Fund can also be used to award grants. There were no applications in the current round although Herefordshire Community Foundation has awarded grants to projects in the AONB from other funds they manage. Consequently under the HCF AONB Fund there is £9,520 available for grants for environmental, community and cultural projects in the AONB. The Endowment Fund is able to receive donations and legacies so it is intended that the AONB Fund will grow over time, including donations via text messages by texting 'WVAONB' to 70085 to donate £5. The SDF Assessment Panel recommends applications to the HCF Trustees for funding.

Background

The AONB Unit and other partners promote the availability of the SDF to as many sectors as possible in Monmouthshire, and throughout the AONB for the HCF AONB Fund. Members are similarly encouraged to do so. Sarah Sawyer, AONB Community Links Officer, is available to discuss and advise on potential applications (contact community@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk or call 01600 710844).

SDF Wales Summary 2021/22 & 2022/23						
Ref.No	Applicant	Project Name	SDF Amount	Project %	Status	Decision
2021/22						
WV00 YR21W	Wye Valley AONB Unit	Admin 10%	£10,000.00			
WV01 YR21W	Monmouth Climate Futures Festival	Monmouth Climate Futures Festival	£6,968.00	44%	Approved	10/3/2021
WV02 YR21W	Wye Valley AONB Partnership	Friends of the Falls - Wordsworth Walk	£25,000.00	£49%	Approved	10/3/2021
WV03 YR21W	Gwent Wildlife Trust	Pine Marten Monitoring and survey project	£1,355.25	£33%	Approved	10/3/2021
WV04 YR21W	The Narth Footpath Group	Narth Footpath Project	£500.00	16%	Approved	10/3/2021
WV05 YR21W	Jamie's Farm, Monmouth	Environmental Improvements	£11,500.00	45%	Approved	9/8/21
WV06 YR21W	Monmouthshire Meadows	Scything for meadows management	£1,228.00	63%	Approved	9/8/21
WV07 YR21W	Wye Valley River Festival (WVRF) CIC	WVRF 2022 (yr1 of 2)	£25,000.00	41%	Approved	9/8/21
WV08 YR21W	Peter Lloyd	Tintern Angling Club	£2,149.50	48%	Approved	9/8/21
WV09 YR21W	Monmouthshire Meadows	Trellech Wet Meadow Pond Restoration	£5,280.00	47%	Approved	9/8/21
WV10 YR21W	Busy Bees	Garden Project	£10,158.00	62%	Approved	9/8/21
		Sub total	£99,138.75	45%		
2022/23						
WV00 YR22W	Wye Valley AONB	Admin 10%				
WV01 YR22W	Wye Valley River Festival (WVRF) CIC	WVRF 2022 (yr2 of 2)	£25,000.00	16%	Approved	9/8/21
		Sub total	£25,000.00			

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AONB 50TH ANNIVERSARY PROGRAMME

Purpose

To advise of progress with the celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of the Wye Valley being designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1971.

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- The AONB's 50th Anniversary celebrations during 2021 have been less ambitious than originally planned due to the uncertainties and limitations of the Covid restrictions.
- A consistent campaign of social media 'take-over' posts and regular promotions of 50walks@50 have helped raise the profile of the AONB.
- A repeat of the 5 yearly AONB Perceptions Survey is planned to benchmark activity against results from 2016 and 2011.
- The Wye Valley AONB Manager will be co-chairing a major on-line conference on 1st December on 'What is Natural Beauty'.

Reasons

Throughout 2021 it was intended that the AONB's 50th Anniversary celebrations would provide an opportunity to raise public awareness of the Wye Valley AONB and the work carried out by the JAC, the AONB Unit and the AONB Partnership. However the ongoing impacts and implications of the Covid pandemic have reduced ambition and activity.

An AONB Perceptions questionnaire was initiated in 2011 as part of the AONB's 40th Anniversary celebrations. The survey was circulated to AONB Partnership members asking a series of questions about their perceptions of the Wye Valley AONB, the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) & the AONB Unit. The survey was repeated in 2016. It would seem timely to update and repeat the survey after a further 5 years.

Implications

The AONB Information Officer, Ruth Waycott, has been managing the AONB social media channels with regular 'take-overs' by local activists, artists, conservationists and entrepreneurs explaining what they do in the AONB and how and why the outstanding landscape is important to them. See

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/wyevalley.aonb> ,

Twitter <https://twitter.com/wyebeauty/> and

Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/wyevalleyaonb/> .

AONB projects and initiatives have also been highlighted along with each week a new promoted 50walks@50 (see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/50-walks50/>)

The AONB Perceptions questionnaire would ask as many of the original questions as possible to allow baseline comparisons. However, the opportunity will be taken to expand some questions and also to ask some new ones. In anticipation of the Government's forthcoming response to the Landscapes Review, it would seem pertinent as ask about the package of Glover's "Proposal 24: AONBs strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, renamed as National Landscapes"

The questionnaire will be distributed electronically via Survey Monkey to individuals and organisations involved in the AONB Partnership or connected with various AONB projects. The survey results will be reported to the next JAC in March 2022.

'What is Natural Beauty?' is a national on-line symposium planned for 1st December. The event will be hosted by the UK's Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas, and is being run by the PLACE Collective with the Wye Valley AONB Partnership and the Lake District National Park Authority. The provisional programme is available here <https://theplacecollective635096760.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/what-is-natural-beauty-outline-programme-1.pdf> and tickets are on sale available here <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/what-is-natural-beauty-symposium-tickets-194455059317> .

Background

The Wye Valley AONB Designation Order was submitted on 24th February 1971. The Order was confirmed and signed on 13th December 1971 simultaneously by the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Wales.

WYE WATER QUALITY UPDATE

Purpose

To provide an update on the River Wye water quality situation.

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- The Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales provided a joint presentation at the previous meeting on the situation with water quality in the River Wye.
- Through July 2021 the 'Walking With the Wye' pilgrimage took place along the length of the River Wye to raise awareness of the environmental crisis in the Wye.
- RIVERCIDE - George Monbiot's live documentary on the state of the UK's rivers was broadcast on 14th July further raising the profile of the pollution impacts on the Wye.
- In late July/early August another severe algal bloom extended down the Wye from Hoarwithy to below Monmouth, smothering most of the Water Crowfoot beds.
- Citizens Science projects monitoring phosphate levels in the Wye and its tributaries have been initiated by Friends of the Upper Wye, Friends of the Lugg, CPRW and Herefordshire CPRW. A Friends of the Lower Wye group has also been formed.
- The Wye Nutrient Management Board met on 27th September to further debate the issues, including the Wye Phosphate Action Plan being finalised for publication.
- Avara Foods acknowledged at the Nutrient Management Board that they were "part of the problem" in polluting the Wye and so are looking at opportunities to be "part of the solution" through initiatives to remove its chicken manure from the catchment.
- DEFRA have increased funding for Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE) to enhance resources for advice, monitoring and enforcement.
- The AONB Unit continues to manage projects and initiatives including with EA, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Wye & Usk Foundation, to advise farmers in mitigating soil erosion and reducing agricultural run-off into the river.
- The AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes programme may be applicable to farm wetland enhancement schemes upstream of the AONB.
- Lobbying of both governments by public, private and 3rd sector interests continues for adequate resources to reduce phosphate levels across the Wye catchment.
- The Environment Agency has launched a 6 month consultation on the Severn River Basin Management Plan which includes the Wye catchment.

Reasons

Phosphate run-off in the Wye catchment, when combined with low river flows and elevated heat, create algal blooms that spread down the River Wye. Excessive growth of algae can decrease the level of dissolved oxygen in river water and also carpet the gravel beds where

fish normally lay their eggs, cutting off their oxygen supply. The majority of the phosphates come from agricultural and sewerage sources.

Implications

The Wye Valley AONB covers the lower reaches of the Wye, downstream from the confluence with the Lugg. Most of the phosphates and contributing conditions for the algal blooms originate upstream of the AONB.

In late July/early August the Wye turned green from Hoarwithy down to below Monmouth with another severe algal bloom. At this time of year the river should be clear but visibility was down to about 40cm and most of the Water Crowfoot was smothered, which normally support diverse populations of water life. This is also damaging for the local economy, affecting tourism and recreation.

Throughout the year lobbying and campaigning has grown in support of tackling the causes of pollution in the Wye. Both Westminster and Welsh Governments have been lobbied by a wide range of public, private and 3rd sector interests, with a consistent message that sufficient resources need to be invested into reducing phosphate levels across the Wye catchment. A number of grassroots community groups have formed to protect and champion the Wye including Friends of the Upper Wye, Friends of the Lugg and Friends of the Lower Wye.

In July the 'Walking With the Wye' pilgrimage took place following the Wye from its source in mid-Wales to its mouth on the Severn estuary. The aim was to bring communities together to defend and celebrate our beautiful river, to raise public awareness of the current threats and to inspire action. Each day's walk was about five miles, with most of the journey on foot, but canoeists and swimmers were also involved, as well as artists, poets, and filmmakers. There were handover events at key places on the route, including at Ross, Lydbrook, Redbrook and Chepstow. The journey ended at Chepstow on 31st July.

RIVERCIDE with George Monbiot, the world's first live investigative documentary, was broadcast from the banks of the Wye on 14th July. He set off to find out "who is polluting our rivers, and why we're not stopping them". The live broadcast further raised the profile of the plight of the Wye. The documentary proposed an 'Emergency Rescue Plan' with '5 things Government must do' and '5 things you can do'.

A co-ordinated Citizens Science project has been initiated by Friends of the Upper Wye, Friends of the Lugg, CPRW, Herefordshire CPRE and Cardiff University School of Earth and Environmental Sciences. The Environment Agency has provided funding to enable groups (in England) to buy monitoring kit. Cardiff University provide advice, training and support. The Wye and Usk Foundation, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, Radnorshire Wildlife Trust, Wye Salmon Association and Natural Resources Wales have also been involved in supporting this work. Over 400 people have volunteered their time to help monitor nutrient levels and water quality. They take and test water samples from agreed locations, recording observations about the water samples, and upload the data. Over 120 sites are now being monitored, creating valuable mapping of the catchment to help identify pollution hotspots. The information is collated and shared with Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales to help inform, target and drive change in cleaning up the river.

The Wye Nutrient Management Board met on 27th September to further debate the issues, including the draft Wye Phosphate Action Plan. The Board includes representatives from the river catchment's Local Planning Authorities; the farming community; Natural England, the Environment Agency & Natural Resources Wales; the construction industry; the Wye & Usk Foundation and many of the NGOs across the catchment. Avara Foods made the announcement at the Nutrient Management Board that they were "part of the problem" with regards to pollution in the Wye and they are looking at opportunities to remove chicken manure from their operations in the catchment to become "part of the solution". Avara Foods are one of the UK's leading poultry suppliers and supply poultry products to all the major UK supermarkets and restaurant chains from their Hereford processing plant. Avara are a £1.2 billion agri-business and the biggest employer in Herefordshire. Avara's supply chain is responsible for about 14 million of the 20 million chickens believed to be produced across the Wye catchment. Avara estimate their chickens produce around 150,000 tons of manure per year which mostly gets spread across farmland in the catchment. The company is currently evaluating a range of initiatives to remove its chicken manure from the catchment. These included using it as a fuel source for generating renewable energy, incinerating it into ash and biochar that can be easily transported to other parts of the country that need phosphate-based fertiliser for arable farming, and treating it via new anaerobic digester-based technology. The company also indicated that it was looking at ways of importing less phosphate into the catchment within its chicken feed in the first place. Avara confirmed that if these initiatives went ahead, then all its chicken manure could be exported and removed from inputting into the catchment.

Meanwhile, DEFRA have increased funding for Environment Agency and Natural England nearly trebling resources for farm advice, monitoring and enforcement in the catchment. The Wye Phosphate Action Plan is being finalised for publication by EA and NE and is intended to be reviewed annually. The Environment Agency have also launched a 6 month consultation on their draft river basin management plans (to co-ordinate with consultation on the draft flood risk management plans). The Severn River Basin Management Plan includes the Wye catchment. The consultation is available here:

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/environment-and-business/draft-river-basin-management-plans/consultation/intro/> and the documentation here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/draft-river-basin-management-plans-2021#severn-rbd>

Wye Valley AONB Unit manages several projects that attempt to address some of the contributing factors to poor water quality in the Wye, such as reducing soil erosion and agricultural run-off into the river in the AONB:

- Natural Flood Management (NFM) projects in tributaries and sub-catchments of the Wye in Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire have AONB staff supported by Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF) Catchment Advisors, working with farmers and giving advice and grants for land management and NFM improvements.
- as part of the Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) with WUF, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and the Herefordshire Rural Hub, WUF Catchment Advisors have continued advising farmers and preparing Farm Plans to help secure other grants to improve land management practices across Herefordshire. Unfortunately the project funding ends in December.
- the AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme is available for farmers and land managers in the English part of the AONB to deliver bigger and better outcomes for the environment under the 4 themes of Climate; Nature; People & Place. The AONB Unit have identified with Wye & Usk Foundation that farm wetland enhancement sites upstream

of the AONB may be eligible for a proportionate amount from the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, subject to their positive impact on water quality downstream in the AONB.

The Wye & Usk Foundation and Catchment Sensitive Farming advisors continue with their farm visits and are working with the supply chain to investigate alternative disposal methods for manure. Herefordshire Council has commissioned integrated wetlands and a phosphate trading platform. Dwr Cymru Welsh Water continue with their planned £50M programme of improvements.

The understanding of the problem is growing all the time, particularly about the role of legacy phosphate, thanks to the work of Leeds and Lancaster Uni RePhokus group (see <http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/rephokus/>). The Wye Nutrient Management Board partners are looking for ways to support on farm demonstration of regenerative farming and zero tillage techniques. There are multiple activities being undertaken by individuals and organisations to be part of the solution to this complex problem.

Background

Recent research identifies that the Wye has mostly stayed within the permitted levels of phosphate under the EU Habitats Directive and Water Framework Directive. However the Lugg has been continuously over the permitted phosphate levels. The concentration of pollutants, including phosphates, in the Wye and Lugg is exacerbated by any reduction in the volume of water. So any prolonged dry periods will produce low flows in the river with potentially higher levels of pollutants – reducing water quantity leading to reduced water quality. Similarly prolonged periods of hot and sunny weather will increase the temperature of the water in the river, and less water will heat up more quickly. Algae thrive in the warmer water fed by the sunlight and the phosphates, which act as a fertilizer. A recognised impact of Climate Change in England and Wales is more prolonged summer heatwaves. Without reducing either the sunlight or the phosphates, there will be more algae blooms on the Wye. This is an example of the ‘perfect storm’ of the implications of both the Climate and an Ecological Emergency. The natural beauty of the area will suffer as a consequence.

The Wye is not unique in that the majority of English and Welsh rivers are polluted beyond legal limits by human, agricultural and/or industrial waste.

WYE VALLEY VILLAGES TRAVEL & TRANSPORT PLAN UPDATE

Purpose

To advise members of the completion of the consultation on the Wye Valley Villages Plan for the Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB.

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- The Wye Valley Villages Travel & Transport Plan project is led by Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) and a partnership made of representatives from St. Arvans, Devauden, Tintern and Trellech United Community Councils, with local county councillors and officers from MCC and the Wye Valley AONB.
- ARUP have been commissioned to prepare a Plan for the main villages in the Welsh part of the Wye Valley AONB to address and provide recommendations on a range of travel and transport issues.
- A 6 week public consultation period was completed on a Stage 2 Report with 260 comments received. ARUP are now assimilating the comments to prepare a Final Report and Action Plan later in November.
- There are funds allocated in the AONB's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) allocation from Welsh Government this financial year for some 'quick win' delivery from the Plan.

Reasons

The initiatives arose predominantly from a number of communities in the lower Wye Valley expressing concern about traffic speeds and road safety. The fragile state of the tourism economy had also come into focus with various closures and restrictions on the A466 in the lower Wye Valley, due to land slips (and lockdowns). However these issues were recognised to form part of a much more complex set of challenges that needed to be considered in a broader village and Wye Valley AONB context.

Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) established a partnership made of representatives from the Community Councils of St. Arvans, Devauden, Tintern and Trellech United, with local county councillors and officers from MCC and the Wye Valley AONB. In November 2020 a contract was awarded to ARUP to prepare a Plan for the main villages in the Welsh part of the Wye Valley AONB to address and provide recommendations on a range of issues, including:

- Road (safety) and village infrastructure improvement schemes

- Active travel links within and between communities, including better integration of walking and cycling networks & leisure routes within the valley
- Public transport
- signage audit & review
- visitor experience

ARUP complete a Stage 1 Report consisting of an evidence review along with consultation on stakeholder mapping and a SWOT analysis. The Stage 2 Report was subsequently developed presenting a vision for an integrated strategy with proposals for each village based around the key themes of landscape, transport and movement, local economy, tourism, placemaking, and governance.

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic it was decided that the consultation on the Stage 2 Report would use ARUP's on-line Virtual Engage platform. A 6-week public consultation on the Stage 2 Report closed on 30th September. The on-line information in the 'virtual engage room' included a short introductory video by Deputy Leader of Monmouthshire County Council, Councillor Sara Jones, links to the consultation document and a breakdown of the proposals for each of the eight Wye Valley villages – Trellech, Penallt, The Narth, Devauden, Tintern, St Arvans, Llandogo, Llanishen and Catbrook.

Implications

There were 260 responses to the consultation, the majority through the Virtual Engage website, which received over 1000 visitations. ARUP consider this a successful response rate. Preliminary analysis of the key messages indicate:

- General consensus and support for Road Safety (20mph limits, village gateways)
- General support for the concept of the network of villages
- Need to focus intervention and where to offer limited change
- Messaging around active travel is key, and need to show it is for all
- Need to do more to improve accessibility and inclusivity –maintenance, ease of access for all ages & abilities
- The River Wye needs to feature more strongly
- Final report will need to be refined with clarity of proposed interventions and clear messaging on delivery.

There was some concern expressed by members of the partnership that residents without good IT skills or connectivity were not able to respond. Similarly some thought the language and terminology used in the Report was too ambitious &/or unclear, deterring respondents.

ARUP are now completing the full evaluation of the responses and preparing the Final Report for the partnership. The "Wye Valley AONB Villages Plan for the Future" will be a strategic framework plan that sets a holistic vision for transformation through a programme of short, mid and long-term interventions.

Background

The Wye Valley Villages Plan is funded by Welsh Government's AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) funding and by Monmouthshire County Council.

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
1st November 2021

NAAONB UPDATE

Purpose

To advise members of activity through the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB).

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- The national 'Landscapes for Life' Conference 2021 was held on-line in early July 'hosted' by the five Devon AONBs.
- John Watkins has taken over from Howard Davises as NAAONB Chief Executive. As a leaving event, the Wye Valley AONB Unit hosted a walk for Howard and the NAAONB team.
- AONB Lead Officers met on-line to debate the forthcoming Government response to the Glover Landscape Review due later this year.
- The NAAONB will be a signatory to a Global Statement on climate change in Protected Areas for COP26 (see attached draft)
- Recruitment is underway for a new NAAONB Wales Development Manager
- The national AONBs Chairpersons' Conference and AGM for the NAAONB will be held on-line on 18th November.

Landscapes for Life Conference July 2021

The NAAONB held its first ever online annual conference in July, having postponed the 2020 conference due to the Pandemic. 'A Climate for Change - Climate Change and Nature Recovery in National Landscapes' was the conference theme, examining the essential role the landscape approach plays in tackling climate change and nature recovery, essentially two sides of the same coin. It was hosted 'in' Devon, as intended for 2020, by Blackdown Hills, East Devon, North Devon Coast, South Devon and Tamar Valley AONB Partnerships.

Keynote speakers included Dr Andrew Hartley, Manager of the Climate Impacts Modelling Team at The Met Office; Alan Law, Deputy Chief Executive of Natural England; Lord Benyon, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Minister for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity at DEFRA; Dr Anjana Khatwa, NAAONB Trustee, on diversity, access and inclusion; Professor David Crouch; Siôn McGeever, Deputy Director for Access, Landscapes, Peatland and Soil at DEFRA; Dr Ruth Little, Lecturer in Human Geography, Sheffield University; Cathy Case, Farmer, Riverford Organic Farmers and a range of presenters from AONBs and National

Parks. The Conference Blog is available here:

<https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/events/landscapes-life-conference/L4L-Conference-Blog>

Andrew Blake, AONB Manager, Nick Critchley, AONB Development Officer and Nickie Moore, Lower Wye Projects Officer attended on behalf of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership.

New CEO

John Watkins has taken over from Howard Davies as the new NAAONB Chief Executive. John had been Head of Policy for Future Economy at Welsh Government and previously Head of Landscape and Outdoor Recreation, with responsibilities for AONBs & National Parks. Howard was Chief Executive for 10 years, leading the NAAONB and the AONB Family through the impacts of austerity; to closer relationships with Government in England and Wales, and direct DEFRA sponsorship; transforming leadership and collaborative skills across the AONB Family; raising ambition around climate change and nature recovery through the Colchester Declaration and generally building influence and respect for AONBs across a wide range of organisations.

The Wye Valley AONB Unit were honoured to be asked to arrange and host a leaving walk for Howard and the NAAONB team, which took place at Symonds Yat.

Lead Officers' Meeting & Glover Review

AONB Lead Officers met on-line in early October to discuss the Minister's Statement in June and Government's full response to the Glover Landscape Review, due later this year. The key message from the Glover Review was that Protected Landscapes (AONBs & National Parks) need a renewed mission to fulfil their potential to deliver for people, place and nature and need the best possible purposes, powers, governance, ambition and resources to make that happen. Officers also debated the opportunities and implications of Glover's "Proposal 24: AONBs strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, renamed as National Landscapes". It was widely recognised that this should be seen as a package, with a new name being commensurate with new purposes, powers and resources.

Global Statement on climate change in Protected Areas for COP26

The NAAONB is working with National Parks UK and international colleagues on a Global Joint Statement on climate change in Protected Areas for COP26. The intention is to bring together as many signatories as possible from Protected Areas around the world to set out the potential for Protected Landscapes to deliver climate change mitigation and adaptation, particularly through nature-based solutions. Other countries/organisations involved include: the Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas, IUCN, WCPA, EUROPARC, US National Park Service, Parks Canada, South African National Parks, International Ranger Federation, Parks and Wildlife Finland, plus interest from Protected Landscapes in Columbia, Chile, RedParques (Central & South America), Israel and Australia.

Appended below is a draft version of the Joint Statement. Clearly this Statement on its own will not deliver climate change mitigation and adaptation. Rather it will be an important mechanism for Protected Landscapes across the globe to use COP26 to highlight the potential role we play in addressing the biodiversity and climate emergency. In the UK this will be another opportunity to reinforce the message that opportunities for expanded delivery on biodiversity and climate change will need increased resources.

Recruitment for new NAAONB Wales Development Manager.

The AONB Manager is on the Interview Panel for the new NAAONB Wales Development Manager. Ian Rappel has left the role after 2 years to take up the post of Manager for the Real Farming Trust at the emerging College for Real Farming and Food Culture. We wish Ian well with this opportunity to promote and develop the philosophy and practice of agroecology.

The NAAONB have 12 months funding in place for the Wales Development Manager and are in discussions to support a further 2 year work programme. This post will develop the National Association's mission to support and develop the network and ambitions of the AONB partnerships in Wales, to ensure they have a strong collective voice and a positive impact on the places for which we care. They will help optimise opportunities for Welsh AONB partnerships to deliver on national priorities, including tackling the nature and climate emergency and post-Covid economic reconstruction; engage a more diverse and representative audience who actively participate in shaping priorities; voicing support for AONBs and to deliver greater parity between the AONBs and National Parks in Wales.

Chairperson's conference & AGM, on-line, 18th Nov.

The NAAONB is organising a Chair-level conference for AONBs and National Parks on 18th November March. The title of this year's conference is 'Nature Positive and Carbon Negative: Protected Landscapes and the Climate Crisis'. Speakers include Lord Benyon - Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, DEFRA, Tony Juniper - Chair of Natural England and NAAONB Chief Executive, John Watkins. Small group discussions will consider the challenges raised by the speakers, particularly around creating a new statement of intent with regard to climate change actions. The NAAONB AGM will follow the conference.

Background

The NAAONB is a charity that provides a strong collective voice for the UK's AONBs. It works on behalf of its membership, fostering collaboration and collective action between the 300 staff of the AONB Family, the 700 elected members that support the AONB partnerships and the many partners with whom the NAAONB does business at the local and national levels. For more information see: www.landscapesforlife.org.uk

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UNFCCC COP26 Protected and Conserved Areas¹ Joint Statement

Glasgow, United Kingdom,
November 2021

Preamble

1. We, a group of Protected and Conserved Areas offer this Joint Statement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP26.
2. We invite other Protected and Conserved Areas and associated bodies to join us in our commitments and actions to address the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss at this vital time.
3. We also invite Governments, investors, and supporters from across the world to work with and support the global Protected Areas family to unlock their full capability in addressing the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Context

4. As a family of Protected and Conserved Areas we recognise that no one Protected Area can address the global crisis of climate change nor the exacerbating impact of climate change on biodiversity loss.
5. Recent assessments by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the International Resource Panel (IRP), and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) have all documented that rapid and far-reaching transformations across all sectors of society and the economy are necessary to tackle climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.
6. The [G7 Climate and Environment Ministers' Meeting Communiqué](#) of 20th May 2021 also recognised that the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss are global challenges requiring urgent and ambitious action at all levels, and committed to urgent action to conserve, protect and restore natural ecosystems including soils, grasslands, savannah, drylands, wetlands, coral reefs, rivers, lakes, coastal dunes, peatlands, seagrass beds, mangroves and saltmarshes.
7. Over 60 countries are members of the [High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People](#) that champions ambitious and effective global biodiversity targets, including **conserving or protecting at least 30 percent of global land and at least 30 percent of the global ocean by 2030 to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and address climate change (30by30)**.
8. We believe the global family of Protected and Conserved Areas is well placed to respond to the calls to action from the IPCC, IPBES, IRP and UNEP and to support the actions of countries around the world including the G7 to take rapid and far-reaching actions to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss.

¹ Throughout this Joint Statement, '**protected and conserved areas**' refer to all forms of land, water and marine based conservation measures typically known as national parks, marine parks, nature reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, Indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCA), other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM), and more. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provide definitions and guidance on the use of these terms.

The role of National Parks and Protected Areas

9. Protected and Conserved Areas are a global family and have a unique and powerful place in our land and seascapes and in our societies across the planet. These spaces are intimate and both culturally and personally significant spaces to connect with nature.
10. These global and yet local and personal aspects of our protected and conserved areas allow us **to play a transformative role in addressing the twin crises**. Our family of Protect and Conserved Areas are the foundations that 30by30 will build on:
 - a. we can support the development of sustainable landscapes and seascapes,
 - b. we can support climate change mitigation by being global sinks for carbon and by making our operations carbon neutral,
 - c. we can play a vital role in adaptation to climate change, enhancing social, economic, and ecological resilience to its impacts,
 - d. we can contribute to disaster risk reduction through natural solutions, and
 - e. we can be among the first places to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

In other words, we can be the first 30% that inspires land and sea use choices across the remainder of the planet, and we can be the place where billions of people connect with nature and get inspired to play an active part in combatting these emergencies.

11. Designation and protection are not enough to unlock these transformative and decisive capabilities in addressing the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. We need to see better protection and restoration of nature, especially carbon-rich ecosystems, within our Protected and Conserved Areas and better connectivity of these spaces **to become the heart and anchors of nature recovery networks globally**.
12. Investment will be key, but funding alone is not the answer either. Protected areas must be **governed and managed effectively and equitably**, with sufficient resources and capacity, will and commitment to achieve their outcomes in the long-term. They need to be recognised as part of land-use and marine spatial planning and decision-making to play their role effectively.
13. Protected and Conserved Areas need to be brought into the centre of the work to resolve these crises. Protected and Conserved Area's **capabilities should be leveraged** to direct transformative levels of investment in nature-based solutions and their connections and importance to cultures, communities and visitors should be harnessed to unlock and demonstrate the opportunities for vast behavioural change.
14. Their relationships with the managers, stewards and owners of these spaces can develop and unlock sustainable approaches to land and marine use for adoption across the balance of the planet and to support the health and wellbeing of billions of people.
15. Our family of Protected and Conserved Areas is incredibly diverse covering a vast array of climates, terrains, waters and their ecosystems, and governed and managed by a diversity of actors in every country of the world, yet with a common purpose. The scale and nature of the role each park and protected area will play in tackling these crises will vary, tuning their approach to be place-specific and to generate the greatest impact and return.

Our global commitments are to:

- Champion a shared view of the role National Parks and Protected Areas can play in the 21st century, and beyond.

- Engage a powerful and diverse array of authorities, custodians and stewards across governments, the private sector, Indigenous peoples, and local communities everywhere.
- Lead efforts to achieve net-zero operations and carbon-rich, biodiverse, and resilient landscapes in our respective geographies.
- Focus on aspects of our work that drive scale of impact and benefit, including:
 - Collaborate and exchange knowledge internationally
 - Leverage and build our connections with billions of people (visitors) and communities to inspire behavioural change.
 - Support a global movement for the deployment and implementation of nature-based solutions at scale.
 - Inspire and enable those working outside the protected landscapes by linking with initiatives outside our boundaries and sharing our experiences.

List of signatories:

A leading role at home

(it would be useful to understand and perhaps publish actions each signatory is already taking, for example:)

In support of this statement and our commitments the UK National Parks have committed already to:

- Net-zero organisations by no later than 2030 and net-zero National Park landscapes by no later than 2045 and to join the UNFCC Race to Zero.
- To research and develop a new finance facility (Net Zero with Nature) to unlock £200m+ of private and public investment in nature-based solutions and to share our R&D with the global family of Protected and Conserved Areas.
- To work with partners to inspire our 100m+ visitors to play their part in tackling the dual crises.

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AONB UNIT REPORTS

Purpose

To advise members of activity of the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

FOR INFORMATION

Below are brief update reports on the following AONB Unit initiatives: -

- a) Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme update
- b) Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects
 - i. AONB Office decarbonisation refurbishment
 - ii. Chapel Hill Road, Tintern
 - iii. Old Station Tintern decarbonisation & refurbishment
 - iv. Wyesham riverbank consolidation of Wye Valley Walk
 - v. Designated Landscapes Wales seminar
- c) Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks project with Gwent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust: £258,500 awarded by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)
- d) Lower Wye Catchments projects in Monmouthshire & Gloucestershire
 - i. INNS control – WISP
 - ii. Cleddon Falls
- e) AONB Volunteers & Youth Rangers

a) Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme update

The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme has been developing with Nick Critchley, AONB Development Officer, taking the lead until a Farm Advisor can be recruited. The Local Assessment Panel has been established and will shortly hold its first meeting. The first grant approval has been made by the AONB Manager under the delegated procedures for amounts under £5,000. Nick has been visiting a number of farmers and landowners interested to share ideas and potentially applying to the programme.

There have been a number of public workshops hosted by DEFRA and/or the National Association for AONBs for potential applicants. DEFRA have also held several training sessions for AONB and National Park staff involved in delivering the programme. Meanwhile following discussions nationally between DEFRA and National Park and AONB representatives there is currently on-going negotiation over re-profiling the funding over the three years.

The AONB Unit have identified with Wye & Usk Foundation that farm wetland enhancement sites upstream of the AONB may be eligible for a proportionate amount from the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, subject to their positive impact on water quality downstream in the AONB. However, to date no applications have come forward for this.

b) Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects

i. AONB Office decarbonisation refurbishment

The main refurbishment work to the AONB Office is completed and the AONB team have started moving furniture and filing back into the office from storage. The main challenge is resolving what paperwork needs to be retained, as the vast majority of the paper files have not been missed after nearly 18 months of staff 'working from home' due to the pandemic. It is hoped that Covid restrictions will not prevent the use of the new meeting room, after it has been cleared of boxes.

ii. Chapel Hill Road, Tintern

Six months after installation, the transverse log water-bars have settled in satisfactorily, diverting run-off from 5 springs and weathering various downpours well. The wear from the legal motorbike and 4X4 traffic does not seem excessive and on the whole the lane is much drier and more solid underfoot. Monitoring will continue and lessons learned may be applied to other routes in the area.

iii. Old Station Tintern decarbonisation & refurbishment

The full planning applications, and where appropriate listed building consent, have been made for the following:-

- Shower/Toilets – installing 2 pods to upgrade facilities and accessibility to meet current requirements for campers.
- Doors & Windows – installing secondary glazing to original windows.
- Solar Panels - installing flexible PV film over the two railway carriages.

Western Power will be installing a new power supply to allow capacity for the two 7kw public Electric Car Charger units to be installed.

Work is about to start on installing the new Heat/air handling units in the two railway carriages.

iv. Wyesham riverbank consolidation of Wye Valley Walk

The Lower Wye Projects Officer, Nickie Moore, has been co-ordinating progressing with the investigation for the Wye Valley Walk just downstream from the Duke of Beaufort Bridge at Wyesham. There are difficult sections where the path traverses the steep riverbank and a badgers' sett, squeezed between the end of peoples' gardens and the river. Designs have been drafted by consultants Capita, with proposals to avoid where possible creating retaining walls or new structures except over the badger sett. An Ecological Appraisal has also been undertaken and discussions are now underway with Natural Resources Wales over consenting such works. Next steps will be finalising the design work and establishing viable costs. Once resources are identified it is hoped plans will be to be ready for works to go in during 2022/23.

v. Designated Landscapes Wales seminar

Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales, consisting of the 8 AONBS & National Parks in Wales, hosted an on-line seminar in mid-October promoting the work carried out with the SLSP funding. Presentations focused on the SLSP themes of: decarbonisation; Nature based solutions; Sustainable tourism and Green recovery. There were Question & Answer sessions under each theme with wide ranging discussions from the panel of lead officers from the 8 Designated Landscapes and Welsh Government, providers of the SLSP programme. 60 people attended from across Wales.

c) Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks project with Gwent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust:

The Wye Valley AONB Unit has been awarded £258,400 by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) towards project cost of £278,400. The AONB Unit developed the Lower Wye Nature Networks project bid in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust, and in collaboration with Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales. The project will run from November 2021 until March 2023 and will deliver:

- conservation and enhancement of 7 SSSIs / 2 SACs; ancient woodland, species-rich grassland and riverine sites, improving condition and resilience, and enabling safer public access.
- Targeted nature conservation and habitat connectivity advice for landowners, and working at landscape scale to improve connectivity to and from designated sites: including hedgerow restoration, Natural Flood Management activity, tree planting and species rich grassland creation.
- Breaking unwanted connections in and around designated sites through management of a range of Invasive Non Native Species (INNS). Working with volunteers and contractors reducing the current extent of INNS and building capacity to prevent further infestation.
- Volunteer activity within every aspect of project delivery.

The NHLF Nature Networks Fund (NNF) aims to strengthen the resilience of Wales' network of protected sites, supporting a green recovery for nature and communities. Improving the condition of protected sites will enable them to function better at the heart of nature networks – vital areas of ecological resilience in which habitats and species can thrive and expand. Restoring connectivity in these networks will prevent further declines in species and habitat condition, and enhance capacity to adapt to climate change.

d) Lower Wye Catchments projects in Monmouthshire & Gloucestershire

i. INNS control – WISP

The Wye Invasive Species Project (WISP) combines a number of funding sources to support local communities in the lower Wye Valley, across the catchments south of Monmouth, in tackling 3 Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) – Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed and American Skunk Cabbage. These plants are causing significant problems and are found in many places throughout the lower Wye Valley. Over the summer and early autumn Lower Wye Projects Officer, Nickie Moore, and Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer, Ellie Baggett, co-ordinated contractors and volunteers in identifying and controlling these INNS.

- 127 Japanese Knotweed sites successfully treated (95 sites in Wales and 32 sites in England)
- 14 American Skunk Cabbage Sites successfully treated (9 sites in Wales and 5 sites in England)
- 78 landowners and residents supported in controlling these invasive species (52 landowners in Wales and 26 landowners in England) Plus more that we treated but do not have contact details for!
- 5 local contractors employed over 12 days
- 4 public events and volunteer group work parties

ii. Cleddon Falls

During the summer Technical Access team, iBEX, completed the restoration of the gorge-edge path. Whilst roped-up they rebuilt the steps beside the seasonal waterfall and installed new timber edging for the permissive path. They also cut and hauled out cherry laurel growing at the base of the falls and treated the stumps with eco-plugs to help stop the spread of this Invasive Non-Native Species. The private landowner has also been busy clearing the steps and coppicing undergrowth that was leaning into the path. Ross Smith of Anvil Forge Blacksmithing then installed 25 meters of hand forged bespoke handrail along the path. The route will shortly be reopened as soon as appropriate safety signage has been approved by the landowner.

e) AONB Volunteers & AONB Youth Rangers

Sarah Sawyer, AONB Community Links Officer, has been ensuring whenever possible that the AONB Volunteers and AONB Youth Ranger are out on site undertaking conservation tasks and training activities. A new cohort of Youth Ranger has started activities. All events are carefully risk assessed to ensure Covid restrictions are adhered in England and Wales.