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County Hall
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NP15 1GA

Monday, 31 October 2022

Notice of meeting:

Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Monday, 7th November, 2022 at 2.00 pm
The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High
Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG

AGENDA

Item No	Item	Pages
1.	Apologies for Absence, Introductions & New Members.	
2.	Declarations of Interest.	
3.	Public Questions.	
4.	To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting dated 4th July 2022:	1 - 12
4.1.	Format / location of future meetings at Coleford (verbal update).	
4.2.	Joint Advisory Committee Co-opted Members, nominations & attendance (verbal update).	
5.	Annual report 2021/22.	13 - 14
5.1.	AONB Unit Annual Report table.	15 - 24
6.	River Wye Emergency and Action.	25 - 30
7.	AONB Special Species Action Plans.	31 - 34
7.1.	Noble Chafer Species Action Plan.	35 - 50
8.	Review of Designated Landscapes in England and Wales.	51 - 54
9.	AONB Partnership Study Tour 2022.	55 - 56
10.	National Association for AONBs.	57 - 58

11.	AONB Unit and Partner progress reports and updates.	59 - 64
12.	Date of next meetings at 2pm (venue / format to be confirmed): Monday 6th March 2023 (to be confirmed).	

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:

E. Bryn
S. Garratt
D. Rooke
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

Vacancy – 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
H. O’Kane – Local Tourism Sector
C. Spicer – Local Wildlife Trusts
D. Price – National Farmers Union Wales

Public Information

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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.
- **Kindness:** We will show kindness to all those we work with putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th July, 2022 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor: A. Webb (Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: E. Bryn and D. Rooke

Herefordshire Council

Councillor: 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 – Mr. R. Gething

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

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

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th July, 2022 at 2.00 pm

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor S. Garratt, Councillor B. Durkin, Councillor J. Hardwick, Councillor P. Symonds, Councillor T. Hale, Mr. B. Nash and Mr. R. Niblett

1. Election of Chair

We elected County Councillor A. Webb as Chair.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

We appointed Councillor C. McFarling as Vice-Chair.

3. Introduction and New Members

The Chair invited the Joint Advisory Committee members to introduce themselves before welcoming County Councillors Emma Bryn and Dale Rooke to their first meeting of the Committee.

4. Declarations of Interest

None received.

5. Public Question Time

No questions from the public had been received.

6. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 7th March 2022 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

In doing so, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that the AONB Perceptions survey will be undertaken later this year, surveying partners and key stakeholders.

7. Venue and Format of the Joint Advisory Committee Meetings

We received a report regarding the venue and format of future meetings of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is established jointly under a formal Agreement between the four constituent local authorities.
- The Agreement states that the JAC Clerk is Monmouthshire County Council and JAC meetings are held in Coleford unless or until the Committee decides to make other arrangements.

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- Meetings fall under the jurisdiction of the law of the land in which they are held.
- Post-Covid-19, Council meetings held in England are required to meet face to face, whereas in Wales Councils must give participants the option of attending remotely.
- The English local authorities tend to only have the technology installed for hybrid meetings in small meeting rooms.
- Monmouthshire County Council has the technology for hosting hybrid Full Council meetings at County Hall, Usk.
- Several other AONB Partnerships in England hold hybrid meetings where the technology exists, often purchased by the AONB Partnership.
- The AONB Unit could investigate the purchase, or hire, of bespoke equipment for hybrid JAC and other meetings as necessary, alternatively the JAC could meet in Usk.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Herefordshire Council holds hybrid meetings in one of its committee rooms which could be investigated as an option to host future JAC meetings.
- The AONB Manager and Councillor C. McFarling could investigate the cost of installing a hybrid system within the Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Council Chamber with the Council's Democratic Services Department.
- The Forest of Dean District Council Offices are centrally located which helps to minimise the carbon footprint of meetings.
- Monmouthshire County Council already has a hybrid system in place at its offices in Usk which could be used as a potential venue, going forward. However, concern was expressed regarding the distances some JAC members would have to travel to attend a meeting in Usk.
- Concern was expressed that due to the poor internet connectivity in some areas within the AONB, attending meetings virtually can be a challenge on occasions.

We resolved that:

- (i) the next meeting of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee be held in person at the Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford;
- (ii) the AONB Manager investigates the purchase, or hire, of bespoke equipment for a hybrid Joint Advisory Committee and presents a report to the next meeting in November 2022 regarding this matter.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th July, 2022 at 2.00 pm

8. AONB Unit 2022/23 Work programme report

We received a report regarding the finalised AONB Unit work programme for this financial year, following confirmation of funding from DEFRA, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Welsh Government.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The proposed Wye Valley AONB Unit Work Programme for 2022/2023 was presented in draft and endorsed at the last Joint Advisory Committee meeting, due to budgets for the AONB not having been confirmed.
- New AONB core funding allocations have been offered by DEFRA and Welsh Government for 2022-2025 and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for 2022-2024. Welsh Government has also confirmed allocations for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme for 2022-2025.
- Various project funding bids have also been confirmed covering this financial year.
- The new Community Links Officer and the Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer have been recruited and both start in the coming weeks.
- The medium term funding has also enabled consolidation of the Lower Wye Projects Officer and Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer posts. The shared AONB Planning Officer with the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership is also being proceeded. This will take the AONB Unit up to 7.3 full time equivalent (FTE) staff.
- The finalised Wye Valley AONB Unit Work Programme for 2022/2023 includes an estimated percentage of each staff member's time on each work programme activity. Activities are also assessed for impacts of any potential on-going implications from Covid-19.
- The AONB Unit operating budget for 2022/23 is £342,540 with an additional £1.1million of project funding, delegated grants and leveraged match funding during the year.
- This enables an ambitious work programme focused on the delivery of the AONB Management Plan and the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The names / contact details of the AONB Unit staff would be made available to JAC members.

The Wye Valley AONB website should outline the objectives of the AONB Management Plan. The citizen's charter could be on a separate webpage, in a simpler format, away from the AONB Management Plan.

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- The AONB Unit should produce a more regular and accessible newsletter outlining achievements and key information.
- The AONB Development Officer's role, along with the AONB Manager, is to develop projects and undertake fundraising. However, due to staff shortages in recent months the AONB Unit has been under resourced. It is anticipated that the AONB Unit will be fully resourced again by the autumn of 2022.
- There are several undergrounding schemes currently with Western Power waiting to be progressed. An update report will be brought to the Committee at the next meeting in November 2022.
- The Joint Advisory Committee undertakes the scrutiny role for the AONB Unit over and above the Technical Officers' Working Party and the AONB Steering Group. However, it is also the role of each of the local authorities within the AONB to address this matter via their own scrutiny processes.
- A governance review of the AONB processes had been undertaken in 2018 with no significant deficiencies having been identified.
- The AONB Manager, with the Malvern Hills AONB Manager, is looking to appoint a joint Planning Officer with a view to assessing planning applications that impact both AONBs.

We resolved to endorse the finalised Wye Valley AONB Unit Work Programme for 2022/2023.

9. Annual report 2021/22

We received an update regarding the annual report figures for 2021/22 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:

- 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 (JAC).
- The AONB Unit has levered in over £16 for every £1 of local authority contribution during 2021/22.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding Farming in Protected Landscapes, it was noted that AONB and National Parks representatives sit on DEFRA working groups.

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- In Wales, the AONB Manager is involved in proposals for the Sustainable Farming Scheme which is scheduled to be launched in July 2022 at the Royal Welsh Show.

We welcomed the Annual Report figures and await the finalised Annual Report on AONB achievements for 2021/22.

10. AONB Partnership Study Tour 2022

We received a report regarding the outline programme for the Annual AONB Partnership Study Tour.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour has not been held since 2019.
- This year the intention is to revive the Tour, to be held on Friday 23rd September 2022.
- The programme is still being finalised but will focus predominantly on projects and management issues in the part of the AONB around Ross-on-Wye and south Herefordshire.
- Initial invitations for expressions of interest to attend will be despatched shortly.
- Invitations could be extended to representatives from our neighbouring Designated Landscapes and other appropriate partner organisations in the interest of sharing good practice and broadening collaboration.

Having received the report it was noted that it might be necessary to change the date of the Tour to the 30th September 2022.

We resolved:

- (i) to note the date of Friday 23rd September 2022 for the Study Tour and encouraged a good attendance, at £20 each;
- (ii) to invite representatives from our neighbouring Shropshire Hills and Malvern Hills AONB Partnerships and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and other appropriate partners.

11. AONB Climate Action report

We received a report regarding the Statement of Commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

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- Climate change is a major challenge for society and the environment and a key priority for the conservation and enhancement of our National Landscapes.
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation requires collaborative action, working with partners, stakeholders, land managers and local communities to multiply the capacity and impact of individual and collective activity.
- AONB teams and partnerships must now more than ever confirm their leading role and ambition in addressing this challenge.
- AONB staff from across the country, supported by the National Association for AONBs, have created a collaborative Climate Action Framework and Toolkit with a programme of five workstreams.
- The Wye Valley AONB Unit has undertaken a carbon audit of operations with a plan of action to help achieve the target of Net Zero Carbon emissions by 2030.
- An audit of the organic carbon stocks and stores across the whole AONB as a landscape has estimated that there may be up to 5 million tonnes of carbon stored in the AONB.
- A consumption-based assessment has been conducted on the Greenhouse Gas footprint of residents, businesses, tourism and land use in the AONB.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Issues regarding transport, energy and food need to be addressed. The Forest of Dean District Council's Climate Action Plan is available as guidance for the AONB unit.
- The latest census data indicates an increase in the number of people aged over 65 in the area which will have an impact on the Climate Action Plan.

We resolved:

- (i) to endorse the signing of the Statement of Commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action;
- (ii) to welcome the Carbon Audits of the Wye Valley AONB Unit and wider landscape and the development of actions to achieve the target of Net Zero Carbon emissions.

12. Reviews of Designated Landscapes update

We received a report regarding the on-going progress following the respective Reviews of Designated Landscapes in Wales and England.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

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- The Welsh AONB lead officers continue to meet with Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, the National Association for AONBs and the Welsh National Parks working together as Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales.
- Welsh Government and DEFRA have committed to three year core funding agreements for AONBs with additional or proposed capital funding programmes.
- DEFRA is assimilating the results of the public consultation on the Government Response to the Landscapes Review, with further announcements and outcomes anticipated.
- Natural England is progressing work on the All England Strategic Landscape Mapping Assessment Tool and evaluating the Yorkshire Wolds for potential AONB designation.
- Welsh Government is undertaking a deep dive focussing on how Wales can implement the target to restore 30% of land and sea by 2030 (known as '30 by 30') including convening a Designated Landscapes Expert Subgroup.
- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) continues to liaise and co-ordinate collaboration with both governments and key stakeholders over progressing the agenda for AONBs.

We noted the report.

13. Tintern Wireworks Bridge refurbishment

We received a report regarding the closure of the Tintern Wireworks Bridge for refurbishment.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wireworks Bridge at Tintern is one of the three remaining former railway bridges spanning the River Wye in the AONB. It provides a strategic crossing point for recreational users, particularly walkers and cyclists using the recently opened Wye Valley Greenway.
- Gloucestershire County Council leads on repairs and maintenance under shared ownership with Monmouthshire County Council.
- The bridge is in poor condition and in need of significant repairs. Contractors have been commissioned to undertake these repairs.
- The bridge will be closed from mid-July 2022 until Spring 2023.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

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- In response to a question regarding the Duke of Beaufort Bridge, Wyesham, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that bids for lottery funding had been submitted in previous years to upgrade Lydbrook and Redbrook bridges. However, these had been unsuccessful. Bids for funding will continue to be submitted. It was noted that the Beaufort bridge was not in the AONB and was not in public ownership.
- A pedestrian & cycleway footbridge across the River Wye at Monmouth was proposed. However, it was noted that funding is currently unavailable to accommodate such a scheme.
- There was a need for Active travel networks and funding to join up between the Welsh and English side to enable some cross-border solutions.
- Forest of Dean District Council is investigating options to build a bridge for cyclists and pedestrians between Beachley Point and Chepstow.
- Matthew Lewis, Monmouthshire County Council's Environment and Culture Manager would liaise with Monmouthshire County Council's Highways Department regarding the current condition of the Wye Bridge.

We noted the report.

14. Wye Valley River Festival 2022 update

We received a report regarding the success of the Wye Valley River Festival held between the 27th May and 5th June 2022, supported by the Wye Valley AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley River Festival 2022 ran from 27th May - 5th June 2022, organised by the Wye Valley River Festival Community Interest Company (CIC).
- The Wye Valley River Festival CIC received funding from Arts Council England (ACE), Community Renewal Fund UK, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), Welsh Government Major Events - Festival Growth Fund, Arts Council of Wales (ACW), Forestry England and in-kind support from Cadw.
- The Festival on the theme of HUMAN⇌NATURE was a great success with a range of bespoke outdoor arts events and activities with some augmented local Platinum Jubilee celebrations.
- Further events are planned, including in Tintern Abbey 21st - 23rd October 2022.
- Meanwhile, a full evaluation of the Festival will be available later in the year. Then the CIC will begin contemplating the next Wye Valley River Festival.

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On behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee, the Chair asked the AONB Manager to pass on the Committee's best wishes to the CIC for organising a successful festival.

We noted the report.

15. AONB & Partner progress reports and updates

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

- AONB Species Action Plans.
- Wye Invasive Species Programme (WISP).
- Wye Valley AONB Villages signage.
- Farming in Protected Landscapes.
- Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & and Herefordshire Community Foundation Wye Valley AONB Fund.
- Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects.
- National Association for AONBs Conference.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Villages signage production is anticipated to be installed this summer. Signage is only on the Welsh side of the border being funded via Welsh Government. DEFRA is being encouraged to provide funding on the English side. It was noted that communities wanted to recognise the AONB.
- The re-opening of dismantled railways within the AONB should be encouraged.

We noted the report.

16. Dates of next meetings:

Monday 7th November 2022 at 2.00pm – The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

Monday 6th March 2023 at 2.00pm.

The AONB Manager would present a report to the November 2022 meeting for discussion regarding holding a Wye Valley AONB Partnership Winter Seminar.

The AONB Manager would provide Members with an update on the state of the River Wye via newsletter.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held
at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High Street, Coleford,
GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th July, 2022 at 2.00 pm**

The meeting ended at 4.29 pm.

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ANNUAL REPORT

Purpose

To present the annual reports for 2021/22 on the achievements of the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

Recommendations

That the JAC welcome the Annual Report of AONB achievements for 2021/22

Key Issues

- The 2021/22 Annual Report on the Work Programme for the AONB Unit is appended, along with the summary financial report, presented at the previous JAC meeting.
- High levels of achievement were maintained by the AONB Unit despite the challenges of the on-going Coronavirus Pandemic restricting many activities and some reduced capacity due to staffing issues.
- 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 full Report was delayed due to work pressures and staff shortages. Only the financial summary was presented to the JAC in July. The impacts of Covid-19 have continued to affected many aspects of life over the past year.

Implications

The AONB Unit Work Programme Plan was risk assessed in relation to Covid-19 restrictions and reviewed by the AONB Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP). The majority of works continued with AONB staff 'Working from Home'. When the AONB Office decarbonisation and refurbishment was completed staff were able to return to working from the office where and when necessary. However extensive use of Microsoft Teams continued including for all JAC Meetings. Site works and commissioning contractors on the ground was easier when Covid lockdowns and restrictions lifted. However staff capacity was reduced due to the on-going delays in recruiting the FiPL Officer and then the departure of the Community Links Officer.

The overall turnover of the AONB Unit increased in 2021/22, mostly accounted for by the income and expenditure of the DEFRA Farming in Protected Landscape programme and the Welsh Government Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) funding. The leverage of the AONB Partnership in 2021/22 means that for every £1 of local authority contribution, the AONB Unit brought in over £16.

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Annual report 2021 – 2022 including financial summary

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives</i> AONB Unit Initiatives		Activities & Outcomes 2021-2022
WV-L1 WV-P3	AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalise design of adopted Wye Valley AONB Management Plan Publicise and promote Wye Valley AONB Management Plan Monitor use of Management Plan in Planning Applications, Public Inquiries and by stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalise Plan adopted by Local Authorities Publicity and promotion of Plan , available at https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/management-plans/ AONB Management Plan referred to in planning application responses and reports.
WV-F1 WV-F2 WV-F3 WV-F4 WV-F5 WV-E2	Farming in Protected Landscapes Support, as directed by DEFRA, farmers and other land managers to help them diversify their income streams and lay the groundwork for Environmental Land Management (ELM) uptake. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support to farmers to help grow businesses, create green jobs, enhance biodiversity and invest in infrastructure to attract more diverse visitors to support local economies Through (A) farm level projects and (B) wider infrastructure and projects on farmland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme established and Panel selected Programme promoted nationally by DEFRA, NAAONB, NFU etc and locally through Farm Herefordshire, NFU, Herefordshire Rural Hub & https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/farming-in-protected-landscapes/ Advice & support given by DO to farmers & landowners to help with applications. FiPL Panel met & fully allocated funds to 8 projects. Allocations renegotiated with DEFRA and subsequently additional funds applied for and secured from DEFRA. Admin completed with farmers & landowners over claims. FiPL Officer recruitment commenced through Herefordshire Council
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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awards were cancelled due to Covid restrictions, as was Monmouthshire Show, where Awards are announced. Considerations to incorporate into Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives</i> AONB Unit Initiatives		Activities & Outcomes 2021-2022
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judging Present the prizes at the Monmouthshire Show <i>(if held)</i> Involve winner in Open Farm Sunday event.	
WV-L1 WV-B3 WV-C1	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 Service SDF Assessment Panel for allocating SDF funds. Training for SDF Assessment Panel members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLO liaised with project proposers and advised applicants. SDF Panel met in August 2021 via Zoom. 14 projects approved with full allocation of £100,000
WV-L1 WV-B3 WV-C1	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"> Promotion of Fund: https://www.wyevallyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/grants/aonb-fund/ Assisted potential applicants with application process and project development Serviced SDF Assessment Panel recommending allocations to HCF. Discussed fundraising campaign with HCF for AONB Fund CLO left in December reducing capacity to progress training or applicant support.
WV-L2 WV-L4 WV-B2 WV-B4 WV-F4 WV-W3 WV-W4	Landscape & Habitat Conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise monthly volunteer task days, including on partner sites and Reserves Continue Lower Wye Green Infrastructure (GI) and Natural Flood Management (NFM) initiatives 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 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. Develop initiatives focused on Orchards (Noble Chafer), River (Water Crowfoot), Woodland (Woodland Butterfly assemblage), Grassland (Bumblebee assemblage), General (Hedgehog)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful recruitment and appointment of new Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer who commenced in July. Organised monthly volunteer task days, including on partner sites and Reserves until CLO left in December, impacting AONB staff capacity and delivery. AONB Volunteer activity was put on hold while recruitment of new CLO underway Continued Natural Flood Management (NFM) & Riparian Tree initiatives working with local land owners, managers & stakeholders, with 11 schemes progressed. Monitored NFM pilot interventions on Chapel Hill Lane, Tintern. Managed control of Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) particularly 140 identified stands of Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and American Skunk Cabbage across 78 landownerships, with 5 contractors & 4 public/volunteers events Preparatory work for 2022 management & control of INNS and development of Community Pack in liaison with WaREN.

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives</i> AONB Unit Initiatives		Activities & Outcomes 2021-2022
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued collaboration with Ross Town Council over management of Ross Riverside. Lower Wye Green Infrastructure (GI) plans progressed and discussed at Monmouthshire Local Access Forum. AONB Nature Recovery Plan & Species Action Plans drafted in line with Colchester Declaration by DO & LWNRO.
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 websites www.overlookingthewye.org.uk & www.wyevalleyriverfestival.org.uk 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 continued to be refined & updated IO co-ordinated regular social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram & LinkedIn with frequent social media take-overs Maintenance of www.wyevalleywalk.org and hosting of www.overlookingthewye.org.uk & www.wyevalleyriverfestival.org.uk websites. AONB 50th Anniversary promotion through 50walks@50 Digital 50th Anniversary edition of Pictureque published https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Picturesque-Newsletter-50th-Anniversary-Edition-1.pdf
WV-P1 WV-P6 WV-P7	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"> 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 2021 Promote & disseminate JAC contacts & processes for other organisations & individuals to feed into JAC & AONB Partnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour cancelled due to Covid issues. AONB Partnership on-line winter event cancelled due to Covid & staff capacity issues. AONB Unit Annual Report 2020/21 presented to JAC in November. 'What is Natural Beauty?' national on-line symposium in December, hosted by the UK's Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA), and co-hosted by AONBM and The PLACE Collective; 100 people attended with a cross-sectorial range of speakers from landscape management and conservation, arts and academia; https://www.cumbria.ac.uk/media/WINB-Report-FINAL-PDF.pdf and: https://bit.ly/3H1ljt2 .
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 Monmouthshire Show and other relevant shows. Gilpin2020+ events, local exhibitions and other local appropriate / prestigious events. AONB 50th Anniversary programme of events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AONB Stand at the Monmouth Climate Futures Festival. AONB 50th Anniversary promotion through 50walks@50 https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/50-walks50/ Regular social media 'take-overs' by partners AONB team promoted & led guided walks in and around the AONB Hosted Wales Dark Sky Week talk

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives</i> AONB Unit Initiatives		Activities & Outcomes 2021-2022
	Promote & lead guided walks, events, children's activities and countryside craft /rural skills courses in and around the AONB	
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 Train new Leaders and scope for next Cohort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued programme of activity for 5th Cohort both on-line and resumed activities in the landscape, when covid restrictions allowed Training of new volunteer Leaders commenced for next Cohort CLO left in December impacting AONB staff capacity and delivery. Youth Rangers activity put on hold until while new CLO recruited
WV-D1 WV-D2 WV-D3	AONB Strategy & Development Advisor <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 and 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"> 716 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 8 significant planning applications; 4 in Herefordshire, 3 in Monmouthshire and 1 in Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire and also provided advice on the 'setting of the AONB' to Herefordshire Council and local residents. Liaison with NAAONB over development issues and national strategy
WV-A1 WV-L5 WV-C2	Wye Valley River Festival 2022? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate future prospects & governance for Festival. Help establish CIC to take forward Festival Support Research & Development for next Festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helped establish CIC & governance to take forward Festival, with AONBM on CIC Advisory Board. Supported CIC with preparations for 2022 Festival.
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"> DO managed reports & claims to Foresters' Forest LPS for HLF Artspace Cinderford organised regular creative sessions, workshops and social activities for participants, both on-line and some face-to-face.
WV-F1 WV-F2 WV-F5 WV-B6	Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) Support Catchment Advisors (CAs) working in AONB & wider Wye catchment in partnership with Wye & Usk Foundation through Water Environment Grant (WEG) funded project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported Catchment Advisor working in AONB & wider Wye catchment in partnership with Wye & Usk Foundation Engaged farmers & land managers with tailored advice and Farm Plans

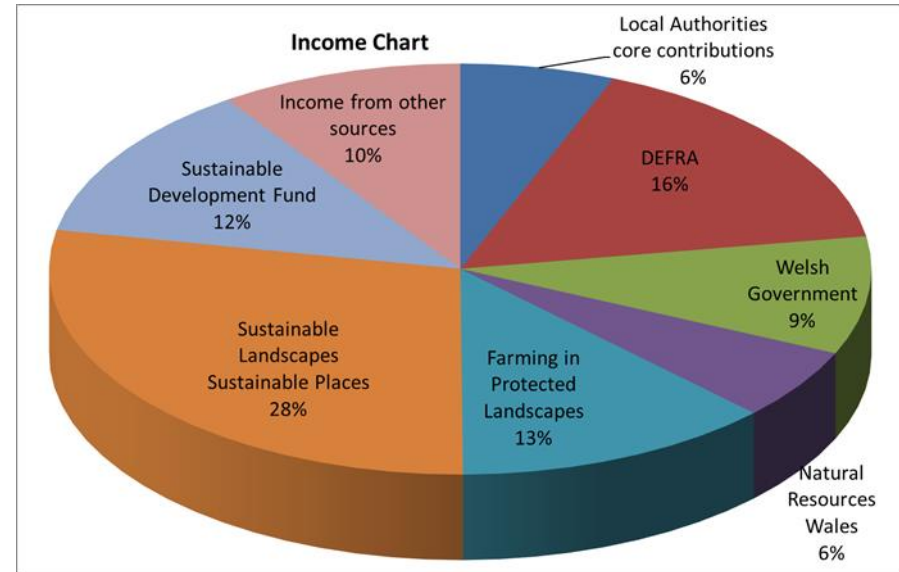
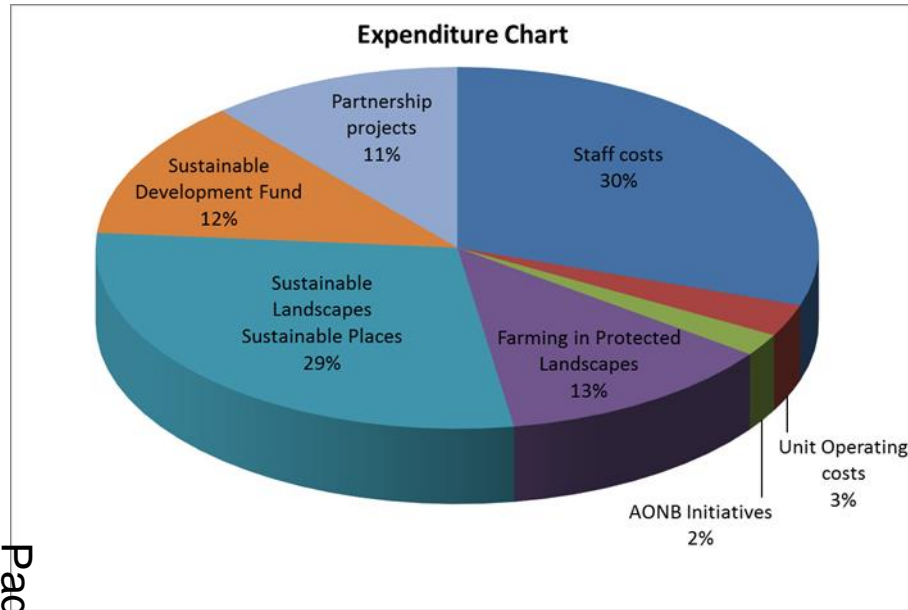
AONB Unit Work Programme <i>AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives</i> AONB Unit Initiatives		Activities & Outcomes 2021-2022
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage farmers & land managers with tailored advice and produce Farm Plans Promote land management practices to reduce impacts 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 ROAR project ended in December along with Ben Nott's secondment to the AONB team, however he was retained as a WUF Catchment Advisor and continued to work in the and around the AONB, alongside other WUF Advisors, as resources allowed.
<i>WV-U2</i> <i>WV-P4</i>	Undergrounding Continue working with Western Power & local communities 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 worked with Western Power & local communities to identify power-lines within the AONB suitable for undergrounding with 4 schemes approved. Liaison & attendance of Western Power South Wales Protected Landscape Undergrounding group and the West Midlands Undergrounding group.
<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 'Forests without Frontiers' and collaborative projects with orchards, veteran & riverine trees. National Grid Visual Improvement Programme (VIP) for area between Ross & Goodrich with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust & others Continue work with Herefordshire Meadows Network, Monmouthshire Meadows and Parish Grassland Project. Pursue roll-out of Natural Flood Management & Riparian Trees initiatives throughout the AONB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DO developed partnership projects to deliver landscape scale conservation activity and initiatives within and adjoining the AONB, including On-going work Herefordshire Meadows Network, Monmouthshire Meadows and Parish Grassland Project. Continuing roll-out of Natural Flood Management & Riparian Trees initiatives throughout the AONB, with 11 grant aided projects being taken forward. Submitted successful application to National Lottery Heritage Fund for £278,400 Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks project until March 2023 DO managed Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks partnership & project work with Gwent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust. Managed projects under NRW Biodiversity & Ecosystems Resilience Fund (BERF) and Peatland Restoration Fund
<i>WV-S1</i> <i>WV-S2</i> <i>WV-R1</i> <i>WV-P5</i>	Wye Valley Walk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage replacement of Passport scheme Launch new website www.wyevalleywalk.org Support Wye Valley Walk Partnership Audit & co-ordinate refreshing of way-marking Collate counter data along route Review Cicerone Route Guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IO & FAO dispatched Passports & information as requested. Tendered for new website design for www.wyevalleywalk.org and IO managed successful contractors Supported Wye Valley Walk Partnership. Reviewed future options for Lydbrook Bridge, Redbrook Bridge and Tintern Wireworks Bridge. Progressed surveys for Monmouth riverbank erosion scheme. Worked with HC/Balfour Beatty on Wyastone landslip solutions.

AONB Unit Work Programme AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives AONB Unit Initiatives		Activities & Outcomes 2021-2022
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate future options for Lydbrook Bridge, Redbrook Bridge and Tintern Wireworks Bridge. Progress Monmouth riverbank erosion solutions Work with HC/Balfour Beatty on Wyastone landslip solutions Review & republish 'Easy Access' walks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commenced review of options for revised Cicerone Route Guide.
WV-R2 WV-P3 WV-P5 WV-P6 WV-P7	Partnership Influence & attend partnerships as appropriate; eg: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Nature Partnership (LNP) in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire Environment Partnership Wye Catchment Partnership Wye Navigation Advisory Committee (WyeNAC) 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 others as necessary 	Attended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership (LNP) Wye Catchment Partnership Wye Navigation Advisory Committee (WyeNAC) South East Wales Tourism Forum Visit Herefordshire meetings
WV-P5 WV-P9	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 National Designated Landscapes Partnership (NDLP) in Wales Work with DEFRA and others in progressing Proposals in Glover Review of Designated Landscapes in England 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attended NAAONB on-line national conference, Lead Officers meeting and training events, including on Government Response to Glover Review Worked with Welsh Government and Wales National Designated Landscapes Partnership (NDLP) - Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales, consisting of the 8 AONBS & National Parks in Wales AONBM assisted with Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales on-line seminar in October promoting SLSP project work & outcomes. Worked with NAAONB and others in progressing Proposals in Glover Review of Designated Landscapes in England
WV-P5 WV-P9	Work placements Support the needs of student placements/group projects. Investigate new under-graduate and post-graduate research opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to host or support due to Covid restrictions and office refurbishment.
WV-L4 WV-B5 WV-H2 WV-S3 WV-P8	Monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing updating of the AONB GIS and State of the AONB data, Complete Phase 1 Habitat Survey mapping & digitising Progress Nature Recovery Network map & Plan Investigate opportunities to update heritage, tourism and recreation monitoring. Monitor and review implementation of the AONB Management Plan Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State of the AONB Report published https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/State-of-the-AONB-Report-2021-final.pdf Ongoing updating of the AONB GIS including ongoing Phase 1 Habitat Survey mapping & digitising Received AONB Nature Recovery Network Map & commenced ground-truthing

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives</i> AONB Unit Initiatives		Activities & Outcomes 2021-2022
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake Fixed point photography across the AONB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued annual Fixed point photography across the AONB
WV-P1 WV-P2	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, Welsh Government and DEFRA, and other funding bodies as required. Continue implementation of recommendations from AONB Good Governance Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Work Programme for 2021/22 was risk assessed in relation to Covid-19 impacts reviewed by AONB Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP). 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 2021-22 spend profile. JAC met on-line in July, November & March
WV-P1 WV-P2 WV-P3	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 Develop fundraising campaign for Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley AONB Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The unanticipated reduction in the NRW core contribution and the similarly unanticipated addition of the BERF, along with the much delayed confirmation of the funding offer put AONB staff and the AONB Partnership under considerable stress in resolving the tensions in delivering the agreed AONB Work Programme. Continued pursuing funding and developing opportunities for external funding and securing sources for strategic and partnership projects The decarbonisation and refurbishment of the poorly insulated AONB Office was completed and AONB staff returned to the refurbished office as Covid restrictions allowed from September.
WV-C1 WV-S2 WV-S4 WV-R4	Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places Welsh Government capital investment scheme for Designated Landscapes focussed on decarbonisation, Nature-based solutions and nature recovery, Supporting more sustainable tourism and more resilient & healthy rural economies that promote a Green Recovery. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refurbishment of Old Station Tintern Cleddon Falls & Wordsworth Walk enhancements Piercefield Walk enhancements Wye Valley Villages Travel & Transport Plan implementation Engagement in small number of high impact, collaborative projects across multiple Designated Landscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progressed delivery of Welsh Government capital investment programme at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refurbishment of Old Station Tintern, with MCC Cleddon Falls SSSI & Wordsworth Walk enhancements; with permissive path private landowner & contractors iBEX & Ross Smith of Anvil Forge Blacksmithing re-establishing path & steps by falls. Piercefield Walk enhancements with Gwent Wildlife Trust Wye Valley Villages Travel & Transport Plan implementation; with Arup and delivery through MCC & Wye Valley Villages Steering Group of 4 Community Councils Carbon Audit across 6 Designated Landscapes of both AONB Unit operations and AONB landscape (including residents, business, land use & tourism/visitors)

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives</i> AONB Unit Initiatives		Activities & Outcomes 2021-2022
WV-H1	Offa's Dyke Collaboratory <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 Support community based research and events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributed to Convenors meeting & Offa's Dyke Journal Editorial Board.
WV-H1 WV-H3 WV-P5	Overlooking the Wye legacy Continue to develop heritage & Community projects as part of the legacy of the Overlooking the Wye Landscape Partnership Scheme <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. Review & reprint of Walks leaflets Audit and repair / maintenance of Overlooking the Wye infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive review of interpretation & infrastructure postponed due the staff capacity issues. Gilpin2020 events and exhibitions cancelled and unlikely to be resurrected in 2021. Consideration of which 'good ideas' could be carried forward.

Wye Valley AONB Unit Accounts		2020/21	2021/22		2020/21	2021/22
Expenditure		£	£		£	£
	Staff costs	206,732	243,843	Local Authorities core contributions	49,002	49,182
	Unit Operating costs	20,623	23,260	Defra AONB grant	137,645	132,443
	AONB Initiatives	18,055	15,970	Welsh Government	~	75,000
	Farming in Protected Landscapes	~	96,525	Natural Resources Wales Grant	49,600	45,500
	Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places	194,700	233,000	Farming in Protected Landscapes	~	96,525
	Sustainable Development Fund	100,000	100,000	Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places	194,700	227,500
	Partnership projects	56,162	91,525	Sustainable Development Fund	100,000	100,000
	TOTAL	596,272	804,123	Income from other sources	65,324	77,973
				TOTAL	596,272	804,123



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, Welsh Government, 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/2228/council-accounts-202122>

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; LWNRO = Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer

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RIVER WYE EMERGENCY AND ACTION

Purpose

To advise members of the latest activities and plans to improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients and help restore the River Wye.

Recommendations

That the JAC, as an organisation long aware of the significant decline in the condition of the River Wye, which is so central to the Wye Valley AONB, welcomes the statements and concerted collaborative actions now being declared and advanced by the main stakeholders in the Wye Catchment, to improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients and help restore the River Wye and its tributaries.

The Wye Valley AONB Partnership will do everything within its powers, purposes and resources to work with all individuals, groups and organisations to convene, enable and deliver on the restoration, conservation and enhancement of the River Wye and its tributaries, which are one of the Special Qualities of the Wye Valley AONB.

Key Issues

- It is widely recognised that coordinated work needs to progress on the restoration of the River Wye and River Lugg to conserve and enhance the catchment's biodiversity, natural beauty and to enable future sustainable development, in the context of the climate and environment emergency.
- The Environment Agency (EA), in their River Wye Report (July 22), stress that the issues facing the River Wye and its high phosphate levels are complex and require urgent action by all contributing sectors with a coordinated catchment based approach.
- Phosphate discharges into the rivers Wye and Lugg originate from 2 main sources; diffuse agricultural pollution (about 60%) and sewage treatment works (up to 40%)
- The Wye Nutrient Management Board (NMB) have adopted the River Wye Phosphate Action Plan.
- The NMB Technical Advisory Group (TAG) established 5 sub-groups to progress key themes in the Phosphate Action Plan. The AONB Manager sits on the Innovation & projects sub-group.
- Herefordshire Council have set up a Phosphates Commission to consider their strategic approach to water quality issues in the Wye & Lugg, with neighbouring local authorities.
- Monmouthshire County Council recognises its rivers and coast are in crisis and has adopted a Motion for the Rivers and Oceans Action Plan.
- Significant reduction in nutrient input from all sources is required across the whole catchment, but 5 keys areas, all upstream of the AONB, have been identified with a high

proportion of pressures and high phosphate concentrations for targeted investigations, analysis and remedial action.

- The AONB Unit continues to manage partnership projects and collaborative initiatives including through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, to support farmers and land-managers in and around the AONB.
- The AONB Partnership winter seminar will focus on issues and activities in & around the AONB that improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients & help restore the River Wye.
- The Wye Valley AONB Partnership will do everything within its powers, purposes and resources to work with all individuals, groups and organisations to convene, enable and deliver on the restoration, conservation and enhancement of the River Wye and its tributaries, which are one of the central Special Qualities of the Wye Valley AONB.

Reasons

The River Wye SAC (Special Area of Conservation) is failing to meet phosphate targets in some reaches and is very close to the threshold in others. Over a number of years there have been algal blooms in the river and recognition of ecological decline. Excessively high summer water temperatures in the main river are a major contributing factor to the algal growth.

Phosphate in the Wye catchment originates from two main sources. These are discharges from sewage treatment works and from diffuse agricultural pollution, principally from livestock manure and nutrients washing into the river during rainfall events. More than 60% of phosphate (varying across the catchment) entering rivers is from agriculture.

The Wye Valley AONB covers the lower reaches of the Wye, downstream from the confluence with the Lugg. The River Wye and its tributaries are an AONB Special Quality as identified in the statutory Wye Valley AONB Management Plan. Most of the phosphates and contributing conditions for the algal blooms originate upstream of the AONB.

Implications

The Environment Agency (EA) published a revised version of the first River Wye Management Catchment Integrated Data Analysis Report in July (see https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/west-midlands/river-wye-water-quality/supporting_documents/Wye_Report_Q1_2022_23.pdf). The report brings data from citizen scientists and monitoring infrastructure together with existing datasets to contribute to a shared understanding of the issues and actions required. The recommendations include

- Significant reduction in nutrient input from all sources is required across the whole catchment to contribute to the recovery of river macrophytes. Reducing run-off and leaching of nutrients from land during summer rainfall events when dilution is low and temperatures are high is an important element of this remedial activity.
- The RePhoKUs project (Withers, et al., 2022) concluded that it may take about a decade to eliminate the agricultural phosphorus surplus from soils to achieve water quality targets in the catchment.
- Efforts to increase shade by tree planting and better management of riparian trees could help mitigate high temperatures.

- Taking a catchment-based approach, all contributing partners in the Wye Catchment should target investigations, analysis and remedial actions in key focus catchments that meet the following criteria:
 - As far upstream as possible
 - High phosphate concentrations relative to the wider catchment,
 - A high proportion of the following factors and drivers present: Arable land use; Maize; Poultry sheds; Anaerobic digesters; Sewage treatment works; Combined sewer overflows; Macrophytes status less than good and indicative of eutrophication; Declining Atlantic salmon populations; Land allocated for development to which Nutrient Neutrality guidance applies; Active Citizen Science groups; Active partnership projects

Based on these criteria the following 5 waterbodies are most suitable to target initially: 1. River Arrow near Kington, 2. River Arrow near Pembridge and Curl Brook, 3. River Lugg and tributaries near Presteigne, 4. Little Lugg and Withington Marsh Brook, 5. River Frome.

EA now have a full time Citizen Science Coordinator who will be overseeing the citizen science groups in the Wye in addition to a national project entitled Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative (CaSTCo) to engage communities in catchment monitoring.

The Wye Nutrient Management Board (NMB) convenes the local authorities, government agencies and key stakeholders including water companies and farming support organisations, to progress the River Wye Phosphate Action Plan (see <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/23069/river-wye-sac-nutrient-management-plan-phosphate-action-plan-november-2021>). There is significant crossover between the organisations and members of the NMB and the JAC. The NMB has established a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of key officers to work collectively with partners and experts to resolve gaps and identify opportunities. The TAG has established 5 sub-groups to a) identify practical actions and projects that progress the Phosphate Action Plan, and b) identify gaps & issues beyond the ability of TAG and bring these back to the NMB.

These sub-groups are:

- Evidence
- Regulation
- Farm advice
- Poultry
- Innovation & projects.

The AONB Manager sits on this latter sub-group.

Following the DEFRA ministerial decision not to proceed with a request for a Water Protection Zone, Herefordshire Council along with Monmouthshire and Powys County Councils concluded that a Joint Cabinet Commission should undertake a strategic and systems review of how the respective councils can accelerate progress in the restoration of the Wye. In September the Cabinet Commission on Restoring the River Wye (the Phosphates Commission) was established (see

<https://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/s50103960/Appendix%201%20-%20Terms%20of%20reference%20and%20membership.pdf>). For Herefordshire, one of the considerations is what the Local Planning Authority (LPA) can do to move the planning regime for both agriculture and new housing development to full Nutrient Neutrality for all new planning applications by 2025. The Commission is intended to add value and capacity rather than duplicate the work of Nutrient Management Board and the TAG. Meanwhile Herefordshire Council are overseeing the building of the first wetlands in the UK to be

funded by developers buying what is being described as "phosphate credits" near the village of Luston, near Leominster.

Monmouthshire County Council has formally recognised that the county's coastline, rivers and climate are in a state of emergency and has outlined an Action Plan, which complements the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, to identify what the council needs to do in working towards nature recovery for our oceans and rivers (see <https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/documents/s32714/2a%20Place%20Scrutiny%20Sept22%20Motion%20for%20the%20Ocean.pdf>).

At the Royal Welsh Show, the Welsh Government First Minister convened a summit discussing the phosphorous pollution of Welsh rivers and how the situation can be improved. Also over the summer, Julie James, Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change, convened a wide range of stakeholders to undertake a Biodiversity Deep Dive in Wales to develop a set of collective actions to support nature's recovery. In October the recommendations were released, <https://gov.wales/written-statement-biodiversity-deep-dive>, which correlate with improving the state of the Wye catchment and River Wye SAC:

1. Transform the protected sites series so that it is better, bigger, and more effectively connected
2. Create a framework to recognise Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) that deliver biodiversity outcomes
3. Unlock the potential of designated landscapes (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) to deliver more for nature and 30 by 30
4. Continue to reform land and marine management and planning (including spatial) to deliver more for both protected sites and wider land / seascapes
5. Build a strong foundation for future delivery through capacity building, behaviour change, awareness raising and skills development
6. Unlock public and private finance to deliver for nature at far greater scale and pace
7. Develop and adapt monitoring and evidence frameworks to measure progress towards the 30x30 target and guide prioritisation of action
8. Embed Nature Recovery in policy and strategy in public bodies in Wales

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have 6 hydrometric stations on the Wye and its tributaries where monitoring instruments have been measuring temperature, conductivity, dissolved oxygen, nitrates, total algae and pH in the river. NRW reported that over the summer water temperatures in the lower reaches of the Wye exceeded 25°C on several occasions, exacerbated by low river flows and this, along with fluctuating dissolved oxygen levels, in part due to algal blooms, is believed to be responsible for the loss of up to 40 adult Salmon.

NRW has also updated its "[Advice to planning authorities for planning applications affecting phosphorus sensitive river Special Areas of Conservation](#)". There is now a Monmouthshire Opportunity Catchment Officer in post with NRW working on the Trothy and Monnow sub-catchments of the Wye. Over the course of the 3-year plan, the project aims to work with farmers and land managers to deliver a range of interventions to reduce pollution, mitigate climate impacts, and bring biodiversity benefits.

Natural England (NE) Catchment Sensitive Farming advisors continue to deliver advice throughout the English part of the Wye Catchment, augmented by the Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF) Catchment Advisors operating across the whole catchment, as resources allow (see <https://www.wyeuskfoundation.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/farm-advisors>). WUF

are also leading on progressing Natural Capital opportunities in the catchment (see <https://www.wyeuskfoundation.org/Pages/Category/natural-capital>).

The Friends of the Upper Wye lead on much of the Citizen Science work collecting water quality data in the catchment, along with CRPE & CPRW, Wye Salmon Association and Friends of the Lower Wye. Friends of the Upper Wye became a registered charity in 2022 and merged with the Friends of the Lugg to cover all the upper reaches of the Wye and its tributaries, upstream of Mordiford. Their data is displayed on WyeViz and shared widely <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/mcarpenter/viz/FriendsOfTheUpperWyeCitizenScienceData/START>. The SaveTheWye campaign coordinated 'WyeJuly' as a series of events bringing together communities the length of the Wye to learn about the crisis from the groups that have taken on the monitoring of the river. The AONB Unit had a stand at the Monmouth WyeJuly event.

Wye Valley AONB Unit manages several projects and initiatives, including with EA, NRW, WUF, Herefordshire Meadows and Farm Herefordshire, that support and advise farmers 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. These include:

- The AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme is a delegated DEFRA grant (on the English side of the AONB) that supports farmers and land managers to deliver bigger and better outcomes for the environment under the 4 themes of Climate; Nature; People & Place. To date 12 projects have been supported that enhance farm and land management, predominantly in the AONB but schemes upstream are also considered where appropriate. The FiPL Officer is able to give advice and guidance to potential applicants as well as oversee the applications process, see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/farming-in-protected-landscapes/>
- WUF Catchment Advisors have continued to encourage Natural Flood Management (NFM) and Riparian Tree management schemes in tributaries and sub-catchments of the Wye in the AONB, working with farmers and helping with the uptake of advice and AONB grants. To date 12 projects have been supported primarily through EA funding.
- The Lower Wye Nature Networks project funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) in the Monmouthshire as part of the AONB have consultants advising farmers and preparing Farm Plans to help secure other grants to improve land management practices and connectivity across the project area. In addition Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust are enhancing management in 7 SSSIs.
- Also on the Welsh side of the AONB, the Landscape & Biodiversity Enhancement Grants, part of the Welsh Government (WG) delegated AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) enables modest grants for activities such as pond creation and hedgerow planting. Land management grants are also available through the WG Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) delegated Nature Recovery and Landscape Connectivity funding.
- AONB staff regularly contribute to the Wye Catchment Partnership, coordinated by WUF with NRW & EA.
- The AONB Manager sits on the Innovation & Projects sub-group of the Wye Nutrient Management Board (NMB) Technical Advisory Group (TAG).
- The AONB Development Officer sits on the Farm Herefordshire Steering Group and the Herefordshire Meadows Network.
- The AONB Unit hosted an event in Woolhope on 'Developing Natural Capital and Agri-environment schemes' with Herefordshire Meadows and Farm Herefordshire, funded

by the Woolhope Dome Environmental Trust, attended by over 70 farmers and land managers.

- Funding is being negotiated with EA to support a winter programme of promotion of water management events to raise awareness with farmers and land managers, with WUF, Herefordshire Meadows and Farm Herefordshire.
- AONB Species Action Plans are being prepared in response to the National AONB Colchester Declaration pledge to adopt species and reverse their decline. Water Crowfoot is one of the Species Action Plans that the AONB Unit will publish in 2023 as an indicator for water quality in the AONB.
- The AONB Partnership winter seminar, in late February or early March, will focus on land management issues in and around the AONB and activities and plans to improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients and help restore the River Wye.

A wide range of individuals, groups and organisations continue to lobby for and highlight the condition of the River Wye. Such action has helped maintain a high level of political and media coverage locally, regionally and nationally; most recently on BBC Wales Investigates “What’s Killing Our Rivers?” (see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001cmj3/bbc-wales-investigates-whats-killing-our-rivers>)

The Wye Valley AONB Partnership will do everything within its powers, purposes and resources to work with all individuals, groups and organisations to convene, enable and deliver on the restoration, conservation and enhancement of the River Wye and its tributaries. , which are one of the central Special Qualities of the Wye Valley AONB.

Background

EA’s River Wye Water Quality webpage

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/west-midlands/river-wye-water-quality/>

provides a wealth of detailed information and further links which explains the EA’s analysis, activities and plans to improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients, and help improve environments in the Wye and Lugg catchments.

The Wye Nutrient Management Board (NMB) is hosted by Herefordshire Council and is the responsible body for ensuring the delivery of the Conservation Objectives for the River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC). It provides oversight and direction to all involved in delivering the Nutrient Management Plan. Further details on the NMB are available here:

<https://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=1161>

AONB SPECIES ACTION PLAN

Purpose

To present members with the first of the 5 AONB Species Action Plans, for the Nobel Chafer Beetle, under the Colchester Declaration.

Recommendations

That the JAC:

- A) endorses the Nobel Chafer Beetle Species Action Plan and
- B) welcomes the progress on the commitments in the Colchester Declaration and the other forthcoming Species Action Plans.

Key Issues

- The Colchester Declaration – a ‘declaration for nature’ was produced by the National Association for AONBS (NAAONB) and supported by all the AONB partnerships in 2019.
- Five species, or assemblage of species, have been chosen as representative of the Wye Valley AONB Special Qualities.
- The first Species Action Plan, for the Nobel Chafer Beetle, relating to orchard habitats & Veteran Trees has been published, and is appended below.
- The AONB Unit is working on the production of the remaining Species Action Plans and an accompanying Wye Valley AONB Nature Recovery Plan.

Reasons

In July 2019 the Colchester Declaration was produced by the NAAONB and supported by AONB partnerships. The Declaration demonstrated the readiness of AONB partnerships to act to redress declines in species and habitats within the context of a wider response to climate change. The ambition was pledged for every AONB to prepare a Nature Recovery Plan and deliver Species Action Plans to reverse the decline of threatened species identified on the IUCN Red List, see: <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/projects/colchester-declaration>

The AONB Unit worked with local wildlife and conservation experts to choose 5 species, or assemblage of species, that are representative of the AONB Special Qualities [SQ], as identified in the AONB Management Plan, and will benefit from positive landscape scale management. The species are; Nobel Chafer beetle in relation to orchard habitats & Veteran Trees [SQ27, SQ18]; Hedgehog as a locally iconic species [SQ1, SQ4, SQ5, SQ26]; Water

Crowfoot as an indicator for river water quality [SQ3, SQ10]; Woodland butterfly assemblage with special interest in the Wood White and Pearl Bordered Fritillary in relation to woodlands [SQ2], and Bumblebee assemblage with particular focus on Shrill Carder, Brown Banded Carder, Redshank Carder and long horned bees in relation to grassland sites [SQ4].

Implications

Nobel Chafer Beetle - Orchard habitats & Veteran Trees

The first of the 5 Wye Valley AONB Species Action Plan, has been produced and is appended below.

Progress to date on delivering the Nobel Chafer Beetle Species Action Plan (SAP), led by Ellie Baggett, AONB Nature Recovery Officer, includes the following:-

- A partnership was developed with Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL) during initial discussions about the species.
- PTES shared their NC records with the AONB Unit, and suggested installing beetle boxes, which led to the commission of a prototype box for the AONB Unit to evaluate.
- RHUL offered to fund pheromone lure trapping surveys in the AONB as part of their National study, which Ellie carried out between June-July 2022:
 - 27 orchard sites across the 3 AONB counties (Monmouthshire, Gloucestershire & Herefordshire) were surveyed.
 - This resulted in two sightings of adult beetles, and one sighting of larvae, all in Herefordshire orchards.
- With a population baseline now established, the AONB Unit successfully applied for a FiPL grant to fund a noble chafer project in Herefordshire, which will deliver the following:
 - Installation of 10 beetle boxes (soon to be commissioned, following feedback from prototype box)
 - Planting of 20 plum trees (beetles orchard species preference)
 - Delivery of 2 orchard management training courses (in partnership with local charity Colwall Orchard Group & local business The Orchard Tamers, to take place in winter 2022 and spring 2023)
 - Production of 100 leaflets about traditional orchard management and noble chafers
 - Pheromone supply and beetle traps for 2 more years' worth of surveying as part of the National study, in partnership with RHUL
- Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) funding for Nature Recovery in Wales has been secured, which will allow delivery of similar work in Monmouthshire, focusing on maintaining the integrity and longevity of orchard habitats, improving their connectivity, and continuation of surveying for noble chafers.
- The AONB Species Action Plan for the noble chafer has now been written and sent out to project partners for feedback/to discuss their involvement in the project going forward (MCC, PTES, RHUL, Wildlife Trusts etc.)
- A presentation about the noble chafer SAP was given during the AONB Partnership Study Tour in September.

Work is also progressing on the other Species Actions Plans.

Hedgehog - Urban/engagement species

- A partnership was developed with Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and local hedgehog champion and 'Be Hedgehog Aware' campaigner Dylan Allman.
- PTES agreed to share their records of hedgehogs in the AONB, from The Big Hedgehog Map.
- An AONB social media campaign was launched, appealing for public sightings of hedgehogs within the AONB, which Ellie mapped to establish where baseline populations were.
- Ellie and Nick Critchley, AONB Development Officer, participated in the Nature and Mental Wellbeing Week at Ashfield Park Primary School in Ross-on-Wye, delivering 5 interactive sessions about priority species, including 2 sessions on hedgehogs, their habitats and hazards they face.
- Dylan Allman is doing takeovers on the AONB social media channels every month, putting out important seasonal messages about how to support hedgehog populations throughout the year.
- Ellie set up a collaboration between Dylan and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust. HWT are now supporting Dylan's campaign by putting his 'Be Hedgehog Aware' stickers on their machinery, and Dylan is doing a talk for HWT members at Peterchurch Village Hall on November 10th on what we can all do to help reduce hedgehog decline.
- The AONB Species Action Plan for hedgehogs is almost completed and will subsequently be sent out to project partners.
- Plans for spring 2023 (after the hibernation period):
 - o Further engagement with schools and local communities (talks, sessions with children, camera trap loans)
 - o Mammal footprint surveys as citizen science/engagement tool
 - o Continuation of using AONB projects to promote conservation action for hedgehogs (e.g. Nature Networks project, esp. hedgerow projects or field margin buffers, FiPL, SDF projects)
 - o Promote ongoing work of partner organisations and PTES conservation action.

Bumblebee Assemblage - Grassland species

- A partnership has been developed with Bumblebee Conservation Trust.
- Ellie attended two online courses (Bumblebee ID & How to set up a Bee Walk) and one field ID course in Brecon as part of BCT's Skills for Bees project.
- Ellie and Nick participated in the Nature and Mental Wellbeing Week at Ashfield Park Primary School in Ross on Wye, delivering 5 interactive sessions about priority species, including 3 sessions on bumblebees, their lifecycle, their role in the ecosystem and the hazards they face.
- Lack of monitoring appears to be a key issue, so a major focus of spring/summer 2023 work will be promoting and encouraging the use of citizen science survey tools, such as POMS, Bee Walk, LERC Wales and iRecord.
- A potential collaboration event with the Monmouthshire 'Nature Isn't Neat' project is in discussion, as well as collaborations with Monmouthshire Meadows Group, Monmouthshire Bee Festival, Bees for Development, Herefordshire Meadows Group, Townsend Farm, Natur am Byth and BugLife.
- The AONB Species Action Plan for bumblebees has been started, but needs further development and action in 2023.

Water Crowfoot – River species

- This Species Action Plan has not yet been started and will be a key focus of Nature Recovery work in 2023. Collaboration with NRW's proposed Water crowfoot drone survey is planned.

Woodland butterfly assemblage – Woodland species

- This Species Action Plan has not yet been started, and will be a key focus of Nature Recovery work in 2023.

Background

In 2019 the annual National AONB 'Landscapes for Life' Conference took place at the University of Essex, Colchester. The conference concluded with The Colchester Declaration – a Declaration for Nature. This was developed through a series of pre-conference discussion fora and workshop sessions during the conference. The Declaration is the pledge for nature of the AONB network: to protect what remains and restore what has been lost.

Wye Valley
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Noble Chafer

Gnorimus nobilis

Species Action Plan 2022 – 2027



To Accompany the
Wye Valley AONB Nature Recovery Plan

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1. Background

Set against a backdrop of unprecedented concern for the future of the natural world, the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) believe that now is the time to significantly increase the scale and pace of nature conservation activity in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). In 2019, the Wye Valley AONB Partnership, along with AONBs across the country, signed up to the Colchester Declaration. This is an ambitious plan to recover nature in and beyond protected landscapes, build climate resilience and enhance engagement with people.

As part of this effort, each AONB has committed to adopting an IUCN threatened, or locally threatened, species and prepare and deliver a Species Action Plan, in the hope that by 2030 at least 30 species relevant to AONBs can be removed from the threatened list (NAAONB, 2019). The Wye Valley AONB Partnership has committed to adopting 5 locally significant species, each of which represent a Special Quality identified in the statutory Wye Valley AONB Management Plan (2021-26), and/or indicates the health of a well-connected landscape. The Noble Chafer beetle has been chosen as the representative species for traditional orchards, which are a priority habitat in the Wye Valley AONB.

2. Introduction

The Noble Chafer (*Gnorimus nobilis*) is a rare and beautiful beetle that can be found in traditional orchards. The adult is approximately 20mm long and has a metallic-green iridescent body, speckled with white. It can be confused with the Rose Chafer (*Cetonia aurata*), but has wrinkled wing cases; the Rose Chafer has smooth wing cases. The other most obvious difference between the two is the small triangular area (the scutellum) between the wing cases; this forms an equilateral triangle on the Noble Chafer but is elongated on the Rose Chafer (fig. 1). Noble Chafers are saproxylic as larvae, which means they are dependent upon dead or decaying wood for development. The larvae live and feed in old, decaying fruit trees, where they take up to 3 years to develop into adult beetles (Ellegaard & Bach, 2020).



Figure 1: Rose Chafer (left) and Noble Chafer (top right) (Source – PTES, Credit Paul Brock)



Figure 2: Noble Chafer in larvae form (Source – PTES, Credit Ross Bower)

The key habitat for Noble Chafers is inside hollow open-grown trees, and only in landscapes where such trees occur at relatively high densities, and have done for many centuries. This immediately confines the beetle in modern England to the main traditional orchard areas and the few remaining old wood-pasture systems, as nowhere else have trees been left to grow old in large numbers

(Alexander, 2008). A traditional orchard is defined as having at least five full sized fruit trees, planted on permanent grasslands, which are widely spaced and allowed to reach a veteran state (Berkshire Biodiversity Action Plan, 2010). Noble Chafers exhibit a preference for orchards that contain mature fruit trees between 50 and 80 years old, especially cherry, plum and apple. These sites are vulnerable to removal or clearance, particularly if the trees are reaching the end of their productive life. As orchards were modernised, the old traditionally managed ones became progressively less economic and were 'grubbed out' and not replaced. Since the 1950's, 90% of traditional orchards in England and Wales have been lost (PTES, 2022). The overall area of all orchards in England has declined by 63%, and of the remainder, only a third are traditional. This means that only 13.5% of the former English habitat range exists (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, 2015). In Wales, the agricultural census estimates that there was a 94% reduction in area of orchards between 1958 and 1992 (Oram, Alexander & Sadler, 2013).

The Noble Chafer is a classic old-growth species; the population has always existed as localised meta-populations, and has a long life history and low reproductive rate (Whitehead, 2003). Fragmentation of these old-tree landscapes is a key issue, producing smaller and less viable populations which are increasingly isolated from each other. The Noble Chafer is just one species which has been affected by this dramatic change to our landscape, and is now facing a severe risk of extinction in England (Alexander & Bower, 2011).

3. Current Status

3.1 Ecology

The adult life stage is relatively short-lived, existing primarily to mate and produce the next generation. Adult females lay up to 35 eggs beneath the bark or in the centre of the trunk of old, decaying fruit trees. The larvae take around 2 weeks to hatch. They are white, c-shaped, and grow to about 30mm long (fig. 2). In southern Europe, larvae are fully grown after one year, whereas in English orchards they take two years to develop, overwintering twice in the wood mould. They remain feeding within the tree until they pupate into adult beetles (Alexander & Bower, 2011).

Adult Noble Chafers emerge from the wood mold in early summer and live for 4-6 weeks from late June to early August. It is thought that adults have no real need to leave their host tree unless the tree is no longer suitable for larval development and/or the adult remains unmated. Males and females will both be emerging from the wood mould, so if they meet and mate, then flight into the potentially hazardous outside world may be unnecessary (Alexander & Bower, 2011).

When adults do emerge, their activity is stimulated by relatively warm conditions, generally periods of hot sunshine and when there is minimal wind. They will bask for a short while to warm up their flight muscles, then fly to feed on nearby flowers (Alexander & Bower, 2011). As a food source for the adult beetles, blooming flower heads of elders and



Figure 3: Adult Noble Chafer feeding on umbellifers (Source – PTES, Credit Ross Bower)

umbellifers, such as hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) and meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), no more than 700m from the breeding trees are required (Whitehead, 2002). They will often also visit the canopy of nearby broadleaved woodland, which can be some distance from their larval habitat, although the purpose of such visits remains unclear (PTES, 2022). Where the adults are at night is not known and further field observations would be required to answer this (Ellegaard & Bach, 2020).

3.2 Habitat requirements

The Noble Chafer is found in standing trees that are still alive but have cavities where the larvae can develop in the wood mould. Hollowing of tree trunks is a completely natural process: as the heartwood builds up with age, the central older rings begin to die whilst the outer rings of the tree are still alive. Specialist fungi colonise this central dead woody tissue and begin to break it down into simpler substances which can then be digested by other organisms. Eventually the trunk becomes hollowed and debris accumulates in the cavity bases, which is subsequently colonised by a range of specialist organisms, including the Noble Chafer. Inside the cavities, the chafer larvae ingest the debris and defecate pellets (frass), which accumulates in large volumes (fig. 4). Fortunately, in Britain, the Noble Chafer is the only chafer that is known to develop in the wood mould of old fruit trees (Alexander & Bower, 2011).



The tree species occupied by the Noble Chafer appears not to be important, except that it must be broadleaf and live long enough to become hollowed by heartwood-decay fungi; the determining factor making the trees suitable for the species may be the level/stage of wood decay. Orchard trees are especially good for the Noble Chafer in this respect, as pruning wounds also stimulate cavity formation (Alexander, 2008; Ellegaard & Bach, 2020).

Figure 4: Noble Chafer larval frass pellets in a tree cavity. (Source – Buglife, Credit Matt Smith)

In continental Europe, the larvae have been found in willow (*Salix spp.*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and oak (*Quercus spp.*) trees among others. In England, Noble Chafers seem more restricted to species of orchard fruit trees, with the highest numbers of records from plum, damson, and cherry orchards (*Prunus spp.*), with apple (*Malus spp.*) and pear (*Pyrus spp.*) also used. Plum and damson trees tend to begin their decay process earlier than other fruit species and also tend to be easier to search for evidence of the beetle as they develop open cavities much more readily. It is suspected that this strongly influences the predominance of records from *Prunus* species and may not be a reflection of true fruit-type preference on behalf of the beetle (Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership, 2018). A lack of research within the UK makes it unclear how important non-fruit species are to the larval stage of development.

In the Wye Valley AONB and Worcestershire, the known Noble Chafer breeding sites are all in old, traditional orchard trees, whereas in the New Forest they are thought to breed within old oak and beech trees (PTES, 2022). Noble Chafer records go back over 100 years in the New Forest, and yet whilst adult beetles have been recorded by searching suitable flowers in summer, or have been attracted to “bait” or pheromone lures, there are no records for any confirmed Noble Chafer breeding sites or evidence of their larval stage in these trees. There are almost no areas of traditional orchard in the New Forest, so the presumed breeding sites are the rot cavities in taller forest trees such as oak, beech or cherry, but difficulties surveying these larger trees for frass has hindered further research in this area (Smith, 2021).

3.3 Population and distribution

The Noble Chafer is endemic to Europe and is found in most regions except the far north. Its distribution is patchy and very localized in several countries e.g. in the UK, Sweden, and Denmark. In parallel with the loss of traditional orchards, the Noble Chafer has undergone a considerable decline in range within Britain. Distribution of the species before 1970 is evidenced in records from North Devon, South Hampshire, West Sussex, East Kent, West Kent, Surrey, South Essex, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, East Norfolk, West Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Cumbria (PTES, 2010) (fig. 5). It is unclear how many of these are reliable and how many represented genuine resident populations (Alexander & Bower, 2011), but the data do suggest a massive contraction of the population into isolated fragments, and it seems clear that this process is continuing today.



Figure 5: Map showing pre 1980 records of Noble Chafer in the UK (Source - PTES)



Figure 6: Map showing post 1980 records of Noble Chafer in the UK (Source – PTES)

The main national distribution today is in the old orchard country of the 'Three Counties' (Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire) (fig. 6). Outlying populations exist in south Oxfordshire, Kent and the New Forest where the beetle has been found outside of traditional orchards. It is probably more widespread in Worcestershire than anywhere else (Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership, 2018). There is currently no data available on either the total population or national/regional population sizes (Ellegaard & Bach, 2020).

Within the Wye Valley AONB, there are only current records of Noble Chafer in Herefordshire; they have not been recorded in Gloucestershire or Monmouthshire (PTES, 2021). Whilst there are known populations of Noble Chafer in other parts of Gloucestershire outside of the AONB, Monmouthshire has no current records. Noble Chafer surveys were carried out 10 years ago in Monmouthshire as part of Gwent Wildlife Trust's 'Traditional Orchards Project', but no evidence was found (Gwent Wildlife Trust, 2021). Despite this, it is still likely that Noble Chafer beetles are present in Monmouthshire due to the close geographical proximity to other population strongholds.

3.4 Legislation

The Noble Chafer is classed as Nationally Scarce in Great Britain and has an IUCN status of Vulnerable. It was selected as a Priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and subsequently listed in Section 41 of the National Environmental and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (PTES, 2022).

3.5 Summary of important sites

Despite its reduced range, and vulnerable population, the Noble Chafer in England is currently a major concentration of the species within its wider European range. A workshop to assess the European conservation status of saproxylic beetles (Nieto & Alexander 2010), revealed that the Noble Chafer is rare and threatened across most of its range, and only in France does there appear to be a sufficiently strong population for the species not to be considered 'Vulnerable'. The macro-population of the Severn Basin (Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire) is potentially a key European centre and requires special conservation attention – before the species reaches the IUCN-defined level of 'Threatened' (Alexander & Bower, 2011).

The vast majority of Noble Chafer sightings in England are from traditional orchards. Orchards are a Special Quality of the Wye Valley AONB, covering 222.6ha of land, equivalent to 0.68% of the landscape. The number of orchards reduced dramatically throughout the 20th century, but despite this the Wye Valley AONB still has 1% of England's orchards (158.9ha), and just over 6% of Welsh traditional orchards (63.7ha) (Wye Valley AONB, 2021). Orchards are most prevalent in the AONB in Herefordshire and Monmouthshire; the Gloucestershire part of the AONB has significantly less orchard cover.

Data provided by the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) shows that there are only 3 current records of Noble Chafer in the AONB, potentially two meta-populations, all found in traditional orchards in South East Herefordshire (fig. 7). These can therefore be considered as the most important locations for Noble Chafer in the Protected Landscape. Figure 8 shows orchards within the Wye Valley AONB, buffered to 700m. As identified by Whitehead (2003), the largest distance that Noble Chafers have been recorded to fly is 700m (Alexander & Bower, 2011). Hence, a buffer zone of 700m has been added around each of these orchard areas, to highlight the potential within the AONB

to expand and reconnect priority orchard habitats, thereby creating more opportunities for the Noble Chafer to expand its population size and range. The Wye Valley AONB Nature Recovery plan considers orchard habitat enhancement and expansion in more detail.

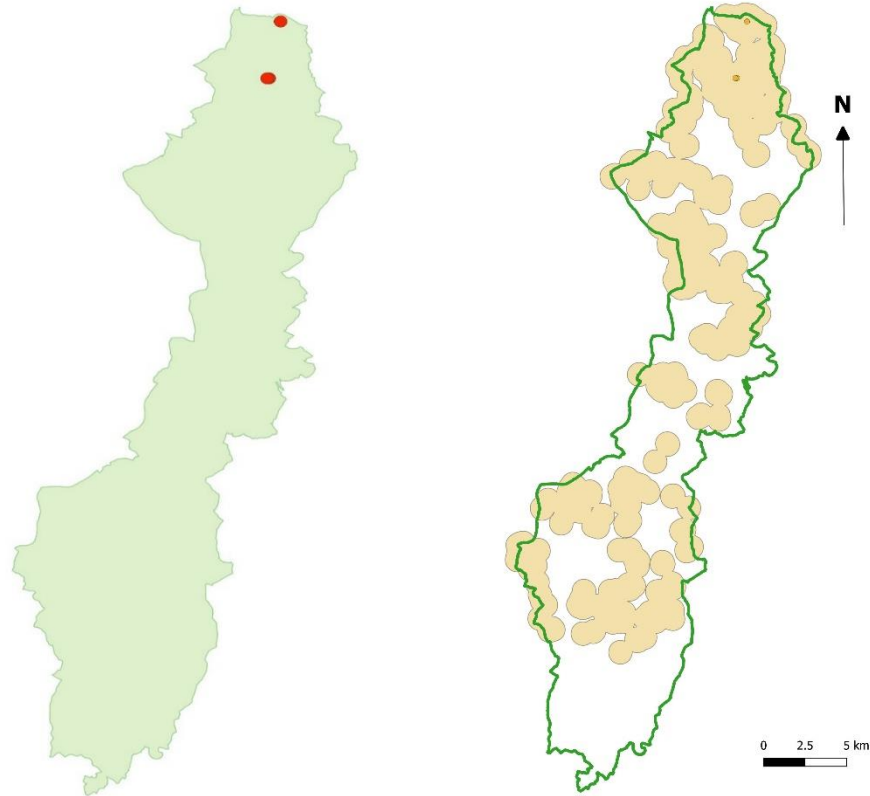


Figure 7: Map of Noble Chafer records in the Wye Valley AONB (Source – data supplied by PTES, map created by Wye Valley AONB)

Figure 8: Map of orchards in the Wye Valley AONB with buffer zones to represent 700m, the largest recorded distance of Noble Chafer flight (Source - Wye Valley AONB)

4. Current factors affecting the species

4.1 Threats

Development

- The economic decline of traditional orchards means there is little commercial incentive to maintain ageing trees or replace dead ones. Many such orchards are removed to make way for housing developments, or left to fall derelict with no replacement of habitat (PTES, 2022).
- Many surviving small orchards are situated within or on the edge of settlements, making them particularly vulnerable to proposals for residential development on the basis that they fall within the definition of ‘brownfield land’ (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, 2015).

Isolation of sites

- The loss of orchards over the last 40 years means that sites have become increasingly isolated from one another. This leads to habitat fragmentation and pressure on isolated patches of orchard (Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership, 2018).

In insensitive management of orchards

- Dying trees are often removed promptly, depriving Noble Chafers and other saproxylic organisms that rely on dead wood. Reasons such as aesthetic tidiness or public safety lead to the felling of ancient trees, removal of dead wood from living trees and the destruction or removal of standing and fallen dead wood, all of which provide essential habitat for orchard species (Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership, 2018).
- Many sites are now used as horse paddocks. Horses can cause considerable damage when allowed to graze in old orchards; the palatable bark can be stripped in a matter of weeks causing death to the tree (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, 2015).
- Many orchards are commonly located adjacent to farms; this means that they are often used as shelter for overwintered livestock that receive supplementary feed. This can lead to nutrient enrichment of the grassland beneath the fruit trees, damaging botanical diversity which leads to a loss of vital nectar and pollen sources for insects (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, 2015).
- The use of pesticides in orchards may poison Noble Chafers, as well as compromising tree health through impacts on fungal mycorrhizae which have many benefits to trees (PTES, 2022).

Neglect or loss of orchards through natural processes

- Fruit trees generally have a short life in comparison with other tree species. Plums rarely live beyond 50 years, apples 80-100 years and pears (especially perry pears) 100-150 years. Therefore, unless replacements are established to replace lost trees, a traditional orchard is unlikely to survive beyond 100-150 years (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, 2015).

Orchard destruction for 'agricultural improvement'

- Traditional orchards were often seen as being unproductive and were ripped out for more intensive agricultural use. In the past this was the main source of loss but other threats are more significant now, particularly neglect (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, 2015).

Lack of awareness

- There is a lack of awareness of the cultural value of traditional orchards and their importance as a vital wildlife habitat (Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership, 2018).
- Orchards are no longer recognised as a UK BAP habitat, although traditional orchards are (JNCC, 2007).

4.2 European barriers to conservation

Lack of data on Noble Chafer populations

- The current total population and national/regional population sizes are not known. More research on the status of European saproxylic beetles in general would be hugely beneficial; during assessments for the European Red List of Saproxylic Beetles, the risk of extinction could not be evaluated for almost a quarter of the assessed species due to a lack of data (Ellegaard & Bach, 2020).

Lack of knowledge about Noble Chafer ecology

- More research into the habitat preferences of the Noble Chafer is needed, in particular their preference for tree species and how important non-fruit species are to the larval stage of development. Some elements of Noble Chafer behaviour are still not understood (Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership, 2018).

4.3 Local barriers to conservation

Lack of knowledge about Noble Chafers in the Wye Valley AONB

- Despite areas of the Wye Valley AONB falling within the main national stronghold for Noble Chafers, very little is currently known about the population here. Survey work is needed to reinforce our understanding of the range, population and distribution of Noble Chafers within the Wye Valley AONB, covering all three county areas.

Lack of knowledge about the condition of orchards in the Wye Valley AONB

- In order to develop a Habitat Action Plan (HAP) for traditional orchards and the species they support, baseline data is needed to enable future changes to be measured and identify priorities for future conservation action.
- Orchards are a Special Quality of the Wye Valley AONB and are found across the Protected Landscape, but records of orchards on pre-existing maps often do not tell us their age, type, or condition, and many are not marked at all or have been lost. Survey work is needed to determine which orchards still exist and to gather additional information that enables us to assess their condition and habitat value, to help focus future conservation action for the Noble Chafer.

Lack of awareness of the Noble Chafer

- Very few orchard owners are aware of the Noble Chafer and its vulnerable status. The importance of orchards in the Wye Valley AONB for Noble Chafers needs to be highlighted to raise awareness of this species.

Lack of good quality agri-environment schemes

- Where orchards are still in use – for pasture, if not for fruit production – they can be supported through agri-environment schemes. Higher Level Stewardship is an important mechanism but operates on a farm-by-farm basis and may not be effective enough at landscape scale (Alexander & Bower, 2011). New schemes such as FIPL (Farming in Protected Landscapes) and ELMs (Environmental Landscape Management schemes) need to support improved management of traditional orchards.

5. Current Initiatives

5.1 Local protection

In Worcestershire, the Noble Chafer is a local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species. Within the Wye Valley AONB, Gloucestershire has a Species Action Plan for 'Beetles (various)' and a Habitat Action Plan (HAP) for 'Old Orchards', both of which fall within their BAP for Gloucestershire. Herefordshire has a Traditional Orchard HAP but no species action plans for beetles or the Noble Chafer. Monmouthshire County Council are currently developing a Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) which will include a HAP for Traditional Orchards but no specific plans for the Noble Chafer.

Most orchards in which Noble Chafers have been found so far are privately owned and have no specific protection. Within the English parts of the Wye Valley AONB, 0.10ha of traditional orchards are within designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and 26.22ha are on land within a Higher Level Stewardship agreement but outside SSSI. Of the SSSI traditional orchards, 0.01ha are considered to be in favourable condition and 0.09ha in unfavourable recovering condition. Habitat outside SSSI is not monitored for condition status, which means that the status of 127.74ha of traditional orchard within the English part of the AONB is currently unknown. The Wye Valley AONB Unit are not supplied with comparable orchard data for the Welsh part of the AONB.

Pool Ellocks Local Wildlife Site and orchard in Goodrich, Herefordshire, is one of the only community orchards in the AONB, and is managed by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust. A number of Herefordshire Wildlife Trusts nature reserves include orchards and contain very old fruit trees and often uncommon varieties.

5.2 Site management and programmes of action

A number of conservation or community groups own and/or manage orchards, or have a broader interest in the management, enhancement and preservation of orchards for their biodiversity and landscape value, including:

- Herefordshire Wildlife Trust
- Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust
- Gloucestershire Orchard Trust
- Gwent Wildlife Trust
- Peoples Trust for Endangered Species

Historically Monmouthshire was an important apple and pear producing County, and old orchard trees in particular support a wide variety of wildlife. Some local groups such as Transition Towns have enthusiastically planted community orchards in their localities, and Gwent Wildlife Trust ran a project from 2010 to 2012 surveying 740 sites, and working with volunteers to encourage management.

The Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project (TCTOP), started in 2014 and managed by the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership, has given advice to orchard owners and supported the production of site management plans for AONB orchards in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, as well as neighbouring Worcestershire.

The Peoples Trust for Endangered Species have, with Natural England funding, mapped all of the traditional orchards in England and Wales to create the first ever inventory of traditional orchards. Their Orchard Network is an umbrella group for traditional orchard organisations, local orchard groups, cider producers and conservationists. It is a partnership of organisations throughout the British Isles, working together to actively promote the conservation of orchard fruit and nut trees and their varieties, and in their many forms; as individual trees, traditional, garden, and other orchards, and conserve the orchard habitat's biodiversity. PTES also run a traditional orchard grant scheme as part of this, which focuses on replacement tree planting for orchards which are in need of new trees, with the aim of improving and protecting biodiverse traditional orchard habitats (PTES, 2022).

Agri-environment funding scheme options have included those for the creation, restoration and management of traditional orchard. Traditional orchard management and restoration advice is available from Natural England.

5.3 Survey, research and monitoring

Orchard surveys, research and monitoring

- As part of their aforementioned Traditional Orchard Inventory, PTES also run a volunteer programme of Traditional Orchard Surveying, to help assess the condition of the orchards collated within the inventory. PTES and its volunteers have been mapping and surveying traditional orchards since 2007, using the data to update the inventory and target conservation action for orchards and the wildlife they support (PTES, 2022). Many of these orchards are within the Wye Valley AONB, and need surveying.
- As part of their Gwent Orchards Project, with partial funding from the Wye Valley AONB Sustainable Development Fund, Gwent Wildlife Trust and its volunteers surveyed 740 orchard sites in the Gwent area from 2010-2012. The project was one of the first orchard mapping projects in Wales, and focused on updating records through orchard surveys, and providing advice and support to orchard owners to promote orchard preservation for their historic and wildlife value (Orchard Network, 2022). A number of orchard sites within the Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB were included within this project, but having been surveyed 10 years ago, it's likely the condition of these orchards may have changed, so updated surveys may be required.

Noble chafer surveys, research and monitoring

- As part of their Gwent Orchards Project from 2010-2012, Gwent Wildlife Trust surveyed many orchards for Noble chafer within Monmouthshire looking for evidence of frass inside old trees, but none was found.
 - PTES are the UK leaders in running surveys for Noble chafers, as well as awarding research grants to conservation organisations, scientific researchers and wildlife experts in this field. Within their current schemes, the Traditional Orchard Survey involves looking for evidence of Noble chafers by searching for frass/larval evidence inside tree cavities or looking for adults feeding on
- PTES also collect public reports of Noble chafers, and analyse frass samples sent in from orchard owners.

6. Conservation Visions

All potential habitat to be monitored and maintained to enhance the opportunity for Noble chafers in the Wye Valley AONB

- Working with partners to ensure that all potential Noble chafer sites are under management appropriate to maintaining both the integrity and longevity of the habitat and the potential Noble chafer populations within them.

More potential habitat to be created and joined up to enhance the opportunity for Noble chafers in the AONB

- Working with partners and stakeholders to expand, join up, and create new orchard habitats in the AONB, improving corridors for wildlife and enhancing opportunities for Noble chafer populations.

7. Conservation Actions

ACTION	HOW
Raise the profile of the Noble chafer, its ecology, and how to manage orchards for Noble chafer, amongst orchard owners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote guidance and best practice on website - Publish Species Action Plan - Social media campaigns and takeovers - Nature recovery film - Visit orchard landowners
Encourage suitable sites to be managed to create, maintain or otherwise provide good habitat for Noble chafer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage with partner organisations and community orchards to promote orchard management for Noble chafer - Promote the management and creation of suitable habitat on privately owned land, including through suitable funding sources
Promote survey work to better understand the current condition of traditional orchards in the Wye Valley AONB.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) traditional orchard survey
Promote survey work to reinforce our understanding of the Noble chafer's population and distribution within the Wye Valley AONB.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote PTES traditional orchard survey and Noble chafer survey - Support AONB volunteers in surveying - Encourage orchard owners to survey for Noble chafer - Highlight importance of wildlife recording for vulnerable species – PTES, iRecord, LERCs
Expand survey effort to include, where practicable, the investigation of non-fruit tree species for evidence of the Noble chafer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote ancient/veteran tree projects/surveys e.g. Ancient Tree Inventory - Support AONB volunteers in surveying veteran trees for Noble chafer
Support and encourage the expansion of current orchard habitats, planting new trees to replace old ones and leaving standing deadwood for Noble chafer habitat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agri-environment schemes - Sustainable Development Fund landscape enhancement grants - Promote best practice for tree planting - Signpost tree planting grants/schemes - Highlight importance through website, films, social media
Support and encourage the creation of new orchards (or the creation/provision of suitable deadwood habitat) in locations that will form habitat stepping stones between known or likely Noble chafer orchards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agri-environment schemes - Sustainable Development Fund landscape enhancement grants - Landowner advice visits - Promote best practice for tree planting - Signpost tree planting grants/schemes - Highlight importance through website, films, social media

Promote the planting of fruit trees generally, including within hedgerows, in particular where trees can function as habitat stepping stones between known or likely Noble chafer orchards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agri-environment schemes - Sustainable Development Fund landscape enhancement grants - Landowner visits - Promote best practice for tree planting - Signpost tree planting grants/schemes - Highlight importance through website, films, social media
Produce habitat boxes to trial the effectiveness of using artificial deadwood habitat as replacement orchard habitat/stepping stones between known or likely Noble chafer orchards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure funding for and contract the production of Noble chafer habitat boxes - Use PTES/AONB data to target suitable sites - Visit orchard landowners and establish suitable sites to trial boxes
Monitor all Noble chafer habitat boxes after three years to assess effectiveness of trial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain monitoring process to orchard landowners - Encourage landowners to monitor boxes, or AONB volunteers to survey for them
Develop a programme of surveying to better establish populations and monitor population changes following action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Liaise with PTES to establish monitoring methods, replicable in the Wye Valley AONB - Undertake monitoring across suitable sites, following established methodologies - Engage landowners and volunteers in surveying and monitoring

8. Role of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership

- Support, advise, facilitate, and co-ordinate conservation action for Noble chafers, both leading on and through partnership within the AONB.
- Engage with landowners and managers, encouraging best practice in managing sites to enhance opportunities for Noble chafer populations.
- Promote Noble chafer conservation within other wildlife conservation organisations and encourage the provision of advice and practical support for orchard management for Noble chafers.
- Where suitable, encourage Local Authorities to take into consideration records of Noble chafer presence in the planning process and set conditions in relevant planning applications to ensure that traditional orchards for Noble chafer are maintained and enhanced.
- Through the planning process, where suitable, encourage developers to include provision for Noble chafer in landscaping e.g. creating wildlife corridors to connect traditional orchard habitats.
- Work with and enthuse volunteers to provide records of sightings and signs of Noble chafer, information about the condition of sites that support Noble chafer e.g. PTES Traditional Orchard Survey, and help with measures to support Noble chafer, e.g. orchard habitat management.

9. Marking progress

We will mark progress through:

- **Noble chafer records:** When there are more records of Noble chafer in the AONB, indicating a population increase or an improvement in survey efforts.
- **Noble chafer sites:** When there are more sites in the AONB where Noble chafer are being recorded, indicating a population increase, an expansion in range or an improvement in survey efforts.
- **Noble chafer measures:** When new measures are successfully implemented to support Noble chafers e.g. trees planted, habitat boxes installed, monitoring schemes set up.
- **Traditional orchard information:** When all of the AONB traditional orchards have been surveyed for their condition.
- **Traditional orchard improvements:** When all of the AONB traditional orchards have improved in condition since the initial survey, as identified by continued condition monitoring.
- **Noble chafer understanding and habitat creation:** When information about Noble chafer is widely available to orchard owners and managers, and the range of Noble chafer habitat in the AONB is being enhanced and encouraged through a wide take up of habitat enhancement including habitat boxes.

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TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
7th November 2022

REVIEW OF DESIGNATED LANDSCAPES IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Purpose

To advise members of progress with the respective Reviews of Designated Landscapes England and Wales.

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- The DEFRA announcement following the public consultation on the Government Response to the Landscapes Review has been delayed due to the recent turmoil in Westminster.
- Dr Thérèse Coffey MP has now been appointed as the new DEFRA Secretary of State Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Meanwhile Natural England, the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB), National Parks England and AONB lead officers are collaborating with DEFRA on various aspects of the anticipated proposals, including the potential rebranding of AONBs to 'National Landscapes'.
- Natural England have published the All England Strategic Landscape Mapping Assessment Tool and are continuing the evaluation of the Yorkshire Wolds for potential AONB designation.
- Welsh Government have published the recommendations from the Biodiversity Deep Dive which includes unlocking the potential of the Designated Landscapes.
- Responsibility for AONBs in Welsh Government has moved back to the Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd.
- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) continues to liaise and co-ordinate collaboration with both governments and key stakeholders over progressing the agenda for AONBs.

Reasons

The Glover 'Landscapes Review' in England was broadly welcomed when published three years ago. It included Proposal 24 which stated that "AONBs should be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, and renamed as National Landscapes." In January 2022 the Government consulted on proposals in response to the Landscapes Review. DEFRA received over 15,000 responses. Since then the Government has been distracted with other priorities, but it is believed a formal response is still forthcoming.

Welsh Government have been working with AONB and National Park lead officers, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the NAAONB through Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales and the Biodiversity Deep Dive Designated Landscapes Expert Subgroup, which the AONB Manager contributed to.

Implications

The NAAONB and AONB lead officers have been responding to a range of requests from DEFRA officials in support of implementing the response to the Glover Review and the collation of information following DEFRA's consultation. DEFRA have indicated that a significant opportunity arising from the Landscapes Review is the renewal of AONBs as a landscape designation fit for the 21st century. DEFRA have initiated funding for a rebrand to of AONBs to National Landscapes, as recommended in the Review, to drive change and increase awareness. In response the NAAONB has published a Prospectus on AONBs (see <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/designation/>) and information and statistics about AONB resourcing and achievements. A formal announcement on the Review is awaited from DEFRA, now a new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been appointed: Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey MP.

Meanwhile Natural England has published the 'All England Strategic Landscape Mapping Assessment Tool', produced with Land Use Consultants (LUC) and Gillespies. The review and process is available here <https://all-england-strategic-landscapes-mapping-hub-luc.hub.arcgis.com/> and the Mapping tool is available here <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/58d17072b1454b73b94db50ea53d8f1a/page/Home/>. Initial viewing suggests the results appear to correspond quite closely to the original Dower & Hobhouse maps of the 1940s.

Natural England are continuing with investigations to designate the Yorkshire Wolds as a new AONB, see: <https://www.yorkshire-wolds-designation-project.org/home>. A recommended Candidate Area and supporting justification is being produced, followed by an 'Assessment of desirability to designate' in Autumn 2022 and an 'Assessment to define a proposed boundary' due during the Winter. The designation process could take a further 2 or more years before the area might formally become a new AONB.

In October Welsh Government published the Recommendations of the Biodiversity Deep Dive, conducted over the summer. Julie James, Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change announced the recommendations designed to develop a set of collective actions to support nature's recovery, see <https://gov.wales/written-statement-biodiversity-deep-dive>. Recommendation 3 is "Unlock the potential of designated landscapes (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) to deliver more for nature and 30 by 30" (see <https://gov.wales/biodiversity-deep-dive-recommendations-html#section-105982>) stating:

"Our Designated Landscapes, both National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have a vital role to play in supporting nature's recovery. In the immediate term we will:

- *Support the National Parks and AONBS to develop a prioritised action plans for nature restoration embedding these in strategic planning.*

In the longer term we will:

- *Realign Designated Landscapes priorities to enhance and accelerate nature recovery delivery, supported by updated policy, resources and guidance to build capacity and expertise and to target activity.*
- *Develop the evidence and mapping tools to enable designated landscapes to baseline, target and monitor areas of high nature value that could be secured as their contribution to 30 by 30*
- *Ensure Designated Landscapes bodies are funded adequately, sustainably and flexibly to deliver nature recovery at a transformational landscape scale.*
- *Ensure that the potential designation of a new National Park in northeast Wales affords opportunities for climate change mitigation and nature recovery as key delivery priorities for the new Park.*
- *Consider the need for legislation in the next Senedd to reform the statutory purposes, duties and governance arrangements for designated landscape bodies to equip them better to drive nature’s recovery.”*

Background

The Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales commenced in 2014 with the publication of the ‘Marsden Review’ *National Landscapes: Realising their Potential* in October 2015. Welsh Government subsequently published *Future Landscapes: Delivering for Wales* (March 2017) and *Valued & Resilient: Welsh Government’s Priorities for AONBs & National Parks* (July 2018).

The ‘Glover’ Landscapes Review of National Parks and AONBs in England was published in September 2019 with 27 ‘Proposals’ for Government. A Written Ministerial Statement in June 2021 provided the Government’s initial response followed by a 12 week public consultation which closed in April 2022. For more information, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response> .

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TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
7th November 2022

FEEDBACK ON AONB PARTNERSHIP STUDY TOUR

Purpose

To feedback on the success of the AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour.

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- A total of 33 people attended the annual AONB Partnership Tour on 30th September.
- There was a good spread of representation from throughout the AONB even though the Tour was focused around Ross-on-Wye, Brampton Abbots, Lydbrook & Welsh Bicknor in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire in the AONB.
- The tour visited a range of sites associated land-use and land management around various AONB projects and initiatives along with regenerative farming and recreation, including variously football, fishing and hostel accommodation.
- The time and dedication of the speakers and hosts is greatly appreciated.
- Feedback from attendees of the Tour has been extremely positive.

Reasons

The AONB Partnership Tour returned post-pandemic and continued to be popular. It is a key tool in the transfer of information to the wider partners and interested parties in the AONB particularly to local Ward members, key officers and the Town, Parish/ Community Councils.

Implications

Of the 33 attendees on the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour, 9 came from Herefordshire, 6 from Monmouthshire and 8 from Gloucestershire. There were 9 JAC members, 10 Town/Parish/Community Council members, 7 officers, including from Welsh Government, Natural England and the Shropshire Hills AONB and 5 AONB staff. Feedback from attendees was very positive.

Sites and issues visited, and hosts or speakers were:-

- Ross Sports Centre: Tony Featherstone [Ross Sports Centre CIC] & Nick Critchley [Ross Junior Football Club – Girls Section]

- Townsend Farm, Brampton Abbots: regenerative agriculture and Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme; Ben Taylor-Davies [Regen Ben], Nick Critchley [AONB Development Officer] & Anna Stankiewicz [AONB FiPL Officer]
 - Lunch: Inn on the Wye
 - Lydbrook & Stowfield Fishery: some river issues; George Woodward [Ghillie]
 - Lydbrook Bridge / Stowfield Viaduct: bridge issues on the Wye Andrew Blake [AONB Manager] & Nicola Chidley [Principal Public Rights of Way Officer, Gloucestershire County Council]
 - Wye Invasive Species Programme Ellie Baggett [AONB Nature Recovery Officer]
 - Wye Valley Youth Hostel, Welsh Bicknor: the work of the YHA; Bryan Shekyls [Youth Hostel Manager]
 - Traditional Orchards - Noble Chafer Beetle & Orchard project; Ellie Baggett [AONB Nature Recovery Officer]
 - Welsh Bicknor Church – view restored church; Mrs Lorna Vaughan [Courtfield]
- As always the contribution of the speakers and hosts was much appreciated.

Background

The annual AONB Partnership Tour is traditionally held on one of the last Fridays in September. Tours were not held in 2020 nor 2021 due the coronavirus restrictions. In 2019 the Tour focused predominantly on the Monmouthshire part of the AONB. The 2018 Tour looked at a selection of projects and issues in the Herefordshire part of the AONB north of Ross-on-Wye. The 2017 Tour also looked at a number of projects and issues between Ross and Lydbrook. The 2016 Tour visited sites in and around Tintern.

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
7th November 2022

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 2022 was held at Lancaster University in mid September attended by most of the AONB team.
- AONB Lead Officers have met on-line regularly to debate issues including the forthcoming Government response to the Glover Landscape Review.
- The NAAONB has recruited a new part-time Collaboration and National Partnerships Lead to liaise with DEFRA over development of a Landscapes, Parks & Trails Partnership.
- The NAAONB AGM and national AONBs Chairpersons' will be held on-line on 17th November, with the topic "Green Finance – What is it? What isn't it? And what potential does it hold for AONBs?"

Landscapes for Life Conference July 2022

The NAAONB Conference return to a fully residential event, hosted by northern AONB in Lancaster University. The theme was 'The Nation's Landscapes? Peoples and Places'. Six members of the AONB Unit attended (travelling up in a hired People Carrier with an additional officer from Welsh Government). The conference focused on Engagement, in its widest sense. There was a wide range of speakers challenging AONB partnerships to engage more fully with and embrace more widely the diversity of the British public. Keynote speakers included Natalie Querol, Arts Council England; Amy-Jane Beer, Right to Roam; Anita Kerwin-Nye, YHA; Dr Geeta Ludhra, Brunel University London and The Chilterns AONB; Anjana Khatwa, Trustee, NAAONB; Siôn McGeever, DEFRA and Colin Stocker, Alpkit UK. There was also a variety of field trips and plenty of opportunity to network and meet staff and members from other AONBs across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Conference Programme is available here:

<https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/events/landscapes-life-conference/landscapes-life-conference2022>

Lead Officers' Meetings & Glover Review

The NAAONB met on-line regularly with Lead Officers to discuss the Government's 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 further 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. Consequently the NAAONB has published 'National Landscape: The designation for the 21st Century and beyond – Delivering for Nature, Climate and People' (see <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/designation/>). This has been presented to the DEFRA Landscapes team to use in conversations with the Secretary of State.

The new part-time NAAONB Collaboration and National Partnerships Lead officer will also be liaising with DEFRA over the Glover proposals to develop a National Landscape Service. This is currently anticipated to be a Landscapes, Parks & Trails Partnership, encompassing AONBs (potentially rebranded as National Landscapes), National Parks and National Trails.

Chairperson's conference & AGM, on-line, 17th Nov.

The NAAONB is organising a Chair-level conference for AONBs and National Parks on 17th November. The title of this year's conference is 'Green Finance – What is it? What isn't it? And what potential does it hold for AONBs?'. The purpose is to create a better shared understanding of what green finance is, the opportunities it could present and look at how best we might go about engaging with green finance, underpinned by sound principles and standards in order to uphold our values. Presenters include DEFRA Green Finance team; Paul Cottington, Head of Conservation Investment, RSPB; Naomi Conway and Emma Davies, Revere; and various Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF) projects. 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

AONB UNIT & PARTNER REPORTS

Purpose

To advise members of activity of the Wye Valley AONB Unit and other partners.

FOR INFORMATION

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

- a. Farming in Protected Landscapes
- b. Wye Invasive Species Programme (WISP)
- c. Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project
- d. Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP)
 - i. collaborative Dark Skies Wales project
 - ii. Lower Wye Valley Village Halls Energy efficiency & Hub development
- e. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & and Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley AONB Fund
- f. Wye Valley Walk website
- g. Wye Valley River Festival 2022 update

a. Farming in Protected Landscapes

Anna Stankiewicz joined the AONB Unit in August as the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Officer. She has taken over the day to day running of the programme from Nick Critchley, AONB Development Officer. She has been very active meeting farmers and landowners, providing advice on potential FiPL projects and supporting the Assessment Panel. The Panel met in September and approved 3 further projects.

- Wye and Usk Foundation INNS control along the Wye
- Brampton Abbots Rectory Orchard restoration
- AONB Noble Chafer habitat enhancement

The Year 2 (2022-23) FiPL allocation from DEFRA for the Wye Valley AONB is £220,110 of which £160,420 has now been committed. Therefore just under £60,000 remains available for FiPL grants up to March 2023. The Year 3 (2023-24) allocation is £219,490 of which £79,600 has already been committed leaving just under £140,000 available for grants.

There are a number of changes on the FiPL Assessment Panel. Rob Edwards has replaced Rachel Bosanquet as the Natural England Catchment Sensitive Farming Advisor, a representative from the NFU will be joining the Assessment Panel, and a new member will replace Andrew Nixon, who has left Herefordshire Wildlife Trust. The Panel wish both Rachel and Andrew well in their respective new roles.

For the full list of FiPL projects supported in Year 1 see

<https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/projects-supported-through-the-farming-in-protected->

[landscapes-scheme/](#) . For further information on FiPL see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/farming-in-protected-landscapes/>.

b. Wye Invasive Species Programme (WISP)

Nickie Moore, AONB Lower Wye Project Officer, and Ellie Baggett, Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer, have been very busy throughout the summer supervising contractors and working with local communities and landowners to stop the spread of the four Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) – Japanese Knotweed, American Skunk Cabbage, Cherry Laurel and Himalayan Balsam – see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/our-projects/wisp/>.

Cherry laurel around Cleddon Shoots SSSI:

- The initial (June 2022) cherry laurel treatment work was surveyed again by the AONB team, assessed for regrowth, and re-mapped to update records for the contractor follow-up work
- The adjacent landowner to Cleddon Shoots SSSI is Natural Resources Wales (NRW), and we arranged for an NRW officer to join us to map laurel on their estate, with a view to NRW arranging clearance in the near future.
- The AONB team also carried out a door-knocking exercise, talking to residents and landowners around the SSSI to raise awareness about cherry laurel and offer support with controlling or clearing it.
- Cherry laurel contractor follow-up work is taking place w/c 17/10/22 and 24/10/22

American Skunk cabbage:

Skunk cabbage treatment was carried out (the AONB team and a local contractor) in two sub-catchments in August:

Cleddon catchment:

- 20 sites, 5 landowners, approx. 300+ plants present, 178 treated.
- We are alarmed to see the problem has grown significantly worse since 2020. Every known site, bar one, showed a significant increase in numbers.
- We treated around 180 plants but estimate there's double that number that were inaccessible to us – we've not been able to obtain permission to treat the most upstream sites for the past 2 years and those plants are likely to still be releasing seed each spring.
- We will send all landowners an update and hope to be granted permission to access all sites next year.

Whitebrook catchment:

- 15 sites, 5 landowners, est. 500+ ASC present, 54 plants treated.
- We're still tracking down the source of cabbage seed in this catchment, so we conducted a leaflet drop around properties along one Whitebrook tributary. The second tributary will be visited next spring.
- We treated most of our known sites and one new, abundant site, but a change in ownership meant we were unable to access the most abundant ASC site this year.
- The number of ASC plants in this catchment will continue to grow, until the source(s) is found and contained. We will continue our awareness raising efforts.

Brockweir catchment:

- Managed an area of 21ha (inc. the previous 18 ha + further 3ha) at 5 sites, protecting a 1.9km stretch of the Brockweir tributary

Japanese knotweed:

- The creation of new online 'Report It' and 'Landowner Consent' forms have considerably eased the info and consent gathering processes, but many sites have still needed ground-truthing, and liaising face-to-face with landowners has really helped to build relations and raise awareness of the knotweed problem
- We've managed two contractor teams this year, the Wye and Usk Foundation and Brooke Estate Management.
- Both teams received pesticide stem injection training in August and have purchased stem injection kits. This enabled them to employ this method where appropriate to reduce pesticide use and/or the risk of spray drift impacting non-target plants.
- In total they've treated over 170 JK sites in the lower Wye Valley. 70% of those sites are on the Wales side of the AONB and the large majority of those sites (83%) are within the NLHF Nature Networks Project area.
- In general, the number of sites is still continuing to rise. We cannot attribute this rise in reports solely to it increasingly being spread around – it could also be due to a heightened public awareness resulting in more reports – but, given how easily it can be spread, we will continue to highlight the issues this plant poses and the best practice control – no cutting, no moving, no digging. On the positive side, the knotweed at many of the sites is in retreat or even absent, so much less herbicide is required now.
- Many knotweed plants here have become stunted, a bonsai form, and these can prove hard to eradicate. In 2023, we will investigate alternative methods to herbicide treatment for accessible sites e.g. electrocution/steaming.

Himalayan Balsam:

- We've continued to support Local Action Groups (The Narth, Llandogo, and upstream groups) in pulling balsam this year.
- 29 volunteers have supported the AONB Unit and local landowners in Brockweir managing 4.4ac (1.8ha) and clearing a total 3.12ac (1.26ha)
- We produced a Balsam Action Toolkit - an online resource to help local groups get active in pulling up this pest plant. We've had a few local action groups testing and feeding back on the resource pack. It is due to be translated into Welsh and once we've done that, we plan to fully promote it through all channels Spring 2023, see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/our-projects/wisp/balsam-action-toolkit/>.
- We encouraged our key landowner/partner, NRW, to place signs around their woodland estate to encourage users to pull up the accessible balsam before it set seed, and they did, with positive results!

A range of public events and training days have been organised, including community 'Balsam Bashing'. Media coverage has resulted in the following:

- Our Brockweir events social media posts on Facebook reached 15,050 with 530 reactions
- Social media posts on Facebook about our contractors being out treating JK and ASC reached 15,050 people and gained 530 reactions.
- Coverage in the local press and 4 public enquiries stemmed from that.

c. Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project

Nick Critchley, AONB Development Officer, leads on the Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks Project, working alongside Gwent Wildlife Trust and The Woodland Trust. This project aims to improve the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) within part of the

AONB, as well as improving connectivity between them. This project has been made possible with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).

The NLHF has agreed to a 6 month extension of the project (but not an increase in funding) until September 2023. This will enable a further summer season of activity, particularly the INNS control work outlined above.

As part of the project, the AONB Unit have commissioned The Environment Partnership (TEP) to engage with local farmers and landowners and carry out free-of-charge farm visits. To date 10 farm visits have been made, involving a site walkover to collaboratively identify:

- Habitat management and connectivity opportunities
- Soil management options
- Site-wide hydrological flows and management options

A summary report is then produced for the landowner/ manager, highlighting opportunities for wildlife enhancement and habitat connectivity, taking the agricultural business into account.

Following on from the findings of the site visits & Farm Plans, opportunities for projects which would be eligible for grant funding may include:

- Hedge planting and/or gapping up
- Natural Flood Management, e.g. wetland creation, leaky dams, surface water bunds
- Species Rich Grassland creation or restoration
- Riparian habitat management such as coppicing or pollarding of bankside trees and/or fencing and water troughs to restrict livestock access to water
- Tree/woodland planting and/or Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) restoration (with support from the Woodland Trust).

The AONB Unit has match-funding available to help implement some potential works. The offer for Capital Works will be in the region of 50% of total costs. However, funding may be at a higher or lower rate depending on the commercial benefit. Match-funding would be required by the landholder. This can be in the form of cash contributions towards costs, e.g. labour and machinery costs, calculated at current National Association of Agricultural Contractors rates.

d. Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP)

i) collaborative Dark Skies Wales project

Welsh Government have approved SLSP funding for a collaborative 3 year Dark Skies Wales project covering all Wales' 8 Designated Landscape (AONBs & National Parks). The project will run until March 2025 and will include the appointment of a Wales Dark Skies Officer (to accompany the one already in North Wales) to oversee:-

- Creation of Wales wide good practice guidance for external lighting
- Comprehensive ground-based lighting surveys to be conducted by contractor
- Creation and distribution of educational materials
- Implementation of designated star gazing sites
- Retrofitting lights - community and public spaces, including those owned/used by designated landscapes/local authority - exemplar demonstration projects
- Support to local businesses to retro fit dark sky friendly lighting
- Baseline ecological mapping and post implementation studies to measure impacts of retrofitting works on nature recovery and the state of our dark ecological network/habitat connectivity

There is already plenty of good material from existing Dark Skies projects both in North Wales Designated Landscapes, eg: <https://www.discoveryinthedark.wales/project-nos> & <https://www.clwydianrangeanddeevalleyaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/DARK-SKIES-GUIDANCE-2.pdf> and also in the Brecon Beacons National Park (see <https://www.breconbeacons.org/discover/top-10-activities-in-brecon-beacons/after-dark>)

The project will apply to the Welsh / Monmouthshire side of the AONB but the English side will be able to benefit from all of that experience. This will complement the Kerne Bridge Dark Skies Project that has been operating in Walford Parish and is moving onto Goodrich Welsh Bicknor and Whitchurch. The Wye Valley Society and local Ward member Cllr Yolande Watson have been supporting 12 enthusiastic volunteers who have been out and about at night taking sky quality meter readings as part of the Kerne Bridge Dark Skies Project. It is believed to be the first time light pollution has been measured in this way in the AONB, and on this scale in Herefordshire. These readings provide a simple benchmark for the presence of dark skies and areas of light trespass (pollution). For more information on the Kerne Bridge Dark Skies Project: www.wyevalleysociety.org.uk/events.php . For additional information and resources on dark skies: www.darksky.org .

ii) Lower Wye Valley Village Halls Energy efficiency & Hub development

Lucinda James, the new AONB Community Links Officer, is managing the SLSP grants to Village Halls to deliver projects under 3 of the key themes:

- Decarbonisation - Projects that will contribute to low carbon communities and enhance the sustainable local economy.
- Resilient and Green Local Communities - Projects that enhance Village Halls by providing improved advice and support for energy efficiency & Hub development initiatives, whether transport or work hubs. These should deliver increased social, environmental, cultural and economic opportunities and outcomes for local communities, as well as potential health and wellbeing benefits for locals and visitors, for example from specific transport/cycle hub development.
- More Sustainable Tourism - Projects that enhance Village Hall Hub development and initiatives (transport or work hub), that help reduce emissions for both tourism businesses and tourists. Projects may include cycling and e-bike infrastructure and other critical infrastructure development that will have health and wellbeing benefits for local communities and visitors. Improved access to these facilities will increase awareness, understanding and appreciation of environmental issues and help to positively influence visitor behaviour in the AONB.

Types of projects that may be supported:

- Energy Audit - paying a consultant to carry out a high-level energy Audit of a Village Hall.
- Improvements to Village Hall Energy Efficiency - implementation of actions highlighted in an Energy Audit, including purchase of small/modest items to improve the efficiency of running the Village Hall, and/or guidance /signposting on other sources of funding for further/larger items.
- Co-working Hub Assessment – paying an expert to advise on what improvements and infrastructure is needed to create a co-working environment in a Village Hall.
- Transport Hub Assessment - paying an expert to advise on what improvements and infrastructure is needed to create a transport hub at a Village Hall.
- Co-working Hub Development Infrastructure - Implementation of actions highlighted though an Assessment report, this could be for further costs in developing proposals up to Planning Permission if required, and/or purchase of items such as work stations/office type furniture, small items of IT equipment etc.

- Transport Hub Development infrastructure - implementation of actions highlighted in an Assessment report, this could be for further costs in developing proposals up to Planning Permission if required, and/or purchase items to create a transport hub, such as a Bike Repair Stand & Bike Pump, bike parking stand, water fountain etc.

A total of £61,250 is available until March 2025. The funding is available to the 11 Village Halls in the AONB (Wales only). Priority will be given initially to Village Halls who are in need of an Energy Audit and/or Advice on hub development. For further information please contact Lucinda at community@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk.

e. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & and Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley AONB Fund

Lucinda James, the new AONB Community Links Officer, is managing the SDF and HCF AONB Fund grants. Currently £54,453 has been committed to projects meaning that £45,547 remains available for grant applications. For further information see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/grants/grants/> and contact Lucinda at community@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk.

The Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley AONB Fund has now exhausted the initial 'immediate impact fund' and the Endowment Fund currently holds £55,489.53, meaning that there is about £5,000 available for grants. For further information see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/grants/aonb-fund/>. Andrew Blake, AONB Manager, and Lucinda James, AONB Community Links Officer, met with Bridie Sullivan, CEO, and other HCF team members to discuss options and opportunities going forward. Currently negotiations are underway with a potential one-off donor to the Fund.

f. Wye Valley Walk website

Ruth Waycott, AONB Information Officer, has been co-ordinating the renewal of the Wye Valley Walk website on behalf of the Wye Valley Walk Partnership. The new website is now live – see <https://www.wyevalleywalk.org/> - along with a new Passport scheme that has replaced the old stamping stations with QR codes. Once a walker registers and scans the QR codes their digital passport is automatically stamped. Only 12 of the 17 stamps are needed to claim the coveted Wye Valley Walk badge and certificate. The QR codes are in the windows or doors of local shops, cafes, pubs, B&B, tourist attractions or Tourist Information Centres. A few are to be found on church porch noticeboards. They are all accessible at any time, so walkers don't need to worry about arriving after hours. The locations are in the route description and on the route map (see <https://www.wyevalleywalk.org/walk>).

g. Wye Valley River Festival 2022 update

The final event of the Wye Valley River Festival 2022 was 'Alchemy and Artistry – Tintern Fire Garden!' in the grounds of Tintern Abbey on 21st & 22nd October. The 1400 tickets were sold out on both nights. Despite the wet and windy weather the crowds attending were dazzled by hundreds of fire-pots filling the Abbey nave and grounds, dozens of fire sculptures, live music and food & drink stalls.