

## **MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee  
held at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High Street,  
Coleford, GL16 8HG & Hybrid on Microsoft Teams on Monday, 9th March, 2026 at 2.00  
pm**

**PRESENT:** Councillor C. McFarling (Chair) (Forest of Dean District Council)

### **Elected Members (with voting powers)**

#### **Monmouthshire County Council**

County Councillors E. Bryn, Steven Garratt, Dale Rooke and A. Webb

#### **Forest of Dean District Council**

Councillor D. Wheeler

### **Town / Parish Community Councils (with voting powers)**

Herefordshire of Local Councils – Councillor B. Jones  
One Voice Wales – Councillor L. Parker

### **Co-opted Members (with voting powers)**

National Farmers Union – Ms. C. Hinds

### **Co-opted Members (without voting powers)**

Local Wildlife Trusts – Dr. J. Hynes

### **Technical Advice Officers**

National Landscape Manager – Mr. A. Blake  
National Landscape Team – Ms. C. Laidlaw  
Monmouthshire County Council – Ms. C. Bosley  
Monmouthshire County Council - Mr. R. Williams  
Gloucestershire County Council – Mr. A. Deb  
Herefordshire Council – Mr. J. Bisset  
Forest of Dean District Council – Alistair Chapman

### **Others present:**

Councillor M. Getgood (Coleford Town Council)  
Mr. J. Pearce – Member of the Public

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### **APOLOGIES:**

Councillors B. Hoyland, G. Moseley, B. Durkin, S. Cole and H. O'Kane, Ms. E. Johnson, Mr. J Evans, Councillor. R. Hatton, Mr. I. Williams, Mr. M. Quine

### **1. Declarations of Interest**

County Councillors Emma Bryn, Dale Rooke and Steven Garratt declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 4.2 Dixton Housing & Monmouthshire RLDP delay as they are Members of Monmouthshire County Council's Planning Committee.

### **2. Public Questions**

We received the following question from Jonty Pearce:

The Planning Inspector will hold public hearings on the Monmouthshire Replacement Local Development Plan between 16<sup>th</sup> June and 16<sup>th</sup> July this year. These hearings were postponed after the Planning Inspector concluded that Monmouthshire County Council had not provided sufficient evidence on the phosphate impacts affecting the River Wye and the River Usk Special Areas of Conservation. The Inspector also found that the Council had not used the most up-to-date population projections when determining the plan.

One of the most contentious site allocations in the plan is the proposed 270-dwelling development at Dixon Road, Monmouth. The site sits within the setting of the Wye Valley National Landscape, and the National Landscape has previously objected to this allocation. Concerns have focused on landscape harm, significant risks to water quality in the River Wye, and negative impacts on the internationally important Horseshoe Bats of the Wye Valley and the Forest of Dean Special Areas of Conservation.

Given the statutory purpose of the National Landscape to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, the question was raised as to whether the Wye Valley National Landscape will participate in the forthcoming Planning Inspector hearings and how it intends to present its concerns about the Dixon Road allocation. In response, it was confirmed that the Wye Valley National Landscape will be engaging in the process and that this matter will be discussed further under agenda item 4.2.

### **3. Confirmation of Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record.

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In doing so, the following points were noted:

#### **Dixton Housing & Monmouthshire RLDP delay**

The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) received an update on the delay to the Monmouthshire Local Development Plan (LDP) and the new timetable following its submission to the Welsh Government's Planning Inspectorate in November 2026. A draft hearing programme has now been published, confirming that hearings will take place online over a four-week period from mid-June to mid-July, with one week of no sessions. Key documents are accessible on the RLDP examination webpage. The Council will receive the Inspector's questions on 5 May 2026, and all responses must be submitted by 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2026. The JAC intends to make a formal submission reiterating its objection to the Dixton Road Site. The Chair will sign off the final response, due before the next meeting.

Discussion followed regarding the limited alternative housing sites around Monmouth. Some JAC members noted that, due to flooding risks at the Wyesham / Wonastow Road area and other local constraints, the choice may effectively be between Dixton Road and Wonastow Road. It was noted that the Inspector will not consider alternative sites and is restricted to evaluating the proposed allocations on issues such as deliverability and policy compliance. The impact of phosphate constraints was highlighted, which has halted development in the north of the County.

The primary concerns for the Joint Advisory Committee's response will relate to landscape and visual impact, character, and housing density. Further evidence, including landscape and heritage assessments, will be reviewed before finalising the submission. It was noted that although the approval of the site could set a precedent, each planning application must still be judged on its individual merits. Monmouthshire officers added that, at the application stage, strict green infrastructure and landscape policies would apply, requiring more detailed assessments and mitigation strategies.

The Chair emphasised the intention to submit the strongest possible objection, addressing landscape protection, biodiversity duties including bat habitats, and all relevant planning concerns. The draft response will be shared with JAC members before submission.

#### **Wyesham A466 Wye Valley Walk Footway**

The discussion centred on long-standing safety concerns along the Wye Valley Walk near Redbrook, particularly where pedestrians are forced into the highway immediately after a traffic chicane. It was noted that this stretch is extremely dangerous, with vehicles accelerating after the 30mph zone and having to negotiate the chicane while encountering walkers, often with dogs or in groups. Several near-misses have been

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observed, prompting frustration that despite raising the problem for over a year, Monmouthshire Highways has not provided any substantive response.

It was noted that a letter had been sent to Monmouthshire Highways raising three questions: whether any works were planned this year or next; what would be needed to draw up improvement plans; and whether there was interest in cost-sharing with the Wye Valley National Landscape Team. No reply has yet been received, which may reflect pressures on the Highways service, including more urgent issues elsewhere. A small step forward has been the installation of a "Pedestrians in the Road" warning sign, although it is acknowledged as minimal progress.

Concerns were also raised about the condition of other nearby sections of the Wye Valley Walk. One incident involved a car hitting a tree near the Monmouth Showground, leaving damaged trees requiring work. A report has been commissioned reviewing both this area and the stretch near the sewage works up to the Beaufort Bridge. Potential solutions are being explored, although diversions, such as routing walkers along the Offa's Dyke Path, would be less direct and physically more demanding.

JAC members discussed the possibility of alternative routes, including land at Lords Grove or using sections of the old railway track that locals already walk informally. However, land ownership is uncertain, and it was noted that parts of the current Wye Valley Walk are Permissive Paths not officially public footpaths. Public Rights of Way officers are working jointly with the Wye Valley National Landscape Team to examine all options, but Monmouthshire Highways' priorities and limited capacity have slowed progress. It was agreed that a stronger follow-up letter should be sent to Monmouthshire Highways urging action.

#### **JAC Membership Review**

The Wye Valley National Landscape Manager provided an update on the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) membership. He welcomed Catherine Hinds, who has joined as the NFU's nominated representative, and noted that Chloe Rees has also been appointed on behalf of the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils, although she was unable to attend the meeting. A nomination is still awaited from the Friends of the River Wye, and several further vacancies remain unfilled.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Manager is continuing to work on recruiting members, though many potential nominees are already heavily committed elsewhere, which is slowing progress. It was noted that the Shropshire Hills National Landscape recently used an open recruitment approach, and this may be considered as an alternative way forward if the remaining seats cannot be filled through nominations.

#### **4. Pre-Consultation Draft Management Plan Framework**

We received a report regarding the pre-consultation draft framework for the Wye Valley National Landscape Management Plan and the revised programme.

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In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The proposed Vision for the National Landscape Management Plan 2026-2031 was agreed at the last Joint Advisory Committee meeting.
- The Public Consultation Draft Management Plan will then be finalised and published with a 10 week consultation period, including three public events.
- There is some slippage in the review programme with the likelihood that the new Management Plan will not be formally approved by the Local Authorities and Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) before the end of 2026.
- Therefore, the five-year period of the new Management Plan should be realigned to cover 2027-2032.
- The current Wye Valley AONB Management Plan (2021-2026) will remain valid until the new National Landscape Management Plan is adopted.

The draft Management Plan Framework has been updated to reflect changes over the last five years, retaining its overarching objectives, themes and policies while modernising the structure. The document is still in a skeletal stage, with the core policies developed but the descriptive text yet to be added. Special qualities have been streamlined from 27 to 18 by amalgamating similar elements, and strategic objectives have been reduced from over 70 to around 50 to improve clarity and usability. Public consultation is planned to begin after Easter, and only minor adjustments are expected at this stage, with more substantial feedback anticipated during the formal consultation period later in the year.

Some delays mean that the final plan is unlikely to be adopted until late 2026, so the plan period will shift to 2027–2032. A recommendation has been made to confirm that the existing plan remains valid until the new one is adopted to avoid any policy gaps.

The consultation will include three public events—one in the north (e.g., Ross), one in the south (e.g., Tintern, Trellech, or Brockweir), and one central location such as Monmouth, scheduled at varied times to maximise participation. The consultation will be promoted online, through partner organisations, town, parish and community councils, and via social media. Members highlighted the importance of raising public awareness and suggested using libraries and leisure centres to display QR codes as well as physical documentation.

Discussion also covered the inclusion of tranquillity, dark skies and light pollution within the plan, with JAC members expressing support for their prominence. Concerns were

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raised about noise impacts such as Scrambler motorbikes, and the growing importance of sustainable and regenerative land management in light of potential future food provision issues.

A further question addressed the concept of geodiversity, which relates to the variety of geological and geomorphological features and processes. The plan involves working with organisations such as Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust and groups like the Woolhope Club. Geoconservation includes protecting rock exposures, ensuring accessibility, preventing damage from land management or recreational activities, and potentially enhancing public understanding through guided walks and trail leaflets.

We resolved:

- (i) To provide initial comment and feedback on the pre-consultation draft framework for the Wye Valley National Landscape Management Plan before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.
- (ii) To endorse the revised programme for the review and publication of the National Landscape Management Plan.
- (iii) To recognise that the revised Management Plan is unlikely to be finalised and adopted in 2026 and therefore set the new Management Plan for 2027-2032.

#### **5. Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan**

We received a report regarding the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Colchester Declaration – a ‘declaration for nature’ was produced in 2019 supported by all the AONB (now known as the National Landscape) Partnerships and the National Association for AONBs (now the National Landscapes Association).
- The ambition was pledged for every AONB Partnership to prepare a Nature Recovery Plan and deliver Species Action Plans to reverse the decline of threatened species.
- Five species, or assemblage of species, were chosen as representative of the Wye Valley National Landscape Special Qualities as a commitment to the Colchester Declaration.
- The suite of Species Action Plans supports the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan.

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- Four previous Species Action Plan (SAP) have been adopted by the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), the fifth and final Species Action Plan will be presented to the next JAC meeting, focusing on Water Crowfoot, emblematic for the sustainable restoration and management of the riverine habitat.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan and Species Action Plans are designed to align with the Monmouthshire Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) and Gloucestershire and Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs).
- The Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy is currently out for public consultation until 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2026.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team is finalising its Nature Recovery Plan, built around five representative species that reflect the area's ecological special qualities. The plan consolidates extensive ecological data, mapping, and species assessments, and acts as an umbrella for individual species action plans. It is intended to align with wider statutory frameworks, including the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the Nature Recovery Action Plan in Monmouthshire.

The urgency of ecological recovery was raised, noting the ambitious 2030 targets set out in the Colchester Declaration and the significant challenges posed by current declines, such as the Wye's unfavourable river condition.

Concerns were raised about potential conflicts between recreational river use particularly paddle sports and sensitive species like water crowfoot, with a need for further evidence on the impact.

The importance of monitoring progress against species baselines was highlighted, though acknowledged that reliable baseline data is lacking for some species. An update report in the form of the State of the National Landscape Report including trends is planned for the next Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) meeting.

Discussion also addressed ancient and veteran trees within the landscape. Clarification was sought on the distinction between "ancient" and "veteran" trees, with members directed to the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory for accessible definitions. The issue of protecting iconic trees from deliberate vandalism, referencing the Sycamore Gap incident, was raised, though it was noted that most local ancient trees are on private land and not widely accessible, reducing their vulnerability. Tree Preservation Orders remain an available tool where needed.

We resolved:

- (i) To endorse the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan, in accordance with the Colchester Declaration commitments.

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- (ii) To note the public consultation on the draft Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

#### **6. Wye Valley National Landscape Funding & Work Programme 2026-27**

We received a report seeking approval for the outline work plan for the Wye Valley National Landscape during the forthcoming financial year, following confirmation of funding from DEFRA, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- DEFRA, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales have all made confirmations of funding allocations for Wye Valley National Landscape for 2026/27.
- Welsh Government has offered a 29% increase in Core Revenue funding for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team whereas all other allocations are the same as 2025/26.
- The outline Work Programme for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team for 2026/2027 is furthering the conservation and enhancement of the area's natural beauty, themed around delivering for Nature, Climate, People and Place.
- Priorities include: the consolidation of the support for farming, through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Ffermio Bro programmes, a proposed in-year extension of the Wye Adapt to Climate Change? Programme; on-going focus on Nature & Climate outcomes through DEFRA and Welsh Government Capital funding, including the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme and Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in Wales; continued Planning advice shared jointly with the Malvern Hills National Landscape Partnership; the on-going activities and achievements of the Volunteers and Young Adventurers; the delivery of the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects; the completion of Management Plan review; and continuing a range of existing activities and projects, including continuation of the control of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and progressing the Lower Wye Tracks & Trails Action Plan; while retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Team core budget for 2026/27, as presented to the Steering Group, is £575,945 and additional Capital funding programmes, grants and other project funding is anticipated to reach £1,250,000 levered into the National Landscape during the year.

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The Wye Valley National Landscape team had anticipated a standstill budget from Government for 2026–27, which would have required careful prioritisation of projects and increased fundraising. However, the Team has been informed that additional funding is likely to be provided.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Manager explained that the extra funding stems from a national DEFRA allocation, not yet fully confirmed, but made possible thanks to efficient delivery across national landscapes. As a result, next year's budget is secure, allowing continuity in the work programme and enabling the team to consolidate current initiatives while planning more strategically. The draft work programme has been outlined, and funding will be allocated across projects once costings are refined.

During the discussion, several questions were raised. On reserves, it was clarified that although Herefordshire Council holds reserves for the Team, these will not need to be used next financial year. They may, however, be used for significant initiatives such as the £10 million, ten-year Landscape Connections bid.

Public engagement remains a major area of work and includes website improvements, social media, walks, talks, events, school partnerships, and extensive work with farmers and landowners. The Team also hopes to expand diversity and inclusion projects with diverse communities in Newport and Gloucester if resources allow.

The Young Adventurers scheme will continue, with potential expansion to additional age groups, and may connect with the national Generation Green initiative if it is revived.

Enhancements to the 65 and 69 bus route walking projects will also continue in partnership with Newport Bus, depending on staffing capacity and revenue funding. It was noted that capital-only funding this year limited the scope of engagement activities, so increased revenue funding will be beneficial. Members praised the quality of the 69-bus route information leaflet and requested additional copies. The current staffing and funding position is strong, but that future planning, such as resourcing the next five-year management plan, will also require sustained support.

We resolved:

- (i) To welcome the funding commitments from DEFRA, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales for the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership.
- (ii) To endorse the outline Wye Valley National Landscape Team Work Programme for 2026/2027.

### **7. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Proposed Reforms**

We received a report reviewing changes in the proposed reforms of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in England.

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In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is seeking views on a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) with a consultation closing at 11:45pm on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2026.
- The revisions include several changes in the way in which National Landscapes are addressed in national planning policy.
- The National Landscapes Association has collated a response, developed in consultation with the Planning and Placemaking panel.

The discussion focused on the proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in England. It was considered that although the NPPF is being updated to reflect changes in government and shifting priorities, the amendments generally weaken protections for wildlife and natural landscapes. The reforms downgrade the current status of designated National Landscapes, reducing the weight previously afforded to their protection. While the changes also aim to encourage sustainable development, they effectively lower the bar for developers seeking planning permission. There is uncertainty about how much the consultation will influence the final policy.

A significant proposed change is the replacement of the term 'landscape and scenic beauty' with 'natural beauty'. This is welcomed because 'natural beauty' is the original purpose of designation for National Parks and National Landscapes. The submission deadline for the consultation is imminent, and final comments need to be submitted as soon as possible.

A question was raised whether other organisations share similar concerns raised. It was noted that a wide range of national bodies, including the National Landscapes Association, National Parks England, CPRE, the National Trust, the Landscape Institute, and major environmental NGOs such as the RSPB and Wildlife Trusts, are coordinating regarding responses. These groups are collectively working to refine arguments and present a unified stance.

We resolved:

- (i) To endorse and adopt the response from the National Landscapes Association on the proposed reforms of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- (ii) To encourage partner organisations to incorporate the NLA response in their submissions on the NPPF.

#### **8. Updates on Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL), Ffermio Bro, Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley National Landscape Fund**

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We received a report on the progress of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Ffermio Bro programmes, the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the Wye Valley National Landscape Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Local Assessment Panel has approved grants for 13 projects totalling £93,600 since the last Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), with near complete allocation of the £339,063 budget for 2025/26.
- The Ffermio Bro Assessment Panel approved 13 grants for £64,832 on behalf of Rural Payments Wales, allocating all the remaining available funding for this year totalling £99,450.
- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Assessment Panel recently approved three projects allocating the remaining funds of the total £95,000 on behalf of Welsh Government.
- The Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley National Landscape Fund is currently closed for applications while opportunities to grow the Fund are sought.
- The continuation of FiPL, Ffermio Bro and SDF grant allocations in 2026/27 have been confirmed by DEFRA and Welsh Government respectively.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team expressed satisfaction with both the collaborative work with farmers, landowners and land managers, and with the breadth and quality of applications approved.

Ffermio Bro, although a smaller scheme this year, is set to receive almost double the funding next year, which is seen as very positive. As this is only the first year of Ffermio Bro, it is beginning to build momentum heading into the next financial year. The Sustainable Development Fund also continues to support a good variety of schemes. The Wye Valley Fund, held with Hereford Community Foundation, currently remains largely inactive due to a lack of donations and requires renewed fundraising efforts before further grants can be issued.

Questions were raised about impact measurement and whether funded projects, such as leaky dams, are monitored over the long term. It was noted that although monitoring is not fully systematic, the Team returns to sites, maintains relationships with recipients and ensures work is completed. Successful examples are often showcased through farm visits with other landowners, while less successful work is used internally for learning and improving future methodology.

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Further discussion explored specific funded items, including shelter belts, which are wide hedges or narrow wooded strips designed as natural windbreaks and beneficial for livestock protection, soil conservation, and waterflow management.

Sand Martin nest box structures were enquired about. These are placed above flood level to protect breeding colonies from increasingly unpredictable river flooding. The boxes contain multiple nest cavities and can be monitored via rear access. The Team will track their effectiveness over coming years to determine whether they successfully attract breeding pairs. The Joint Advisory Committee expressed interest in receiving feedback or camera footage once results become available.

We resolved to endorse the recent allocations of FiPL, Ffermio Bro and SDF grants.

#### **9. River Wye Charter and Update**

We received a report regarding the Charter for the Rights of the River Wye and were advised of the latest activities to help restore the River Wye.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Herefordshire Council has adopted a Charter for the Rights of the River Wye and is encouraging other partners to endorse it.
- Haskoning Ltd. has been appointed to produce the Wye Catchment Management Plan.
- The Diffuse Water Pollution Plan (DWPP) for England and the Welsh Evidence have been published, contributing to the evidence base for the Catchment Management Plan.
- DEFRA and Welsh Government £1million research programme for the Wye is currently out to tender.
- 'Forest to Sea - A Vision and Strategic Action Plan for water in the Forest of Dean' has completed a public consultation period and is being reviewed by the Severn Vale Catchment Partnership in collaboration with the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.
- The Wyescapes – food, nature, water - Landscape Recovery programme has been submitted to DEFRA by Herefordshire Rural Hub.
- Welsh Government is consulting on a Green Paper 'Shaping the Future of Water Governance in Wales' until 7<sup>th</sup> April 2026.

The Committee noted that the Charter, led by Herefordshire Council and due to be launched at the Hay Festival, deserves support.

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A key development is the long-awaited production of the Wye Catchment Management Plan, which, despite being non-statutory, is expected to guide future action and attract significant interest. Alongside this, the recently published Diffuse Water Pollution Plan highlights pollution issues and outlines potential solutions; its findings will feed into the catchment plan. The Committee was encouraged to read the executive summary as well as related reports, including the Wales State of Nature report, which emphasise the need for systems-level change rather than relying on existing mechanisms alone.

Updates were also given on the Wyscapes Landscape Recovery Programme, a 30-year proposal involving farmers along stretches of the Wye and Lugg, whose success will depend on upcoming decisions by DEFRA. Additional DEFRA-funded research into water quality is underway, and the Committee will be kept informed of developments. The Wye Navigation Advisory Committee will also meet shortly, focusing on navigation matters.

The chair highlighted the emerging movement around the Rights of the River Wye, which aims to give the river legal representation and intrinsic rights, such as the right not to be polluted and the right to regenerate. Forest of Dean District Council supports such a charter.

We resolved to endorse the Charter for the Rights of the River Wye and welcome the other progress in the Wye Catchment.

#### **10. National and Local Updates**

We received a report regarding activities of the National Landscapes Association, Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) and the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.

The National Landscapes Association recently hosted a meeting of Lead Officers in Birmingham which focused on setting out the direction of travel for the coming year. The annual conference will take place in early July 2026, just before the next Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) meeting. Therefore, because of this timing, both today's meeting and the July 2026 JAC meeting have been moved from the usual first Monday of the month to avoid difficult travel arrangements.

Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) is currently undertaking an important piece of work examining the effectiveness and efficiency of National Landscapes and National Parks in Wales. Interim findings are expected in April, with final results in June 2026, ahead of the Senedd Election in May 2026. This will ensure that key messages and recommendations are available for the incoming Welsh Government. Alongside this, a manifesto has been produced for all political parties in Wales. The Wye Valley National Landscape Manager is currently serving as chair of TCLW and will complete his term in June 2026. Catherine Mealing-Jones, CEO of Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, will succeed him.

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Locally, the National Grid Landscapes Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects are progressing well, with noteworthy outputs emerging, in the area between Whitchurch and Ross. This marks the first of three years of planned project activity. Work on the Tracks and Trails strategy within Monmouthshire is also moving forward, although progress last year was slower than hoped. An audit of key unclassified county roads has now been completed, and the Steering Group is in the process of prioritising routes and identifying both quick wins and more complex challenges. A public meeting will be held in the spring of 2026 to update local communities on the work.

We noted the report.

#### **11. Dates of meetings for 2026:**

Monday 13th July 2026 at 2.00pm.

Monday 2nd November 2026 at 2.00pm.

The hybrid meetings will be held in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

Before closing the meeting, the following information was noted:

The Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity) Wales Bill has now passed the Senedd and is awaiting Royal Assent. This represents a significant step forward, introducing legally binding targets to reverse biodiversity loss in Wales and establishing the Office for Environmental Governance Wales. This new body will provide a mechanism for individuals to raise concerns and hold Welsh public bodies to account.

**The meeting ended at 3.56 pm.**