

LOCAL AUTHORITIES' CONTRIBUTIONS AND AONB MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING 2018 - 2021

Purpose

To request contributions from the four constituent local authorities to the budget for the Wye Valley AONB Partnership as outlined in the AONB Memorandum of Understanding between the four local authorities for 2018 - 2021.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. request from the constituent local authorities the agreed financial contributions for the Wye Valley AONB for 2020/21.
- B. encourages the constituent local authorities to commence a review of the AONB Memorandum of Understanding for 2021 - 2024

Key Issues

- The AONB Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is intended to give medium term security and commitment to the AONB Partnership.
- The local authorities' financial contributions to the Wye Valley AONB Partnership are outlined in the MoU, which form the foundation of the budget managed by the AONB Unit.
- DEFRA and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are not signatories to the MoU however their AONB grant funding offer letters are appended to the MoU.
- The current DEFRA grant offer extended from 2016/17 until 2019/20. A new DEFRA grant offer is anticipated following the publication of the 'Glover' Landscapes Review.
- The NRW grant currently runs from 2018/19 until 2020/21.
- The current MoU ends in March 2021 and a subsequent three year edition would run until March 2024.
- For every £1 of Local Authority contribution the AONB Unit has levered in over £8 on average in recent years.

Reasons

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides a framework for the delivery of duties and obligations in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) arising from Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 including the operation and management of the AONB Partnership and the AONB Unit. The MoU is intended to give medium term security to the AONB Partnership and sets out a shared vision for, and

commitment to, AONB management by the funding local authority partners. The MoU outlines the functions of the AONB Unit and the expectations on all parties to achieve the shared vision, which includes the understanding that:

- AONB management structures should be strongly supported by partners and relevant authorities.
- the statutory requirement to produce a Management Plan provides an important opportunity to strengthen partnerships and achieve better outcomes.
- security of funding and flexibility of funding for the AONB will deliver better outcomes.
- there should be a “can do” culture which is not risk-averse but where lessons from novel approaches are encouraged and learnt from, in both success and failure.
- monitoring of environmental outcomes is essential and needs to be undertaken to develop a sound, spatially-relevant evidence base.
- opportunities should be taken to maximise the synergies between the outcomes of the Management Plan with the plans of other Parties, and of the wider network of nationally designated Protected Landscapes.

The MoU complements the JAC Agreement, which constitutes the JAC, signed between the four local authorities.

Implications

The following Local Authority partner contributions are identified for 2020/21 in the MoU 2018-2021. They are based on an established historical formula aligned with the land area in the AONB. The MoU states that the local authorities retain the discretion to index link contributions, if or when appropriate.

Funding Partner	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Herefordshire Council	£23,860	£23,860	£23,860
Monmouthshire County Council	£15,716	£15,716	£15,716
Forest of Dean District Council	£5,826	£5,826	£5,826
Gloucestershire County Council	£3,600	£3,600	£3,600
Total LA contributions	£49,002	£49,002	£49,002

The proposed base budget for the AONB Unit for 2020/21 is £305,850. The local authority contributions receive up to 75% match-funding for core AONB initiatives from DEFRA and Natural Resources Wales (NRW), on behalf of Welsh Government. The NRW grant will be £49,600 in 2020/21 and will be the last year of the current 3 year agreement. DEFRA had provided a 4 year funding offer up until March 2020.

DEFRA have been negotiating revised grant terms and conditions with Herefordshire Council, as treasurers for the AONB Partnership, in anticipation of a new funding offer following the publication of the ‘Glover’ Landscapes Review of National Parks and AONBs in England. These new ‘terms and conditions’ reference and recognise the Wye Valley AONB Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as the framework for medium term security and commitment to the AONB Partnership.

The remainder of the core Wye Valley AONB budget is made up from income from other sources, totalling £19,000 in 2020/21. The AONB Unit will also be managing externally funded partnership projects with a value in excess of £200,000. These projects include mindSCAPES, the Wye Valley River Festival (2nd – 17th May 2020), the Wye Valley Walk Partnership, a short extension to the Lower Wye Catchments Natural Flood Management

(NFM) and Green Infrastructure (GI) Project, the AONB Youth Rangers programme and the Water Environment Grant funded Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) project with two Catchment Advisors seconded from the Wye & Usk Foundation to work in and around the English part of the Wye Valley AONB. These externally funded projects extend the work of the AONB Unit and allow project investment as well as some elements of cost recovery. Over recent years for every £1 of Local Authority contributions the AONB Unit has levered in more than £8.

The AONB Unit is constantly reviewing the structure and delivery of services in the AONB alongside income streams. Two of the 5 core members of staff in the AONB Unit work reduced hours so the core AONB Unit currently equates to 4.4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff. Additional funding enables the staffing capacity of the AONB Unit to be augmented as required, for example with the Lower Wye Catchments NFM&GI Project Officer and the two ROAR Catchment Advisors seconded from the Wye & Usk Foundation. Similarly, some small expansion of capacity is being pursued around the Wye Valley River Festival.

The AONB Steering Group, made up from officers of the 4 local authorities and Natural England, on behalf of DEFRA, and NRW on behalf of Welsh Government, ensures that staff and resources are maximised and operational structures are fit for the future in the face of ongoing budgetary pressures. The focus remains on consolidating the activity of the core AONB Unit to maximise the leverage and spend on the delivery of initiatives that fulfil the statutory purpose of the AONB designation and benefit the landscape and local communities in the Wye Valley.

Background

Each Local Authority has a statutory Duty of Regard towards the purposes of AONBs under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. A considerable amount of the AONB Unit's core and project work (planning / promotion / advice / preparation & delivery of the Management Plan etc.) goes towards supporting each Local Authority in fulfilling its Duty of Regard. Through project delivery the AONB Unit also supports the Local Authorities' Statutory Duty for biodiversity under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006.