

AONB UNIT & PARTNER REPORTS

Purpose

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

FOR INFORMATION

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

- a) AONB Farming Awards
- b) Gilpin2020 & Launch by HRH Prince of Wales
- c) Lower Wye Catchments Green Infrastructure & Natural Flood Management Project
- d) Wye Valley River Festival 2020
- e) Water Environment Grant ROAR & Catchment Advisors
- f) Priorities funding opportunity Welsh Government
- g) Offa's Dyke Collaboratory
- h) Ross Riverside

a) AONB Farming Awards

Monmouthshire Meadows Group won the 2019 Wye Valley AONB Farming Awards, receiving the Farming Awards' Trophy and a £400 cheque. Gadr Farm, Cwmcarnvan was awarded an 'Outstanding Contribution' certificate and Berry Hill Community Orchard were 'Highly Commended'. This was the 12th year of the Awards, which are for anyone managing land in or adjacent to the AONB that makes an outstanding contribution to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape. The announcement of the winners was made at the Monmouthshire Show on July 6th. The judging panel consisted of Andrew Blake (AONB Manager), David Price (NFW Wales & JAC), Mike Williams (Wye & Usk Foundation) and Martin Rowberry (Coppett Hill Common Trust & 2017 winners).

b) Gilpin2020 & Launch by HRH Prince of Wales

2020 is the 250th anniversary of William Gilpin taking the Wye Tour in 1770. This was a significant event as it heralded the birth of British tourism. Gilpin was a pioneer of the 'Picturesque' and his ideas led to the concepts of landscape appreciation and environmental conservation, culminating in the designation of protected landscapes – our National Parks and AONBs. The Wye Valley AONB Unit is helping co-ordinate local organisations to celebrate this anniversary as a year-long opportunity to raise awareness of the cultural heritage of the Wye Valley, improving understanding and knowledge about the Wye Tour, its sights and

highlights, and provoking discussion about the landscape and environment of the Wye Valley AONB today.

Initiatives currently planned as part of Gilpin2020 include a Primary Schools project around Ross (the start of the Wye Tour), CreateRoss artistic workshops and exhibitions in Ross and at Goodrich Castle, several local walks along stretches of the Wye between Ross & Chepstow, talks and events in Ross, Monmouth and Chepstow and the updating and re-publication of The Picturesque Wye Tour booklet. For more details please see <https://gilpin2020.org/>

The Prince of Wales is visiting Ross-on-Wye on 5th November and will officially launch Gilpin2020, to celebrate the town's role as the birthplace of British tourism. His Royal Highness will tour a local producers' market and meet groups representing the strong philanthropic heritage of Ross, including the Wye Valley AONB stand and a range of local community organisations and their local business supporters, around the Old Market, Ross.

c) Lower Wye Catchments Natural Flood Management (NFM) & Green Infrastructure (GI) Project

The Project has entered its final quarter of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) funding. However, some modest resources have been secured to continue with some elements of the project into next year.

Farm management advice

Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF) have completed eleven farm advice visits in the Angidy catchment. Capital works funded with 50% grants through the project are being delivered by the farmers, including riparian fencing, farm yard infrastructure (to separate clean/dirty water), cross contour hedgerows and woodland linkage, fencing to assist rotational grazing, wet meadow management, leaky ditch barriers and maize under-sowing trials. Farmers have also been supported with applications to Glastir small grants where this fits with the farmer's ongoing business needs.

MCC access project research, development and GI strategy

Atkins consultancy have concluded a second report looking at 4 further Unclassified County Highways and water management proposals. This follows their modelling and investigations into the Chapel Hill Road/Limekiln Brook at Tintern. Surface water run-off causes significant degradation to these routes and various potential solutions are suggested. The next step is to get these prioritised and costed up for future capital bids.

Best practice/info sharing events

The NFM & GI Project has held or contributed to thirteen events to date. It has also worked with volunteer groups and held guided walks promoting the project and natural flood management opportunities.

A Natural Flood Management (NFM) seminar will be hosted on Wednesday 27th November 2019 at the Bridges Centre, Monmouth (poster attached). This free event will be a chance to local agencies and interested individuals to hear about different NFM approaches, experiences and best practice through a series of presentations, including from Chris Uttley (Environment Agency), Bethany Lewis (Herefordshire Council), David Gasca-Tucker (Atkins Consultancy) and Huw Thomas (Forest Research).

Pilot NFM work

Watercourse consents are being approved for a number of leaky dams on private land. These can be used in future to demonstrate locally show NFM can help to slow the flow of water through a catchment, by reducing run off and increasing the ability of catchments to hold water, which can help to reduce peak flows.

Invasive weed mapping and control

Thirteen locations with Japanese knotweed (JK) have been mapped and sprayed. The main site of American Skunk cabbage (ASC) in the Whitebrook catchment has also been sprayed. Local volunteers have also worked on a number of sites to control Himalayan Balsam (HB).

d) Wye Valley River Festival 2020

The Arts Council England grant of £70,000 has been confirmed, which means the majority of the funding is secured to progress with the Festival in 2020. Work is now underway with Phill Haynes, Festival Director, and Desperate Men, Artistic Directors, to consolidate the main concepts, features and artists around the Festival theme of ‘Time’.

Early in the new year the AONB team and the Festival team will undertake some team-working using the Lumina Spark model of personal & professional development, jointly with the Shropshire Hills AONB team and facilitated by NAAONB.

e) Water Environment Grant ROAR & Catchment Advisors

The Wye & Usk Foundation, working with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and the Wye Valley AONB Unit and Herefordshire Rural Hub were successful with the Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) project application for the Water Environment Grant under the Rural Development Programme for England. The total project is for £672,000 until March 2021 for the English part of the Wye Catchment, including the English part of the AONB as well as the adjacent Garren & Gamber catchment. The main aims of the ROAR project are to:-

1. Engage stakeholders with tailored advice
eg. on improving water quality, diffuse pollution, good soil management, improving biodiversity, habitat condition and connectivity.
2. Promote land management practices
to reduce the impact of diffuse pollution from agriculture on phosphate levels in the Wye catchment.
3. Improve understanding and acceptance
amongst farmers, land managers and their advisors, of the need to improve water quality within the Wye catchment.
4. Demonstrate effective working practices
made possible by Catchment Partnerships.

The Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF) have employed three new Catchment Advisors to operate through the ROAR Project and complement their existing team of Catchment Advisors. Ben Nott and Rebecca Meredith cover the English part of the Wye Valley AONB and the adjacent Garren & Gamber catchment, and operate from the AONB Office in

Monmouth while being integrated with the WUF Catchment Advisor team. To date Ben & Bex have visited 8 farms in the area and are preparing Farm Plans for each.

f) Priorities funding opportunity Welsh Government

Following the publication of *Valued & Resilient: Welsh Government's Priorities for AONBs & National Parks* (July 2018), officers from the Welsh AONBs, the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB), Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Welsh Government (WG) have been meeting to discuss how to provide greater parity for AONBs with National Parks in Wales. Each AONB team was requested by WG to identify priority pressures and projects in the event of any additional WG fund becoming available. Currently identified projects that have been proposed and recently received modest support are

- Himalayan Balsam & Japanese Knotweed control
- Natural Flood Management (NFM) & Green Infrastructure (GI) work - continuing NFM & GI capital work & landowner liaison when NRW funded Lower Wye Catchments NFM&GI Project ends in December 2019
- Walking & well-being initiatives
- Gilpin2020 events and community collaborations
- Wye Valley River Festival 2020 - volunteer co-ordination & training and a Schools engagement programme (between Monmouth & Chepstow)
- AONB interpretation
- AONB Youth Rangers

Officer from the Welsh AONBs, NRW, NAAONB & WG are meeting again in December to continue discussing greater parity for AONBs with National Parks in Wales.

g) Offa's Dyke Collaboratory (ODC)

The AONB Manager continues to be a Convenor of ODC along with Professor Keith Ray (Cardiff University), Professor Howard Williams (Chester University), Christopher Catling (Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales), Dr Paul Belford (Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust) & David McGlade (Offa's Dyke Association) that focuses on the promotion, interpretation and conservation of Offa's Dyke.

On-going work includes: -

- Offa's Dyke Conservation Management Plan (Cadw & Historic England - ed. André Berry) CMP and Year One Action Plan produced: sets a huge challenge and will attempt to reverse hundreds of years of so-called 'benign neglect'. Offa's Dyke Association (ODA) currently leading on Action Plan.
- Saturday 21st September - Early Medieval Wales Archaeological Research Group
Dr Paul Belford & Prof Keith Ray both are gave lectures on Offa's Dyke at the meeting at Haverfordwest.
- 29th -30th November - 'The Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Mercia' conference
Prof Keith Ray to contribute a talk about the Dyke and the frontier in 8th-century Mercia to a conference at the Oxford University Dept for Continuing Education.
- 22nd January 2020 at Cardiff University - ODC second meeting
Follow up on the inaugural ODC meeting in Shrewsbury in April 2017. Invited group of experts will address recent active and substantive research including on mapping, reconnaissance, survey and excavation work on either/both Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke &/or closely relevant aspects of the 8th-9th century frontier.

- April/May 2020 - a major ODC 'community projects' event at Trefonen village hall
- 6th -9th July 2020 - The International Medieval Congress 2020, Leeds University
The special theme is 'Borders' and it is proposed that the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory has a sponsored session or strand of sessions at this paramount European venue for medieval studies.

For more information see also <https://offaswatsdyke.wordpress.com/>

h) Ross Riverside

The AONB Development Officer has been working closely with Ross-on-Wye Town Council and the Herefordshire Meadows Group on the restoration of approximately 0.6 hectares of amenity grassland to floodplain meadow. Re-seeding has been completed with locally sourced traditional floodplain meadow seed. Pupils from Ashfield Park Primary School have also been involved. All the above organisation involved in the Ross Riverside meadow restoration project will be meeting HRH The Prince of Wales on 5th November.

HRH The Prince of Wales is Plantlife's Patron, and in 2013 called for the creation of new wild flower meadows, at least one in every county, to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Queen's Coronation. Herefordshire Meadows Group have 2 Coronation Meadows in the AONB, at Joan's Hill Farm, Woolhope (donor site) and Hurstans, Sollers Hope (restoration / recipient site). AONB volunteers have worked on both sites over the years.