

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, 2nd March, 2020 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor A. Webb (Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: D. Dovey and M. Lane

Herefordshire Council

Councillor P. Symonds

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillor S. Phelps

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC - Mr. C. Evers

One Voice Wales - Councillor G. Powell

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Nation Farmers Union - Mr. M. Price

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society - Mr. C. Barron

Local Tourism Sector - Ms. K. Ballard

River Wye Preservation Trust - Mr. R. Hesketh

National Farmers Union Wales - Mr. D. Price

Technical Advice Officers

Wye Valley AONB Manager - Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council - Mr. M. Lewis

Gloucestershire County Council - Mr. R. Niblett

Monmouthshire County Council - Mr. R. Williams

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APOLOGIES:

Councillors: L. Jones, B. Durkin, J. Hardwick, Y. Watson, D. Wheeler, C. McFarling.

Dr. G. Peterken, Mr. B. Nash, Ms. H. McDowell and Mr. R. Gething.

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 4th November 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

In doing so, the AONB Manager informed the Joint Advisory Committee that:

- A representative from the Environment Agency had been invited to today's meeting. However, due to the recent unprecedented flooding events that had occurred across the Country, the representative had been unable to attend. It was hoped that a representative from the Environment Agency would be able to attend the next Joint Advisory Committee meeting in July 2020.
- A report regarding transport collaboration will be presented to a future meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee. It was noted that some local authorities within the Wye Valley AONB are currently updating their transport policies. The Wye Valley AONB Unit will be included as part of the consultation process.

3. Public Question Time

There were no members of the public present.

4. AONB Unit 2020/21 Work Programme

We received a report regarding the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit during the forthcoming financial year.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- During the year it is anticipated that the AONB Unit will consolidate at just under eight Full time equivalent (FTE) staff which builds on the reduced capacity in the previous / current year.
- Priorities include the publishing of the revised AONB Management Plan 2020-2025, delivering the fourth Wye Valley River Festival; the Gilpin2020 celebrations; the Restoring Our Amazing River project (on the England side of the AONB); ongoing Green Infrastructure and Natural Flood Management projects (predominantly in the Monmouthshire part of the AONB); and the Welsh Government 'Sustainable

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Landscapes Sustainable Places' funding, while continuing a range of existing activities and projects and retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.

- The capacity of the AONB Unit is stretched but the budgets in the Work Programme have been approved by the AONB Steering Group and submitted to DEFRA and Natural Resources Wales (NRW).
- The AONB Unit budget is £270,750 and additional funding programmes, grants and match funding is anticipated to exceed £1million levered into the AONB during the year.
- This is the final year of a three year funding agreement with NRW and will be the start of a new core funding settlement with DEFRA, the details of which are yet to be confirmed.
- Welsh Government is working on the new one year Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) capital funding programme and is proposing to increase the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) for the year, the details of which are dependent on confirmation of the Welsh Government budget settlement.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding the control of deer and wild boar it was noted that the AONB Unit is not directly involved in this matter. This is managed and monitored by woodland owners Forestry England or Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and woodland managers, and culling takes place when appropriate determined by local priorities.
- The AONB Manager will be attending a meeting in the Forest of Dean in due course in which these issues will be discussed. He will report back to the Joint Advisory Committee regarding this matter.
- In response to a question raised requesting that the AONB Work Programme be refined to increase flood management resilience, it was noted that some of the new capital funding being received via Welsh Government will be targeted at improving recreational infrastructure and Natural Flood Management, which will address some of the damage that has occurred recently due to the unprecedented flooding events.
- A request was made for officer time to be identified when implementing the projects outlined in the report.

We resolved to endorse the AONB Unit Work Programme for 2020/2021.

5. Review of Designated Landscapes in England and Wales

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

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Welsh AONB lead officers continue to meet with Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, the National Association for AONBs and the Welsh National Parks to progress the 'Valued and Resilient' statement.
- Welsh Government officials are currently finalising proposals for capital funding schemes for the Designated Landscapes, including a Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places scheme and augmented funding for the Sustainable Development Fund.
- The 'Landscapes Review' of Designated Landscapes (National Parks and AONBs) in England, chaired by Julian Glover, was published in September 2019 with 27 'Proposals' for Government.
- The Conservative manifesto stated "We welcome the Glover Review" and it is anticipated that a formal response to it will be made by the Government later in the year.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The AONB Unit has had a 1.4% increase in its settlement from Defra, a modest but welcome increase in the AONB budget for 2020/21.

We noted the report.

6. Sustainable Development Fund & HCF AONB Fund update

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

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The SDF Assessment Panel has fully allocated the £55,000 Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in Wales in 2019/20.
- The Welsh Government has informally advised that the SDF allocation for 2020/21 will be increased to be in the region of £100,000, subject to confirmation of budget.
- The Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) has been fully established with £10,000 for immediate funding alongside an Endowment Fund, currently of £50,000.
- Herefordshire Community Foundation has established the facility for people to donate £5 to the AONB Fund by texting 'WVAONB' to 70085.

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Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Promotion of the endowment fund is still in its early stages but it is intended to address this matter, going forward.

We resolved:

- i) to welcome Welsh Government's proposed enhancement to the Sustainable Development Fund.
- ii) to welcome the establishment of the Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF).

7. AONB Management Plan Review

We received a report regarding on-going progress with the AONB Management Plan review.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- A total of 24 organisations and individuals submitted comments on the Consultation Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-25, amounting to approximately 200 specific comments.
- The assimilation of the consultation responses into the final draft of the AONB Management Plan is underway.
- A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment for the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) of the Plan is now underway which needs to be completed before the Plan can be formally adopted by the local authorities and government agencies.
- It is intended that the finalised version of the AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 will be presented for adoption at the next Joint Advisory Committee meeting on 6th July 2020.

We noted the report.

8. Ash Die Back update

We received a report regarding the most recent assessment of the Ash Die Back disease and effects on the Wye Valley.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Ash trees are the UK's third most common tree and an important tree in woodlands and hedgerows in the Wye Valley.

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- The future of Ash is threatened by Ash Die back; a disease caused by a fungus which is fatal in about 85% of Ash trees.
- 2019 was the first year when Ash Die Back was observed significantly widespread throughout the Wye Valley.
- It is the most significant tree disease to hit the UK since Dutch Elm disease in the 1970s.
- Ash Die Back will have a substantial impact on the landscape and wildlife, exacerbated by the current climate and ecological emergencies.
- Landowners need to evaluate the social, economic and environmental risks of dead or dying Ash trees, particularly along roadside and publicly accessible places.
- The impact of the disease is likely to become more obvious in 2020, both through the prevalence of dead or diseased trees in the landscape and the visibility of the removal of high risk trees in well-frequented places.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In the summer of 2019, there had been a rapid spread of Ash Die Back at the Old Station, Tintern. Significant felling works are being undertaken this week on safety grounds. The contract will take about three to four weeks to complete.
- Further inspections will be undertaken in the coming months and other infected sites are likely to be identified. Private landowners with infected trees along Highways and high risk areas may be served notice.
- There are estimated to be half a million Ash trees in Herefordshire that are affected by Ash Die Back.

We noted the report.

9. Wye Valley River Festival 2020 update

We received a report regarding the provisional programme for the Wye Valley River Festival 2020.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Funding for the Wye Valley River Festival 2020 has been secured from Arts Council England, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), Visit Wales, Arts Council of Wales, and many other sources.
- The programme of events for the Wye Valley River Festival is being finalised for the main festival fortnight between 2nd & 17th May 2020 based on the theme of 'Time'.

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- A range of school and community workshops are planned for the run up to the Festival to create props and build engagement.
- AONB Volunteers and the AONB Youth Rangers have been working in the woods making walking staves for the Festival.
- The Wye Valley AONB Unit recently won a South East Wales Tourism Innovation Award for the Wye Valley River Festival.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The progression of the Coronavirus is being closely monitored as to whether it might affect proceedings, going forward.
- The River Festival will host two significant conferences:
 - 'Art in Landscape' on Wednesday 12th -13th May 2020; with the NAAONB and fellow AONBs coming together for a day of knowledge transfer and networking to consider future national & local collaboration.
 - 'Creative Landscapes' on Thursday 14th May 2020; with land stewards and creatives from across England and Wales sharing ideas and experiences in co-creating transformational and inclusive arts experiences, with a particular focus on diversity, access, sustainability and climate change.
- The River Festival and Gilpin2020 are separate events but complement each other. It is hoped to obtain national media coverage for the River Festival. National media coverage has already been established for Gilpin 2020.
- The AONB Unit is working closely with Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism and Visit Monmouthshire. A marketing strategy is being established to market the Festival regionally and nationally.

We noted the report.

10. National Association for AONBs

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

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The AONB Manager attended the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) Chairman's Conference and AGM on 28th November 2019 which focused on taking the Glover Review forward.

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- The 'Taking the Lead' programme of professional training for staff has concluded which both the AONB Development Officer and AONB Community Links Officer participated in.
- The AONB Manager attended the AONB Lead Officers' meeting in Birmingham on 10th & 11th February 2020.
- A consortium of 11 AONBs are participating in DEFRA 'Tests & Trials' for the new post Brexit agri-environment Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS).
- NAAONB staff facilitated a joint training day for the Wye Valley & Shropshire Hills AONB teams.
- The annual National AONB 'Landscapes for Life' Conference will take place in Exeter on 7th - 9th July 2020.

We noted the report.

11. Partner and AONB Unit progress reports and updates

We received a report of the activity of the AONB Unit and various partners relating to:

- Lower Wye Catchments Natural Flood Management & Green Infrastructure Project.
- Gilpin2020.
- Water Environment Grant Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) & Catchment Advisors.
- Offa's Dyke Collaboratory.

We noted the report.

12. Dates of future meetings of the Joint Advisory Committee for 2020/21:

To be held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford on the following dates:

Monday 6th July 2020.

Monday 2nd November 2020.

Monday 1st March 2021 (to be confirmed).

The meeting ended at 3.10pm.