

LOCAL AUTHORITIES' CONTRIBUTIONS AND AONB MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING 2021 - 2024

Purpose

To request contributions from the four constituent local authorities to the budget for the Wye Valley AONB Partnership and note progress with finalising the AONB Memorandum of Understanding between the four local authorities for 2021 - 2024.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. request from the constituent local authorities the financial contributions for the Wye Valley AONB Partnership for 2021/22.
- B. encourage the constituent local authorities to finalise and agree 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 current MoU ends in March 2021 and a revised three year edition, until March 2024, is being finalised between the four local authorities.
- The MoU includes the minimum contribution expected from the local authorities 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 anticipated AONB grant funding offer letters, when received, will be appended to the MoU.
- The local authorities' financial contributions to the Wye Valley AONB Partnership are requested with a 1% increase on the current year,
- For every £1 of Local Authority contribution in 2019/20 the AONB Unit has levered in over £10.

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. The current DEFRA Grant Funding Agreement references the MoU and this is likely to be the template for the new DEFRA Grant Funding Agreement.

Implications

The following Local Authority partner contributions are requested for 2021/22. 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. Gloucestershire County Council have confirmed their AONB funding for the forthcoming three years. The other local authorities are requested to make a 1% increase on the current year.

Funding Partner	2020/21	2021/22
Herefordshire Council	£23,860	£24,099
Monmouthshire County Council	£15,716	£15,873
Forest of Dean District Council	£5,826	£5,884
Gloucestershire County Council	£3,600	£3,780
Total LA contributions	£49,002	£49,636

The proposed base budget for the AONB Unit for 2021/22 is £346,330. The local authority contributions traditionally receive up to 75% match-funding for core AONB initiatives from DEFRA and Natural Resources Wales (NRW), on behalf of Welsh Government. The anticipated grant funding in both England and Wales may be increased in response to the Reviews of National Parks and AONBs in England and Wales. However, confirmation of grant funding is not expected until after the Comprehensive Spending Review in late November or December.

For the start of the current year DEFRA negotiated 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, estimated at £18,500 for 2021/22. The AONB Unit will also be managing externally funded partnership projects with a value in excess of £150,000. These projects include the Wye Valley Walk Partnership, the Lower Wye Catchments Project, the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places capital funding from Welsh Government, AONB Youth Rangers programme and mindSCAPES. These externally funded projects extend the work of the AONB Unit and allow project investment as well as some elements of cost recovery. The leverage of the AONB Partnership in 2019/20 meant that for every £1 of local authority contribution, the AONB Unit brought in over £10.

The AONB Unit is constantly reviewing the structure and delivery of services in the AONB alongside income streams. 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 the budgetary uncertainties.

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.