

ART IN THE LANDSCAPE AND WYE VALLEY RIVER FESTIVAL

Purpose

To seek members' endorsement of the 'Art in the Landscape' National Arts Strategy with the National Association for AONBs and inform members of progress with the future of the Wye Valley River Festival.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. Formally endorses the 'Art in the Landscape' National Arts Strategy with the National Association for AONBs
- B. Welcomes and supports the progress with establishing a possible Community Interest Company (CIC) to take forward the Wye Valley River Festival, taking account of the 5 Tests previously endorsed in the Wye Valley River Festival Business Plan 2019-2024.

Key Issues

- The JAC had previously acknowledged the Art in the Landscape - A National Strategy, launched by the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) in July 2020.
- The Wye Valley AONB Unit have been closely involved in the preparation and promotion of the Strategy, along with the Wye Valley River Festival team.
- The NAAONB are encouraging all AONB Partnerships to formally endorse and adopt the Art in the Landscape Strategy - connecting people to nature through arts and culture.
- The evaluation, accounts and grant claims for the fourth Wye Valley River Festival 2020 Re-imagined are in the final stages of completion. A summary is appended.
- The JAC had previously endorsed the Wye Valley River Festival Business Plan 2019-2024 and the 5 tests identified to secure the future of the Festival through the establishment of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).
- Currently proposals are being investigated to establish a Community Interest Company (CIC) as a more appropriate and flexible autonomous body to adopt the Festival.

Reasons

The NAAONB are committed to a deeper exploration into the relationship between arts and landscape. The Art in the Landscape National Strategy, was commissioned and subsequently launched in July 2020. The objective is to actively promote the relationship between landscape and art and optimise engagement of AONB Partnerships with artists and producers

in order to ensure our most precious landscapes are more accessible and more widely understood and appreciated by the nation. The Wye Valley AONB team have been closely involved in the preparation and promotion of the Strategy with Sarah Sawyer, Wye Valley AONB Community Links Officer, on the Steering Group. The Wye Valley River Festival is nationally recognised as an exemplar of 'art in the landscape'. The Art in the Landscape National Strategy is available to read here:

https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/application/files/2116/0318/0964/Art_in_the_Landscape_-_Final_Report.pdf

The Wye Valley River Festival 2020 Re-Imagined is now being concluded with the final grant funding claims and evaluation being completed. The Festival was supported and funded by the Wye Valley AONB Partnership, Arts Council England, the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) from Welsh Government, Arts Council of Wales, Visit Wales, Forestry England, Foresters' Forest Landscape Partnership supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Environment Agency & Ross Town Council with in-kind support from numerous volunteers & local communities.

The Wye Valley River Festival Business Plan 2019-2024 set out the medium to long term prospect for the Festival. Central to this was the establishment of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) as a sustainable vehicle to take the Festival forward as a new governance, management and delivery model. Five tests were identified, and previously adopted by the JAC, to ensure this (see Appendix 2).

Implications

Endorsing and adopting the Art in the Landscape National Strategy will signal the Wye Valley AONB Partnership's on-going strong support for both the NAAONB and engagement with the arts and connecting people to nature through arts and culture. The Wye Valley AONB is already a leader nationally in this field.

The completion of the fourth Wye Valley River Festival draws to a close a co-production period and process that tested everyone's determination, commitment, flexibility and creativity to the limit. The consequences of postponing and re-formatting the Festival under the various Covid-19 restrictions has been significant on the work programme of the AONB Unit, displacing other planned activity throughout the year. However, generally the consensus and anecdotal feedback has been that the Festival was well received and a success, given the challenges everybody faced. Delivering the Festival at all has been a significant achievement under the circumstances.

The Wye Valley River Festival Business Plan 2019-2024 recognised that a new governance, management and delivery model would be the most sustainable vehicle to take the Festival forward. Business Plan proposed the establishment of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) under Five Tests endorsed by the JAC (see Appendix 2). A CIO was recommended because of its simple reporting structure, tax benefits and charitable income generation.

However subsequent investigation has identified that a Community Interest Company (CIC) may be a more appropriate and flexible autonomous body for the Festival. Advice is being sought from local CICs & CIOs, Herefordshire Council and the Festival of Thrift CIC. It appears that a CIC would allow the creative team involvement on the Board of Directors and also allow them to be paid for their work. Given the central role of the creative team to this point it seems therefore a more appropriate route to follow. There appears to be the possibility

of a subsequent or additional move to a CIO in future years, should that prove to be a valuable option.

The establishment of an Advisory Group is also recommended, to engage a broad range of partners in helping to guide and steer the organisation, but without the legal oversight and responsibility of the Board. Work will need to be undertaken to separate out the roles and responsibilities of the Directors of the CIC from the proposed Advisory Group. This is also an opportunity to engage with target groups currently under represented in the Festival audiences and to involve key funders more actively.

The relationship between the AONB Partnership and the future organisation is clearly a crucial one and will require a clear agreement of roles and responsibilities. Some comparable Heads of Terms have been shared and advice is being sought from Herefordshire Council. Any such agreement will need to outline in a transparent way what the strategic links are and what priorities the CIC will be delivering against, with clear targets for each year and establish review points.

Wye Valley River Festival will be able to capitalise on its recent successes, but it will take hard work and commitment to establish the new organisation and then future Festivals.

Background

Wye Valley River Festivals in 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020 have been Wye Valley AONB Partnership projects, led by the Wye Valley AONB Unit, Desperate Men and Phillippa Haynes in a unique and creative collaboration between arts and environment professionals, who develop, produce and deliver the Festival with stakeholders and the communities in and around the Wye Valley AONB.

Appendix 1

Wye Valley River Festival

Summary of Evaluation of Wye Valley River Festival 2020 Re-Imagined

The global Covid -19 Pandemic which took hold in early spring 2020, tested everyone's determination, commitment, flexibility and creativity to the limit. We have successfully delivered an outdoor arts and environment festival online in very difficult circumstances. That is a testament to our team, partners, funders, communities and our audience base, all developed over the past three festivals. We have all learnt a lot from this year's festival which will inform many aspects of future work.

The original Wye Valley River Festival 2020 was due to take place May 2nd-17th, however the emerging global pandemic meant that we took the decision to postpone the planned May festival. During the original May dates we trialled online film presentations from some of our programmed artists via Facebook and social media, and worked with University of South Wales students to develop lockdown films as part of their course work. This content was viewed by 9,691 people, and we received many positive comments. This helped our re-framing of the programme and maintain a presence until September when the WVRF2020 Re-Imagined festival actually took place.

WVRF2020 Re-Imagined employed **222** artists, providing artists, creatives and specialists with **1207** paid days' work.

We commissioned and created **141** new pieces of work, plus the additional **19** short films which we put out in May, all of which have legacy and potential for being presented by us and others in future, one piece (Stars by Starlight) is already airing on BBC Radio Scotland. Artists were supported to explore new ways of working and presenting pieces.

We created and uploaded **92** hours of content/entertainment on the festival website, a combination of films, podcasts, music, talks, workshops and live streams.

We delivered **4** days of live (Covid compliant) theatrical and musical animations and interventions on the streets of Chepstow, Llandogo, Monmouth and Redbrook. To live audiences or around **3,500**

We provided training for **30** non-professionals in the environmental sector to make and produce short films which were showcased as part of the programme.

We successfully delivered an online version of the conference that we had planned in Partnership with Articulture.

For the period that the festival film content was available it was viewed or played **9, 881** times, a total of **533,050** hours' worth of entertainment.

The film content was downloaded to be played later **85, 273** times. Most people watched on desktops or mobiles. We can deduce from the analytics that most people watched multiple films.

We had **7,200** unique visits to the website during the festival week, 21st – 28th September, anecdotal evidence suggest people watched /listened with one or two other people, so a conservative estimate of our total audience would be **11,000** over the week.

Our social media content reached **292,287** people generating WVRF 481 new followers going forward.

The schools' projects and outreach had to be reimaged several times due to and ever changing lockdown landscape but 5 local schools received materials, info packs for teachers and a 20min video tutorial.

The feedback from audiences, artists and participants has been overwhelmingly positive with many comments expressing support, admiration, thanks, respect and an appetite for more, be it online or preferably back in a field at some point.

Our audience survey reported that

94% had enjoyed all the content that they saw

89% said that they agreed that taking part in WVRF2020 was enjoyable and that they had learnt something new.

77% said it had made them connect more to the landscape.

63% of people said it has inspired them to make their own art work.

83% would prefer the festival to come back as a live festival, however they would also attend a future on-line WVRF.

Five Tests

Five key tests are identified in the Wye Valley River Festival Business Plan 2019-2024 as necessary before progress can be made towards a new CIO as an independent entity for the governance and management of the Festival.

The Five tests are as follows:

- 1) To build up a reserve of funds before setting up a CIO. This needs to be in the region of £50,000 to enable the recruitment and training of a leadership board, recruitment and employment of a part-time employee, administration and office costs and all legal fees.
Time frame: aiming to achieve by December 2023. This will be reviewed as the Business Plan is updated after the next Festival in June 2020.
- 2) Select and nurture a leadership team to become part of a future Board to run a Wye Valley River Festival CIO.
Time frame: aiming to achieve by December 2022.
- 3) Formalise key partnerships with key organisations, community supporters & artists around the vision, mission, values and aims of Wye Valley River Festival set out in this Business Plan.
Time frame: aiming to have partnership agreements with those partners that have become long term supporters to achieve this by December 2019.
- 4) Legal requirements are confirmed by host authorities Monmouthshire County Council, Herefordshire Council, Gloucestershire County Council and Forest of Dean District Council enabling the transition of Wye Valley River Festival from a Wye Valley AONB Partnership Project to an independent entity: CIO.
Time frame: aiming to achieve by December 2020.
- 5) Satisfy the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), as the Festival leadership body, that all the above tests have been met.
Time frame: aiming to achieve at the latest by December 2024, can be earlier if all other transition tests are met.