

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 1st March, 2021 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor: A Webb (Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: L. Jones and M. Lane

Herefordshire Council

Councillors: J. Hardwick, P. Symonds and Y. Watson

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillors: C. McFarling and S. Phelps

Gloucestershire County Council

Councillor P. Molyneux

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers

R. Gething – Herefordshire Association Local Councils

Councillor R. Edwards – One Voice Wales

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire – Mr. B. Nash

National Farmers Union - Mr. M. Price

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

Local Wildlife Trusts – Mr. A. Nixon

Gwent Wildlife Trust – Mr. A. Taylor

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:

Councillor B. Durkin, Ms. A. Newey, Ms. H. McDowell, Ms. H. Stace, Ms. D. Griffiths, Ms. L. Duberley and Mr. G. Parry.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. County Councillor David Dovey

Before commencing proceedings the Chair, on behalf of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee, paid tribute to the late County Councillor David Dovey who had recently passed away. As a mark of respect, the Committee held a minute's silence.

3. Welcome

The Chair welcomed Councillor Rita Edwards to the meeting who is representing one Voice Wales. Councillor Edwards has replaced Councillor Malcolm Powell.

4. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 2nd November 2020 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

5. Public Question Time

No questions received.

6. Wye Water Quality

We received the report regarding the current situation with water quality in the River Wye, pending a presentation at the next meeting.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The water quality of the Wye, particularly in relation to phosphate levels, remains a critical issue in the Wye Catchment.
- The concentration of pollutants, particularly phosphates, in the Wye catchment, exacerbated by warm weather and any reduction in water quantity, can lead to algae blooms on the Wye.
- In 2019 Natural England advised that plans or projects that result in potentially damaging nutrient loading to the Wye, among other catchments in England, would require an appropriate assessment under the Habitats Directive.

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- Natural Resources Wales completed a review in December 2020 which confirmed that more than 60% of the Welsh Wye is now failing limits for phosphate.
- The Wye Nutrient Management Board, hosted by Herefordshire Council, is the lead body coordinating collaborative effort on the issue.
- The Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales have agreed to give a presentation on water quality issues at the next Joint Advisory Committee meeting on 5th July 2021.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding parts of the River Wye having bathing water classification, it was noted that this was an initiative that has been promoted across the Country. This would be a matter for the Environment Agency and the Wye Navigation Advisory Committee to consider.
- This matter will be discussed at Herefordshire Full Council meeting on 5th March 2021.
- The Joint Advisory Committee is only able to advise on this matter.
- It would be useful to notify all Council's located within the AONB regarding the Joint Advisory Committee's concerns in respect of the pollution on the river Wye.
- The Senedd had recently held a meeting regarding nitrate vulnerable zones. The Wales Government is aware of the issues regarding pollution on the rivers Usk and Wye. It was noted that the whole of Wales has been designated as a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone.
- It was agreed that for the next meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee, an invitation be extended to Councillor Swinglehurst from Herefordshire Council to join this meeting, as she is the Chair of the Nutrient Management Board.

We resolved to:

- (i) note the current situation and activities of partner organisations in relation to water quality issues in the River Wye and its tributaries.
- (ii) welcome the offer of the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales for a presentation at the next Joint Advisory Committee meeting on 5th July 2021.

7. AONB Unit 2021/22 Work Programme

We received a report regarding the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit during the forthcoming financial year, which is subject to new funding agreements with DEFRA and NRW.

In doing so the following information was noted:

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- The table in the report sets out the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit in the form of the Work Programme 2021/2022, including the AONB's 50th Anniversary during 2021.
- Activities are assessed for impacts of any potential on-going implications from Covid-19.
- During the year it is expected that the AONB Unit will remain with about eight full time equivalent (FTE) posts although some staff and roles will change and capacity of the AONB Unit continues to be stretched.
- Priorities include the development of the AONB Nature Recovery Network Plan, the anticipated implementation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (in England); the delivery of a second year of projects funded through the Welsh Government Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme, the culmination of the Restoring Our Amazing River project (on the England side of the AONB); ongoing Green Infrastructure and Natural Flood Management projects; and the promotion and administration of grants through the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Herefordshire Community Foundation AONB Fund, responding to requirements and impacts from easing of Covid-19 restrictions, while continuing a range of existing activities and projects and retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.
- The core budgets in the Work Programme have yet to be confirmed as new funding agreements are awaited with NRW and DEFRA.
- The AONB Unit budget, as presented to the AONB Steering Group, is £271,350 and additional funding programmes, grants and match funding is anticipated to exceed £780,000 levered into the AONB during the year.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- A request was made that a dark skies project be considered to combat rising light pollution in the AONB. A visit to the Brecon Beacons National Park could be considered, going forward, as the National Park has experience in this matter.
- CPRE nationally has recently finished conducting a dark skies observation (6th to 15th February). This report will be available later in the year. This might be useful in aiding a dark skies project within the AONB.
- It was noted that there is increasing light pollution across the Wye Valley on both sides of the border. This is having a detrimental effect on bat foraging behaviour. Planning conditions therefore, need to be enforced to provide adequate protection for bats.
- The AONB Manager informed the Committee that the talk that he gave at the Wye Valley AONB 50th Anniversary meeting is available to view on the AONB YouTube channel. This will be circulated to the Joint Advisory Committee.

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- The AONB Manager stated that several of the Welsh AONBs and National Parks, as well as those across England have undertaken work on developing dark skies projects. Discussion has been undertaken with these organisations with a view to preparing a way forward for the Wye Valley AONB to address light pollution in the region.
- The AONB Manager stated that he would be reviewing the format of the AONB business plan, as discussed at a previous Joint Advisory Committee meeting.

We resolved to endorse the AONB Unit Work Programme for 2021/2022.

8. Art in the Landscape and Wye Valley River Festival update

We received a report regarding the 'Art in the Landscape' National Arts Strategy with the National Association for AONBs and an update on progress with the future of the Wye Valley River Festival.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Joint Advisory Committee 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 has 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.
- The Joint Advisory Committee had previously endorsed the Wye Valley River Festival Business Plan 2019-2024 and the five 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.

We resolved to:

- (i) formally endorse the 'Art in the Landscape' National Arts Strategy with the National Association for AONBs;

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- (ii) welcome and support the progress with establishing a possible Community Interest Company (CIC) to take forward the Wye Valley River Festival, taking account of the five tests previously endorsed in the Wye Valley River Festival Business Plan 2019-2024.

9. Glover Review & Farming in Protected Landscapes

We received a report regarding progress with the implementation of the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes in England and announcement of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The 'Glover' Landscapes Review of National Parks and AONBs in England was published in 2019 with 27 'Proposals' for Government.
- Proposal 5 states: "A central place for national landscapes in new Environmental Land Management Schemes".
- The formal response from Government has yet to be produced but is anticipated sometime this year. The delay of the Environment Bill may be related to the timing of the response.
- The NAAONB and AONB lead officers are collaborating with DEFRA on the provision of information, statistics and case studies in support of implementing the Glover Review.
- Recent collation of figures for DEFRA identified that in 2019/20 the DEFRA core funding for the 34 AONBs in England totalled £2.05million against which the AONBs levered in an additional £9.24million.
- 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' was published in the Agricultural Transition Plan in November 2020 for establishment from April 2021. Details and clarification on implementation are awaited from DEFRA.
- The NAAONB secured funding from DEFRA for each AONB and National Park to deliver advocacy work with farmers in relation to Countryside Stewardship and the forthcoming Environmental Land Management scheme.

We noted the report.

10. Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales

We received a report regarding progress with the Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales, with additional Welsh Government funding and the establishment of the National Designated Landscapes Partnership.

In doing so the following information was noted:

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- In December 2020 the inaugural Wales National Designated Landscapes Partnership meeting was held with officers from Welsh AONBs and National Parks, Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales and the National Association for AONBs.
- Welsh Government has confirmed a second year of Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) funding with some slightly revised criteria for projects.
- Welsh Government has allocated revenue funding for 2021/22 that enables the retention of one AONB post and the creation of one new post.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question regarding how the designated landscapes integrates with the nature recovery network plans, it was noted that it had been agreed at the 2019 national AONB conference that each AONB would produce its own nature recovery plan. Every AONB is working on this. In the Wye Valley, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust has undertaken a nature recovery mapping exercise. It has been agreed with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and part funded by Natural England to roll this out into Herefordshire. Most of the Monmouthshire area of the AONB will be covered also as this exercise includes a three kilometre buffer zone around it. Talks are being held in Wales for a similar initiative to include National Parks and AONBs to undertake nature recovery mapping.
- Gwent Wildlife Trust is working with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust to develop the nature recovery network. The strategy will commence in April 2021 and will be a nine year strategy. The Strategy will include natural solutions to alleviate climate change, such as peatland restoration and tree planting with a view to making the landscape more resilient for the flora and fauna in the region.

We noted the report.

11. 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 Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) currently has £69,552 allocated from the £100,000 offered by Welsh Government for 2020/21, with £30,448 remaining.
- Four potential applications are anticipated shortly which if approved would account for full allocation.
- Welsh Government has confirmed an allocation of £100,000 of SDF in 2021/22.
- Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) hosts the Wye Valley AONB Fund which was established with £10,000 for immediate funding alongside an Endowment

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Fund of £50,000. The 2020/21 Quarter Three balances were £6,779.27 and £54,578.05 respectively. Subsequently, grants totalling £1,500 have been awarded.

- Applications are welcome for both sets of funding for 2021/22.

We noted the report.

12. National Association for AONBs

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

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The NAAONB 2019/20 Annual report is published and available on line.
- The national AONB's Chairperson's Conference is to be held in March 2021 jointly with National Parks to focus on the Farming in Protected Landscape programme.
- The national 'Landscapes for Life' Conference 2021 is scheduled for early July 2021 and will be on-line but 'hosted' by the five Devon AONBs.
- The NAAONB are involved in the national Nature Recovery Network Delivery Partnership, led by Natural England.
- The Chief Executive of the NAAONB, Howard Davies, is stepping down later this year and recruitment has commenced for his replacement.
- The AGM for the NAAONB was held on-line in November 2020 with the AONB Manager representing the Wye Valley AONB.

We noted the report.

13. Partner reports

We received a report regarding activity of various partners in the Wye Valley AONB, namely:

- Forestry England update.
- National Forest Wales.
- Gloucestershire County Council – Wireworks Bridge Tintern.

Having received the report the following points were noted:

- Repairs and maintenance are being carried out to Biblins Bridge, necessitating its closure from 8th February 2021 for 3 – 4 weeks. This work includes replacing the timber 'U' frames along the bridge, as well as resurfacing the bridge with new anti-slip boards. The bridge will be re-opening in due course.

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- The footpath on the English side of the border downstream from Biblins has seen two landslips on the river bank.
- Currently, there are significant diversions in place for the Wye Valley Walk.
- The Wye Valley Greenway Cycleway Initiative will be opening in April 2021.
- Currently, there are a number of road closures down the valley to undertake ongoing maintenance of areas where landslips have occurred south of Redbrook and south of Tintern. It was noted that the subsidence works at Redbrook is anticipated to be finished by the 31st March 2021.

We noted the report.

14. **AONB Unit progress reports and updates**

We received a report regarding activity of the Wye Valley AONB Unit relating to:

- AONB 50th Anniversary programme.
- AONB Nature Recovery Plan & Priority Species.
- Water Environment Grant ROAR & Catchment Advisors (England only).
- Natural Flood Management (NFM) and Riparian Tree project work.
- Wye Valley Villages Transport Plan update.
- Lower Wye Green Infrastructure (GI) work (Monmouthshire).
- Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) AONB Office refurbishment.
- Undergrounding.

In response to questions raised regarding the Wye Valley Transport Plan, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that this initiative arose following the concerns of some villages regarding the speed of traffic through the villages with a view to developing a more holistic approach to address the traffic issues. Welsh Government funding has been received which would have an impact on where this funding could be spent. However, this process will be undertaken as strategically as possible to address cross border issues.

We noted the report.

15. **Dates of meetings for 2021**

To be held at 2.00pm on the following dates:

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Monday 5th July 2021

Monday 1st November 2021

Subject to Covid-19 restrictions, the meetings will be held either remotely via Microsoft Teams or at the Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

The meeting ended at 3.40 pm.