

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, 4th July, 2022 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor: C. McFarling (Vice Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: E. Bryn and S. Garratt

Gloucestershire County Council

County Councillor: T. Hale

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillor: D. Wheeler

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – C. Evers

Herefordshire Association Local Councils – R. Gething

One Voice Wales – R. Edwards

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire – B. Nash

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – C. Barron

River Wye Preservation Trust – R. Hesketh

Technical Advice Officers:

Wye Valley AONB Manager – A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – M. Lewis

Wye Valley AONB Admin Officer – S. Seymour

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APOLOGIES:

County Councillor A. Webb, Councillor B. Durkin, Councillor Y. Watson, Councillor J. Hardwick, A. Thomas, M. Price, R. Williams and J. Atkin

1. Introductions & New Members

The Vice Chairman took the chair and welcomed the members.
S. Seymour attended to note minutes as the Clerk was also unable to attend.

2. Declarations of Interest

None received.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public had been received.

4. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 4th July 2022 were confirmed as accurate. It was suggested that minutes should be shared with Town & Community Councils. Also it was requested that it would be advantageous to have main actions in minutes distributed early.

4.1 Format / location of future meetings at Coleford

It was agreed that Coleford was the most convenient venue for the meetings. At present it is without a system to enable hybrid meetings within the Council Chamber. The AONB Manager will further investigate purchase or hire of a mobile system to use at the venue. Councillor C McFarling advised that an estimate of £20K had been received for a fixed hybrid system.

4.2 Joint Advisory Committee Co-opted members, nominations & attendance

A vacancy has arisen with the retirement of Dr George Peterken as JAC member representing the Voluntary Conservation Sector in Gloucestershire. The Vice-chairman extended thanks and appreciation to George for all his work with the committee. It was agreed that recruitment for this position needs to be inclusive and diverse. The AONB Manager will look into expanding the representation through new members.

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5. Annual Report 2021/22

We received the annual report for 2021/22 on the achievements of the Wye Valley AONB Unit. The Vice-chairman congratulated the extent of the work of the team. In doing so, the following information was noted:

- High levels of achievement were maintained by the AONB Unit despite the challenges of the on-going Coronavirus pandemic restricting many activities and some reduced capacity due to staffing issues.
- The AONB Unit has levered in over £16 for every £1 of local authority contribution during 2020/21.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- There was a late settlement from NRW but extra funding received from DEFRA.
- AONB Manager confirmed that new members of staff have added a fresh dynamic and enthusiastic approach to their roles within the team.
- The Vice-chairman noted that the large work programme with activities and outcomes is difficult to scrutinise. KPI's could be used.
- A presentation to show achievements of the AONB unit would be beneficial.
- A traffic light system to high light progress against the original work programme could be advantageous. It was agreed that not all actions are measurable and that setting targets can go against the main objectives.

The JAC welcomed the Annual Report of the AONB achievements for 2021/22.

6. River Wye Emergency and Action

We received a report regarding the latest activities and plans to improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients and help restore the River Wye.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- It is widely recognised that coordinated work needs to progress on the restoration of the River Wye and River Lugg to conserve and enhance the catchment's biodiversity, natural beauty and to enable future sustainable development, in the context of the climate and environment emergency.
- The Environment Agency (EA), in their River Wye Report (July 22), stress that the issues facing the River Wye and its high phosphate levels are complex and require urgent action by all contributing sectors with a coordinated catchment based approach.
- Phosphate discharges into the rivers Wye and Lugg originate from 2 main sources; diffuse agricultural pollution (about 60%) and sewage treatment works (up to 40%)
- The Wye Nutrient Management Board (NMB) have adopted the River Wye Phosphate Action Plan.

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- The NMB Technical Advisory Group (TAG) established 5 sub-groups to progress key themes in the Phosphate Action Plan. The AONB Manager sits on the Innovation & projects sub-group.
- Herefordshire Council have set up a Phosphates Commission to consider their strategic approach to water quality issues in the Wye & Lugg, with neighbouring local authorities.
- Monmouthshire County Council recognises its rivers and coast are in crisis and has adopted a Motion for the Rivers and Oceans Action Plan.
- Significant reduction in nutrient input from all sources is required across the whole catchment, but 5 key areas, all upstream of the AONB, have been identified with a high proportion of pressures and high phosphate concentrations for targeted investigations, analysis and remedial action.
- The AONB Unit continues to manage partnership projects and collaborative initiatives including through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, to support farmers and land-managers in and around the AONB.
- The AONB Partnership winter seminar will focus on issues and activities in & around the AONB that improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients & help restore the River Wye.
- The Wye Valley AONB Partnership will do everything within its powers, purposes and resources to work with all individuals, groups and organisations to convene, enable and deliver on the restoration, conservation and enhancement of the River Wye and its tributaries, which are one of the central Special Qualities of the Wye Valley AONB.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Wye Valley AONB Unit manages several projects and initiatives, including with EA, NRW, WUF, Herefordshire Meadows and Farm Herefordshire that support and advise farmers to address some of the contributing factors to poor water quality in the Wye, such as reducing soil erosion and agricultural run-off into the river in the AONB.
- Large amounts of action is taking place with many organisations, groups and individuals including Friends of the Lower Wye. The Main organisation is the Wye & Usk Foundation who, as a charity, help coordinate the smaller groups.
- A discussion regarding the current state of the river, including the run off from the spread of poultry waste, concluded that poultry legislation is not fit for purpose and Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) Act 1961 has failed.
- Information is gathered across the catchment with data gathering every 15 minutes at key points.
- One technical solution is the use of anaerobic digesters for the excess manure.
- Funding is being negotiated with EA to support a winter programme of promotion of water management events to raise awareness with farmers and land managers, with WUF, Herefordshire Meadows and Farm Herefordshire.
- AONB Species Action Plans are being prepared in response to the National AONB Colchester Declaration pledge to adopt species and reverse their decline. Water Crowfoot is one of the Species Action Plans that the AONB Unit will publish in 2023 as an indicator for water quality in the AONB.

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- The AONB Partnership winter seminar, in late February or early March, will focus on land management issues in and around the AONB and activities and plans to improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients and help restore the River Wye. More information will follow regarding this seminar.

We resolved that:

The JAC, as an organisation long aware of the significant decline in the condition of the River Wye, which is so central to the Wye Valley AONB, welcomes the statements and concerted collaborative actions now being declared and advanced by the main stake holders in the Wye catchment, to improve, water quality, reduce excess nutrients and help restore the River Wye and its tributaries.

The Wye Valley AONB Partnership will do everything within its powers, purposes and resource to work with all individuals, groups and organisations to convene, enable and deliver on the restoration, conservation and enhancement of the River Wye and its tributaries, which are one of the Special Qualities of the Wye Valley AONB.

7. AONB Special Species Action Plans

We received a report regarding the first of the 5 AONB Species Action Plans, for the Noble Chafer Beetle, under the Colchester Declaration.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Colchester Declaration – a ‘declaration for nature’ was produced by the National Association for AONBS (NAAONB) and supported by all the AONB partnerships in 2019.
- Five species, or assemblage of species, have been chosen as representative of the Wye Valley AONB Special Qualities.
- The first Species Action Plan, for the Noble Chafer Beetle, relating to orchard habitats & Veteran Trees has been published, and is appended below.
- The AONB Unit is working on the production of the remaining Species Action Plans and an accompanying Wye Valley AONB Nature Recovery Plan.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The AONB Manager apologised for the misspelling of Noble in the report.
- Progress to date on delivering the Noble Chafer Beetle Species Action Plan (SAP), is led by Ellie Baggett, AONB Nature Recovery Officer
- A partnership was developed with Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL) during initial discussions about the species.
 - 27 orchard sites across the 3 AONB counties (Monmouthshire, Gloucestershire & Herefordshire) were surveyed, resulting in two sightings of adult beetles, and one sighting of larvae, all in Herefordshire orchards near Woolhope & Checkley.
- A presentation about the noble chafer SAP was given during the AONB Partnership Study Tour in September.

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- It was questioned whether Pine Martens were detrimental to this species and others in orchard habitats and veteran trees. There is a lack of data on this species.
- Work is also progressing on the other Species Actions Plans.

We resolved to endorse the Noble Chafer Beetle Specie Action Plan and welcome the progress on the commitments in the Colchester Declaration and the other forthcoming Species Action Plans.

8. Review of the Designated Landscapes in England and Wales

We received an update regarding the progress with the respective Reviews of Designated Landscapes England and Wales.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The DEFRA announcement following the public consultation on the Government Response to the Landscapes Review has been delayed due to the recent turmoil in Westminster.
- Dr Thérèse Coffey MP has now been appointed as the new DEFRA Secretary of State Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. A request for her or other M.P.s to visit the area would be beneficial.
- Meanwhile Natural England, the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB), National Parks England and AONB lead officers are collaborating with DEFRA on various aspects of the anticipated proposals, including the potential rebranding of AONBs to 'National Landscapes'.
- Natural England have published the All England Strategic Landscape Mapping Assessment Tool and are continuing the evaluation of the Yorkshire Wolds for potential AONB designation.
- Welsh Government have published the recommendations from the Biodiversity Deep Dive which includes unlocking the potential of the Designated Landscapes.
- Responsibility for AONBs in Welsh Government has moved back to the Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd.
- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) continues to liaise and co-ordinate collaboration with both governments and key stakeholders over progressing the agenda for AONBs.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The Glover Review response is still awaited.

We noted the report.

9. AONB Partnership Study Tour

We received a report regarding feedback on the success of the AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour.

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In doing so, the following information was noted:

- A total of 33 people attended the annual AONB Partnership Tour on 30th September.
- There was a good spread of representation from throughout the AONB even though the Tour was focused around Ross-on-Wye, Brampton Abbots, Lydbrook & Welsh Bicknor in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire in the AONB.
- The tour visited a range of sites associated land-use and land management around various AONB projects and initiatives along with regenerative farming and recreation, including variously football, fishing and hostel accommodation.
- The time and dedication of the speakers and hosts is greatly appreciated.
- Feedback from attendees of the Tour has been extremely positive.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- After a 2 year absence, the Tour was greatly appreciated.
- The presentation at Townsend farm on regenerative agriculture and Farming in Protected Landscapes was inspiring, thought provoking, and an excellent choice.
- The AONB manager will organise a JAC Winter seminar which will focus on regenerative farming.

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 national 'Landscapes for Life' Conference 2022 was held at Lancaster University in mid-September attended by most of the AONB team.
- AONB Lead Officers have met on-line regularly to debate issues including the forthcoming Government response to the Glover Landscape Review.
- The NAAONB has recruited a new part-time Collaboration and National Partnerships Lead to liaise with DEFRA over development of a Landscapes, Parks & Trails Partnership.
- The NAAONB AGM and national AONBs Chairpersons' will be held on-line on 17th November, with the topic "Green Finance – What is it? What isn't it? And what potential does it hold for AONBs?"

Having received the update, the following points were noted:

- New AONB staff members found the conference very rewarding.
- AONBs should only be renamed to National Landscapes if or when there are extra powers and resources.
- The Designation will remain 'AONB' in law.
- NE Mapping of 'natural beauty' is a giving concern to some AONB Partnerships.

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We noted the report.

11. AONB Unit and Partner progress reports and updates

We received a report regarding the activity of the Wye Valley AONB Unit and other partners.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Farming in Protected Landscapes – the new officer Anna Stankiewicz joined the AONB unit in August and has been very active in her new role. The panel met in September and approved 3 further projects. Just under £60,000 remains available for FiPL grants until March 2023. There were a few changes to the Assessment Panel – Andrew Nixon has left Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and will need to be replaced. Rob Edwards has replaced Rachel Bosanquet.
- Wye Valley Invasive Species programme (WISP) – AONB Lower Wye project Officer, and Lower Wye Nature Recovery officer, have been supervising contractors and working with local communities and Action Groups to stop the spread of the four invasive species – Japanese Knotweed, American Skunk Cabbage, Cherry Laurel and Himalayan Balsam.
- Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project – AONB Development Officer alongside Gwent Wildlife Trust and The Woodland Trust are improving the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) within the AONB as well as improving connectivity between them. The funding is from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places:
 - Collaborative Dark Skies Wales project – A 3 year project covering all 8 Designated Landscapes. A Wales Dark Skies Officer will be appointed. This will complement the Kerne Bridge Dark Skies Project operating in the Walford Parish.
 - Lower Wye Valley Village Halls Energy efficiency & Hub development. – The new AONB Community Links Officer is managing the SLSP grants to village halls under the themes of: Decarbonisation, Resilient and Green Local Communities and More Sustainable Tourism.
- Sustainable Development Fund and Herefordshire Community Foundation Wye Valley AONB Fund. The new Community Links Officer is managing these. £54,453 has been committed leaving £45,547 available for SDF grant applications. £5,000 now available through HCF. There will be an additional donation from a film company of approx. £10K.
- Wye Valley Walk website: This is now live with QR codes replacing the stamped passport system, registration is via the website.
- Wye Valley River festival 2022 update: the final event of the Wye Valley River Festival 2022 was held in the grounds of Tintern Abbey. Despite the weather this was well attended. 'Alchemy and Artistry – Tintern Fire Garden!' did not fail to impress all.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

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- Footway on the Wye Valley Walk at Redbrook has some erosion. Mon CC has this listed for future improvement and will check if there is space for a pavement.
- A question was asked if a Welsh Version of the Wye Valley Walk Map was available. AONB Manager will check.

We noted the report.

12. Date of next meetings at 2pm

Monday 6th March 2023 at 2.00pm

Monday 3rd July 2023 at 2.00pm