

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 March, 2024 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor C. McFarling (Vice-Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: E. Bryn and D. Rooke

Gloucestershire County Council

County Councillor T. Hale

Herefordshire Council

Councillor: S. Cole

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers
(HALC) – Ms. B. Vine

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

Technical Advice Officers

National Landscapes Manager – Mr. A. Blake
Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis
Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams
AONB Planning Officer – Mr. J. Bailey
Wye Valley National Landscape – Mr. Celyn Davies
Wye Valley National Landscape – Mr. S. Evans
Gloucestershire County Council - Amartya Deb

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: S. Garratt, A. Webb, E. O'Driscoll, D. Wheeler and G. Morgan

Ms. R. Edwards, Mr. B. Nash, Mr. M. Price, Ms.R. Clay, R. Niblett, Ms. E. Whitehouse,
Dr. J. Hynes, Ms. M. Getgood, Mr. R. Hatton and Mr. M. Sweeney

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1. Declarations of Interest

None received.

2. Public Questions - Bigsweir Bridge Restrictions & Monmouth Bridge Closure

In response to questions raised regarding Bigsweir Bridge restrictions, the Monmouth Bridge closure and the impact this will have on the area with potential highways issues arising regarding lorry access in the area, the National Landscapes Manager stated that he would make enquires with the Highways Departments for Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire County Councils with regard to traffic monitoring being undertaken and identify any alternative vehicular routes that are being established, and report back.

It was noted that surface repair work for the Wye Bridge was currently out to tender.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee meeting dated 6th November 2023 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

4. Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) Review

We received a report to consider establishing a Task and Finish Group to review current vacancies and the constitution of the Joint Advisory Committee and propose recommendations with regard to changes of membership and terms of reference.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- There are a number of vacancies that have emerged in the co-opted membership of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC).
- Recent initiatives, including the Glover Review and the Diversity & Inclusion training provided through Welsh Government, have highlighted the need for increasing diversity in public sector representation.
- The Joint Agreement as to the establishment and functions of the Wye Valley AONB JAC should be reviewed from time to time.
- A review of current vacancies and the constitution of the Joint Advisory Committee can be undertaken by a small Task and Finish Group, of three to five members supported by officers, who can report back to the JAC with proposed recommendations.

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The following Joint Advisory Committee members agreed to sit on the Task and Finish Group:

Councillor Chris McFarling
County Councillor Emma Bryn
Chris Barron

The National Landscapes Manager informed the Committee that he would contact all Members of the Joint Advisory Committee as well as relevant external candidates to ascertain if they would like to join the Task and Finish Group.

5. National Landscape Team 2024/25 Work Programme

We received a report regarding the National Landscape Team 2024/25 Work Programme.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The table within the report establishes the proposed business plan for the National Landscape Team in the form of the outline Work Programme 2024/2025.
- The Work Programme remains 'draft' as final confirmation is awaited from DEFRA on new capital funding for 2024/25.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the four constituent local authorities is intended to give medium term security and commitment to the National Landscape Partnership.
- The current MoU ends in March 2024 and a revised three year edition is being prepared, meanwhile it is prudent to extend the existing version for up to 12 months until the revised version is adopted and signed by the four local authorities.
- Work Programme priorities for 2024/2025 include the on-going development of the Nature Recovery Plan, Species Action Plans and Climate Action Plan; promotion and delivery of what is currently the final year of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grant programme in England; the distribution and administration of grants through the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Herefordshire Community Foundation Wye Valley National Landscape Fund; the delivery of the final year of projects funded through the 3-year tranche of Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme; including ongoing control of Invasive Non-Native Species, support for Village Halls and enhancements to the Wye Valley Walk, in preparation for the route's 50th Anniversary in 2025; and continuing a range of existing activities and projects; while retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.
- The National Landscape Team core budget for 2024/5, as presented to the National Landscape Steering Group, is £457,000 with additional funding programmes, grants

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and match funding anticipated to exceed £835,000 levered into the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty during the year.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The Wye Valley Walk is being fully waymarked and enhanced in certain areas in readiness for the route's 50th Anniversary in 2025.
- The decking on Lydbrook Bridge is in need of repair / full scale restoration. Funding for the repair and maintenance work has been established.
- In response to a question raised regarding safeguarding, it was noted that Monmouthshire County Council takes the lead in providing safeguarding training. Most staff have completed the Level 1 training with some staff having already undertaken the Level 2 training. A complaints procedure exists for staff and volunteers whereby a mechanism has been established to allow for direct reporting of staff by other members of staff.
- The National Landscapes Manager would introduce a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating within the work programme for future Joint Advisory Committee Meetings.

We resolved:

- (i) to endorse the outline Work Programme for the National Landscape Team for 2024/2025.
- (ii) to note the need to roll forward the existing Memorandum of Understanding for the National Landscape Team until the constituent local authorities have adopted a revised version.

6. Planning Guidance and Position Statements

We received a report regarding two draft Position Statements for public consultation, which intend to establish the position of the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership on key issues affecting the area.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Position Statements provide further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan Strategic Objectives and associated issues.
- The two draft Position Statements will have respective formal public consultation periods, following which comments submitted will be considered and amendments made.
- Both revised 'post-consultation' versions will then be brought to the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for endorsement in due course.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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- Shared experience from the similar Position Statements from the Malvern Hills National Landscape has helped inform both Position Statements.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Light pollution within the countryside is having a negative impact on the insect population as well as affecting fish spawning.
- In the Welsh side of the AONB, the Dark Skies Project can assist in assessing properties with a view to providing aid to retro fitting appropriate lighting. It has been identified that the types of buildings that are excessively lit are often public houses, doctors' surgeries, and schools.
- In the Welsh side of the AONB it is anticipated that one more bioluminescence walk will be held before Easter.
- The two draft position statements will go out for consultation for an eight-week period.

We resolved:

- (i) to endorse the 'Renewable Energy in the Wye Valley National Landscape and its Setting' Position Statement, and associated Appendices, as a consultation draft;
- (ii) to endorse the 'Dark Skies and Artificial Light Pollution' Position Statement, and its associated Appendices, as a consultation draft;
- (iii) to agree that if future 'non-material' amendments are required, as necessary, that these can be made by Wye Valley National Landscape Team, in consultation with the Wye Valley National Landscape Team Manager;
- (iv) to agree a formal review date of both Position Statements once endorsed to take place every five years unless otherwise amended.

7. Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL), Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & HCF Wye Valley National Landscape Fund Update

We received a report regarding the progress of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme and the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The DEFRA funded Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme in England had an initial allocation of £339,063 for 2023/24 which has subsequently been increased.
- The FiPL Assessment Panel has approved grants totalling £356,307 in 2023/24 having been able to access additional FiPL funding from the DEFRA National Pot.

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- The FiPL allocation for 2024/25, currently believed to be the last year of the programme, is £362,384 of which £260,631 has already been allocated, leaving £101,753 remaining.
- The Welsh Government Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) currently has £82,961 allocated from the £100,000 available for 2023/24, plus £15,000 from a returned grant leaving £32,038 available. There is also £53,227 already allocated from the £100,000 available for 2024/25, leaving £46,773 available.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Fund hosted by the Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) is currently closed for applications to allow the Endowment Fund to grow.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The Development Officer secures external funding bringing in additional resources.
- The National Landscapes Association with DEFRA funding is running training schemes with a view to upskilling people.

We endorsed the allocations of grants under the FiPL programme and SDF to date for 2023/24.

8. National Updates - England and Wales

We received a report regarding issues and updates from DEFRA, Welsh Government and the National Landscapes Association.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- DEFRA published the Government's Response to the Glover Review 'Implementing the Landscapes Review: summary of responses' in November 2023 including an 'Action Plan for Protected Landscapes'.
- Welsh Government, through Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW), offered member training on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and on Tackling the Nature and Climate Emergencies.
- There are two events at the Senedd promoting the Designated Landscapes in Wales, one in March 2024 organised by Campaign for National Parks and the other in April 2024 by the National Landscapes Association.
- Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) will host a Seminar in Bangor on 16th-17th May 2024 on 'Decarbonising the Welsh Designated Landscapes and working with our communities to achieve Net Zero'.
- The National Landscapes Association hosted the National Landscapes re-branding launch in November, alongside the Chair's Conference and AGM.

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 March, 2024 at 2.00 pm

- The Investing in Nature team within the National Landscapes Association are providing training on Green finance, along with National Parks Partnership.
- The National Landscapes Conference will be on 5th – 7th July 2024, at Harper Adams, Shropshire.

We noted the report.

9. Partner and National Landscape Team Progress Reports and Updates

We received a report regarding the activity of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team and other partners relating to:

- Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership Seminar - 19th March 2024.
- Welcome Tintern - Visitor Experience Improvements with MonLife, Monmouthshire County Council.
- River Wye update and collaborations, including the Wye Catchment Partnership.
- Lower Wye Track and Trails consultation & strategy.
- Species Action Plan – Hedgehogs First Response Unit.
- Wye Valley Youth Rangers.
- Wye Valley River Festival 3rd - 12th May 2024.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- DEFRA is funding an initiative with the Youth Hostel Association to encourage schools to access the countryside. Further information is anticipated in due course.

We noted the report.

10. Dates of next meetings:

Monday 1st July 2024 at 2.00pm.

Monday 4th November 2024 at 2.00pm.

The meetings will be held in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

The meeting ended at 3.47 pm.