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| <b>SUBJECT:</b>                 | <b>WYE VALLEY AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN 2015 - 2020</b> |
| <b>MEETING:</b>                 | <b>Individual Cabinet Member Report</b>            |
| <b>DATE:</b>                    | <b>27<sup>th</sup> July 2016</b>                   |
| <b>DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:</b> | <b>All AONB Wards</b>                              |

**1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 To formally adopt the revised management plan for the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as statutorily required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act).

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 To adopt the finalised Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2015 – 2020.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

- 3.1 Section 89 of CROW Act 2000 places a statutory duty on all local authorities to produce, jointly if appropriate, a management plan for any AONBs lying within their boundaries and to review them every five years.
- 3.2 The first statutory management plan for the Wye Valley AONB was produced in 2004 and covered the period 2004 to 2009. Its first review covered the period 2009 to 2014. A second review has now been undertaken managed by the Wye Valley AONB Unit and overseen by the the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee.
- 3.3 The revised plan will cover the period 2015 - 2020. The plan has been subject to extensive public consultation, including a 10 weeks public consultation period and two seminars for key stakeholders. Screening Reports for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) were consulted on by, in England: Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England and in Wales: Cadw, Natural Resources Wales and the Welsh Government.
- 3.4 A copy of the finalised plan for adoption and the consultation documents can be viewed at <http://wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/index.php/about-us/management-and-guidance/management-plan-2015-2020/> . The Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee has considered the revised plan at each stage, including considering the consultation results and proposed amendments, and the finalised plan has been endorsed by the Committee.
- 3.5 This Management Plan, like its predecessors, is intended to provide guidance and strategic objectives, giving support and direction to help steer positive landscape change,

particularly to those bodies that make up the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee and the wider AONB Partnership. It also provides guidance to the local communities and many landowners, residents and visitors in the area. The Management Plan is thus for all the bodies and individuals whose actions affect the AONB and who can play an important part in helping to conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the outstanding landscape of the lower Wye Valley, for the benefit of both current and future generations.

#### **4. REASONS:**

- 4.1 The preparation of a management plan for the Wye Valley AONB and its periodic review is a statutory requirement as set out on the main report. The CROW Act also requires that the County Council, as with all relevant authorities, should have regard to the purposes of the AONB in executing any of its functions which could affect the AONB.

#### **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

- 5.1 There are no additional resource implications. The AONB unit is funded through local authority contributions and grant aid from Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Government and Defra in England.

#### **6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:**

- 6.1 The plan has been subject to formal Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) and will provide a framework within which the primary purposes of AONB designation can be maintained sustainably.
- 6.2 The significant equality impacts identified in the Future Generations evaluation (Appendix 2) are summarised below for members' consideration:
- The positive impact in identifying gaps in access and recreational provision, including for under-represented and minority groups, and work with appropriate bodies and stakeholders to support and promote access improvements.
  - The positive impact in supporting local / cultural distinctiveness.
- 6.3 The actual impacts from this report's recommendations will be reviewed annually by the Wye Valley AONB Technical Officers' Working Party and reported to the AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

#### **7. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no direct safeguarding and corporate parenting implications.

#### **8. CONSULTEES:**

- Cabinet and SLT

As indicated in the main report significant consultation has been carried out in preparing the plan.

**9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Consultation Versions, SEA, HRA, JAC reports: All available at <http://wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/index.php/about-us/management-and-guidance/management-plan-2015-2020/>

Appendix 1: Extract from the management plan (Parts 1 and 2)

Appendix 2: Future Generations Evaluation September 2015.

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# **PART 1 CONTEXT**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Purpose of the AONB Management Plan**

1.1.1 This is the third statutory 5 year Management Plan following the earlier non-statutory Plans of 1992 and 1981. Most of the issues in the 2009-2014 Plan are still relevant, and this Plan aims to build on and develop the approach of the previous one, updating and making changes where necessary, and setting out current priorities and actions. The Strategic Objectives in the last Plan have been reviewed and in some cases updated or refined (see 1.1.5 below). An Action Plan and monitoring and evaluation programme is also produced to ensure that these Strategic Objectives are implemented.

1.1.2 This Management Plan, like its predecessors, is intended to provide guidance and strategic objectives, giving support and direction to help steer positive landscape change, particularly to those bodies that make up the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee and the wider AONB Partnership. It also provides guidance to the local communities and many landowners, residents and visitors in the area. The Management Plan is thus for all the bodies and individuals whose actions affect the AONB and who can play an important part in helping to conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the outstanding landscape of the lower Wye Valley, for the benefit of both current and future generations. However this Plan does not provide all the answers for the next five years. It addresses the implications for the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the area. Meanwhile it complements a range of plans, strategies and programmes that cover other aspects in the administrative areas covering the Wye Valley AONB. In this context it articulates the value of the landscape and the added value brought by the designation and the role of the partners in the AONB in supporting society's needs through an integrated approach to land management.

1.1.3 This Management Plan, under Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, formulates local authority policy and action in relation to the management of the Wye Valley AONB. Regard will be given to this Management Plan, which is a material consideration in the respective Core Strategies and Local Development Plans / Local Development Frameworks of the constituent local authorities.

1.1.4 Therefore this Management Plan sits in the following context:-

National: National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949,  
Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000,  
National Planning Policy Framework,  
Planning Policy Wales,  
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

County/District: Forest of Dean Core Strategy,  
Gloucestershire Minerals Local Plan,  
Herefordshire Local Plan & Core Strategy,  
Monmouthshire Local Development Plan.

Local: State of the AONB Report,  
AONB Management Plan Action Plan,  
Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA)  
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)  
Wye Valley AONB Partnership guidance notes and positions statements.

The SEA & HRA contain a list of policy documents relevant to the Wye Valley AONB.

1.1.5 A Consultation Draft AONB Management Plan 2014-19 was published in November 2013 with a 10 weeks public consultation period. In addition two seminars were held with key stakeholders in January

2014 to provide further opportunities for everybody to inspect and comment on the new AONB Management Plan. A total of 27 organisations and individuals submitted 318 specific comments. The consequent recommended amendments to the AONB Management Plan were made and the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee decided to redefine the period of the five year Management Plan to 2015-2020. Screening Reports for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) were consulted on by, in England: Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England and in Wales: Cadw, Natural Resources Wales and the Welsh Government, between July to September 2015. This concluded that the AONB Management Plan does not have any likely significant effects on Natura 2000 sites (SPAs and SACs) alone or in combination with other plans and projects subject to HRAs being carried out at a lower tier plan or project level as set in the HRA document. The Management Plan has also been subject to a Future Generations Evaluation, which includes Equalities and Sustainability Impact Assessments.

## 1.2 AONB designation

1.2.1 The rich combination of breath taking views, impressive geology, historic legacies and diverse wildlife in the valley of the River Wye between Hereford and Chepstow led to the designation, in 1971, of the valley and adjoining plateaux and hills as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Wye Valley AONB covers 92km (58 miles) of the lower reaches of the River Wye totalling an area of 327km<sup>2</sup> (128 square miles), being 45km North to South and 11.3 km at its widest (East - West) point. It stretches from Mordiford in the north, just east of the city of Hereford, southwards to the outskirts of Chepstow (see Map 1).

1.2.2 The Wye Valley AONB is unique among the 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 14 National Parks in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland in being the only protected landscape to straddle a national boundary; being 64% in England and 36% in Wales. This provides a number of challenges and opportunities for the management of the Wye Valley AONB.

1.2.3 **The primary purpose of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (and National Parks) is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.** This was laid out sixty five years ago in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, modified in the Countryside Act 1968 and confirmed for AONBs in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. Supplementary purposes to the AONB designation were developed by government agencies in the 1990s (the Countryside Commission and Countryside Council for Wales 'AONBs: A Policy Statement CCP 356, 1991' and reiterated by the Countryside Agency in 'CA 24, November 2001'). These further AONB purposes are as follows:-

- In pursuing the primary purpose, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries, and of the economic and social needs of the local communities.
- Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met in an AONB so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

1.2.4 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty share equal status with National Parks in terms of scenic beauty and landscape protection. This was reinforced in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF para 115) and Planning Policy Wales (PPW para 5.3.6).

1.2.5 Unlike National Parks, AONBs are not authoritative bodies with their own planning or development control functions and other executive powers. Instead, responsibility for the designated purposes lies chiefly with the local authorities, for the Wye Valley AONB being Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council. The government departments and agencies responsible for designating AONBs and advising Government and

others on how AONBs should be protected and managed are Defra, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales.

1.2.6 The CRoW Act (Section 85) also requires that relevant authorities, in addition to government and local planning authorities, 'have regard' to the purpose of AONBs. These include parish, town and community councils and the holders of public office.

1.2.7 On the grounds of good citizenship and guardianship at least, a duty of care for the AONB also lies with individuals and organisations (private or third sector), especially those who own or manage land in the AONB and also with the visitors to the area.

### 1.3 What is Natural Beauty?

1.3.1 Natural Beauty is defined as "flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features" in the Countryside Act 1968. These aspects of natural beauty are the components that make a landscape so scenic and distinctive; the wildlife, trees and plants, and the shape of the land with its rivers and hills and rock outcrops. However, since 1968 the recognition and understanding has developed that 'natural' landscapes of the British Isles are in fact the product of millennia of human intervention. Therefore landscape is about the relationship between people and place; the interaction between nature and culture. Public appreciation is a key component of natural beauty and considerable provision for recreation and tourism in AONBs were made in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Subsequent government guidance provides a further definition: 'The natural beauty of AONBs encompasses everything – 'natural' and human – that makes an area distinctive: geology, climate, soil, plants, animals, communities, archaeology, buildings, the people who live in it, past and present, and the perceptions of those who visit it.' (Countryside Agency, 23)

Consequently the Special Qualities of the AONB encompass natural beauty, scenic beauty, amenity, heritage and landscape assets.

## 2. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE AND VISION

### 2.1 Statement of Significance for the Wye Valley AONB

2.1.1 The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is regarded as one of **the finest lowland landscapes in Britain**, with the River Wye one the **nation's favourite rivers**. The AONB, straddling the English Welsh border, with the river as the centrepiece, is an area of striking contrasts. In the north, the river meanders through the **broad meadows** of the Herefordshire lowlands. The more dramatic scenery, including famous spots like Symonds Yat and Tintern Abbey, lie downstream from Ross-on-Wye. Here the river has cut **dramatic gorges** with sheer **cliffs and steep wooded slopes**, interspersed with broader valley reaches, with rounded hills and bluffs.

2.1.2 The Wye Valley AONB contains a **splendid variety of geological outcrops** and important examples of **active and past geomorphologic processes**. Formed over millions of years, the underlying rocks have been worked on by ice and then the river to produce the landscape of the Wye Valley we recognise today. The differing geology has given rise to a **range of distinctive settlement and farming patterns**. The oldest rocks are the Silurian limestones and sandstones that make up the grey soils of the Woolhope Dome in the north of the AONB. The Old Red Sandstone creates the fertile red and brown soils of the Herefordshire lowlands along with the rich river alluvium of the floodplain. These softer rocks allowed the river to meander more widely. From Lydbrook the river cuts in and out of the harder Carboniferous Limestone strata of the Forest of Dean plateau to form dramatic gorges. The area has a **full sequence of the Carboniferous Limestone Series** and excellent exposures and formations including limestone pavement, quartz conglomerate, caves, natural stream channels and tufa dams.

2.1.3 The Wye Valley is particularly important for its **rich wildlife habitats**. This is reflected in the remarkable juxtaposition of three separate Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), under the European Union's Habitats Directive. The river is a SAC as well as being the first major river to be designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) along its entire length. Nearly a thousand hectares of valley side woodland are also designated a SAC. Nine roosting sites for Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats make a third SAC. Underlying this are 45 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) including 4 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and 204 County local/key wildlife sites. The limestone woodlands are renowned as a refuge of rare species and form part of **one of the largest remaining areas of ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland in the country**. As a predominantly wooded and riverine environment, the Wye Valley has a greater combination of ancient and natural features than virtually all the other AONBs and National Parks in the UK. Priority Habitats cover nearly 17% of the English part of the AONB. The traditional orchards, pastures, hay meadows, hedges and copses within the farmed landscape also provide rich habitats for wildlife. The strong mosaic of these habitats makes the landscape robust and permeable for many species.

2.1.4 The AONB contains an abundance of sites of historic and cultural significance. Many activities **fundamental to the cultural identity of Britain** have an origin in the Wye Valley. This is reflected in the fact that there are 123 Scheduled Monuments (SMs) in the Wye Valley AONB, 10 registered Parks and Gardens, 17 Conservation Areas and 915 Listed Buildings. The river is both the backbone and the border of the historic environment that underlays the landscape of the Wye Valley AONB. There is a range of distinctive settlement types and patterns, field systems, and vernacular building styles and materials. The whole of the lower Wye Valley, from Goodrich to Chepstow, has been included in the **Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest** in Wales. Features range from caves with Palaeolithic occupation, ancient forests, Roman and Celtic settlements, defensive structures such as hill forts, Offa's Dyke and Mediaeval castles, secluded early churches and monasteries. Tributaries cascade down side valleys to join the Wye, giving focus to settlements and power to **pioneering industries** including wireworks, papermaking, tanning, tin-plate and quarrying. The river was the main transport route up and down the valley, superseded by the railway and eventually the roads. The scenic qualities of the Wye Valley are important in the history of art. Landscaped parks, gardens and viewpoints inspired some of the great British poets and writers. The Reverend William Gilpin was inspired in 1770 to write his treatise on the notion and depiction of landscape and gave birth to the **'picturesque' movement**. As a result of his work the valley became very popular with visitors.

2.1.5 The lower Wye Valley remains nationally renowned as a **destination for tourism and recreation** with 2.3 million tourist days per annum. Overnight stays, while common, are outweighed by day trips with many people travelling for less than 2 hours to visit the Wye Valley. Amongst these visitors are some of the **29,300 residents** living and/or working in the market towns, villages and hamlets of the Wye Valley AONB.

2.1.6 The **high quality environment** of the lower Wye Valley makes a significant contribution to the area's economic development. The natural beauty of the area is recognised as **contributing to economic activities and well-being** such as tourism and inward investment, as well as the overall **quality of life**, making the Wye Valley a more attractive place in which to live and work. However, the general locality is renowned for limited job opportunities. Many residents work outside the AONB, often commuting to Birmingham, Bristol or Cardiff. The reality for some is an area of low incomes, limited housing, inadequate services and poor transport.

2.1.7 **Agriculture, forestry and tourism** are the main industries that operate in the landscape of the lower Wye Valley along with mineral extraction. Combined together they have to a large extent **crafted the landscape** we see today. Agriculture and forestry are the most apparent land uses with farmland covering 58% of the AONB and woodland 27%. There is a great diversity of enterprises dependant on all these industries, which tend to be characterised by low pay and seasonal employment. The viability of

some of these businesses can have significant implication for the natural beauty and social well-being of the area. Tourism, from the early days of The Wye Tour, has focused on the river corridor and the market towns. It is still predominantly based around **enjoyment of the scenic beauty** and the **palimpsest heritage** of the Wye Valley. With increasing diversification tourism is spreading throughout the AONB. Limestone extraction continues at one commercial quarry, with another abutting the AONB boundary. Neither of these quarries are operating at full capacity at the moment.

2.1.8 The majority of employment in the AONB comes from distribution, education, manufacturing, public administration and tourism. The growth of environmentally beneficial activities in these sectors is becoming an increasingly important factor in the local economy. For example the increased interest in **locally produced food** is generating renewed investment locally in environmental land management, local food processing and distribution, food tourism, education and recreation. Other influences that have the potential to benefit the local economy include changes in working practices and the development of woodfuel and other local renewable energy technologies.

2.1.9 The **Special Qualities of the Wye Valley AONB**, which contribute significantly to the ecosystem goods and services of the area, are listed below.

1. Overall Landscape

of 16 Landscape Management Zones (see Table 1 & Map 2 - at rear) with key features and links to the other Special Qualities

*Biodiversity*

2. Woodlands

3. The river & tributaries

4. Species-rich grassland, including small field pattern of un/semi-improved grassland, often bounded by drystone walls or old hedges

5. Boundary habitat diversity & connectivity, e.g. between grassland & woodland, farmland & heathland, tidal river & ASNW, hedges &/or drystone walls, lanes, banks, verges and fields & woods

*Geological*

6. Silurian Rocks

7. Devonian - Lower Old Red Sandstone

8. Quartz Conglomerate outcropping between Lower and Upper Old Red Sandstone

9. Carboniferous Limestone

10. Riverine geomorphology

*Visual and Sensory*

11. Picturesque, extensive & dramatic views.

12. Overall sense of tranquillity, sense of remoteness and naturalness / wildness

*Historic Environment*

13. Prehistoric sites from Palaeolithic to Iron Age

14. Roman and early Medieval sites including Offa's Dyke

15. Mediaeval Defensive and Ecclesiastical sites and associated landscapes

16. Post-medieval industrial sites and associated landscapes

17. Railway heritage

18. Ancient trees

19. Historic / registered parks and gardens

20. Vernacular architecture: Farmsteads, Commoners cottages, Estate houses

*Language*

21. Welsh language & accent; Forest of Dean & South Herefordshire dialects & accents

*Access and Recreation*

22. Old tracks: often in sunken ways &/or bounded by drystone walls

23. Offa's Dyke Path

24. Wye Valley Walk

25. Access land



26. Small commons; largest are Coppet Hill, Broadmoor, Staunton Meend, Whitelye, The Hudnalls  
*Other*
27. Orchards

## **2.2 The Vision for the Wye Valley AONB**

2.2.1 The following was developed for the 2009-14 AONB Management Plan as a 20 year vision and remains a true encapsulation of how we want the AONB to be in 15 years' time and beyond:-

*The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will be a landscape*

- *that continues to evoke inspiration in a wide range of people*
- *where some degree of change is accepted and its impacts accommodated through positive management including effective adaptation to and mitigation of climate change*
- *where the distinctive mix of steep valley sides and rolling hills, covered with ancient and semi-natural woodland, mixed farmland, and scattered settlement dominate the landscape along with the meandering river*
- *where the natural and heritage assets are in good order, well-understood and accessible where appropriate, in fully compatible uses and adapted and changed in ways which respect and enhance their significance*
- *with a robust mosaic of inter-connected semi natural habitats for native wildlife, particularly around grassland, wetland and woodland*
- *providing functioning services and resources for society, including flood storage, food, timber, tourism and minerals*
- *which provides work for local people, who make good use of the varied resources the area has to offer*
- *where both visitors and residents are able to enjoy the area, particularly for sustainable tourism, recreation and informed appreciation of the historic and natural environment, with minimal conflict or disturbance from other users*
- *where association with the Wye Valley continues to benefit the surrounding villages, market towns and counties*
- *supported by the good will, pride and endeavour of local people, visitors, and the public, private and voluntary sectors*
- *worthy of its designation as an internationally important protected landscape.*