

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, Coleford
on Monday, 4th July, 2016 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor: P. Cutter (Chairman) (Herefordshire Council)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

Councillors: D. Blakebrough, D. Dovey and A. Webb

Gloucestershire County Council

Councillor P. Molyneux

Forest of Dean Council

Councillor G. Davies

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire - Mr. A. Thomas

Country Land and Business Association - Mr. S.W.B. Dereham

National Farmers Union - Mr. M. Price

One Voice Wales - Councillor T. Phillips

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Recreation Sector - Mr. A. Lee

Wye Valley Society - Mr. C. Barron

Local Tourism Sector - Mr. D. Broadbent

Technical Advice Officers

Wye Valley AONB Officer - Mr. A. Blake

Gloucestershire County Council - Mr. R. Niblett

Monmouthshire County Council - Mr. R. Williams

APOLOGIES:

Councillor E. Hackett Pain, Councillor P. McMahon, Councillor B. Durkin, Councillor J. Hardwick, Councillor Ms. E.J. Swinglehurst, Mr. B. Nash, Ms. H. Stace, Mr. J. Bisset, Ms. H. McDowell, Mr. A. Nixon and Mr. M. Lewis.

1. Election of Chairman

We elected Councillor P. Cutter as Chair.

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2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

We appointed Councillor A.E. Webb as Vice-Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

The following Councillors declared interests as Planning Committee Members of their respective authorities in matters that may arise relating to development control issues:

Councillor P. Cutter

4. Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the meeting dated 7th March 2016 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

5. Public Question Time

No questions were raised by members of the public.

6. Future Landscapes Wales Programme

We received a report regarding the outcomes and proposals to date of the Future Landscapes Wales Programme addressing the Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Lord Dafydd Ellis-Thomas AM, Chair of the Future Landscapes Wales Working Group, had delivered an interim report to the outgoing Minister for Natural Resources just before the Welsh Assembly election in May 2016.
- The Future Landscapes Wales Project Groups had recently presented their current findings to the Working Group.
- There is a new draft Vision for Wales' Designated Landscapes and a number of proposals that will be considered further in preparation for Lord Ellis-Thomas's final report later in the year.
- A provisional response to the main implications for the Wye Valley AONB is provided in the report.
- The new Minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM, has endorsed the Future Landscapes Wales Programme and attended part of the recent Working Group meeting.
- There is some concern that the term 'natural beauty' is not referred to in the vision, as this remains in the founding legislation. It was considered that this term should be included.

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Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Feedback to Lord Dafydd Ellis-Thomas AM was required today in order to allow him to present his response to the Minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM, later in the summer.
- There will be opportunities in the future to feed into the process when the Minister responds in the autumn of 2016.
- Land management in the Wye Valley and other Designated Landscapes in Wales was an issue that needed to be addressed.
- There was a need to strengthen links with the voluntary sector.
- It was considered that the vision required some amendment as it was currently a statement of facts and did not state what was intended.

We resolved to:

- (i) note the report and the views expressed;
- (ii) welcome the options and proposals presented to the Future Landscapes Wales Working Group;
- (iii) endorse the provisional response to the Briefing Papers;
- (iv) support the continued involvement of the AONB Officer in opportunities to shape the future of Designated Landscapes in Wales.

7. Annual Report AONB Unit 2015/16

We received a report and table of achievements for the Wye Valley AONB Unit and the Annual Report on contracted Planning consultants' work for the AONB Unit for 2015/16.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The 2015/16 Work Programme Report for the AONB Unit.
- A number of staffing issues and illness had impacted on the achievements of the AONB Unit but a high standard of activity had been maintained.
- Worcestershire County Council Planning Department was contracted to provide advice to the AONB Unit on strategic planning documents and development issues, and where necessary prepare appropriate responses for the AONB Unit.
- The expectation that the AONB Unit, on behalf of the AONB Partnership, comments on Planning Applications has increased in recent years, as has the number of pre-application enquiries.

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Having received the report, it was noted that, the AONB Officer had been consulted with regard to the construction of the Water Monitoring Station between Redwood and Monmouth. However, this matter had not gone through the planning process but consent proposals had been issued.

We resolved to welcome the Annual Reports of AONB and the achievements for 2015/16.

8. AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour

We received a report regarding the date and outline programme for the Annual AONB Partnership Study Tour.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Traditionally the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour is held on the last Friday of September, but in recent years this has clashed with various local authority meetings.
- This year the date is set at 23rd September where there appears to be no conflicting Council meetings.
- The programme is still being finalised but will focus predominantly on projects and management issues in the Monmouthshire part of the AONB.
- Initial invitations for expressions of interest to attend will be sent out shortly.
- It was intended to invite the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (NPA) to join the Tour. However, the date clashes with a full NPA meeting. A separate invitation will be made to visit the Wye Valley AONB.
- The Tour falls within 'Outstanding Week' 17th – 25th September 2016, which is the second year of this week celebrating AONBs.

We resolved to:

- (i) note the date of Friday 23rd September 2016 for the Study Tour.
- (ii) encourage a good attendance on the Tour.
- (iii) extend an invitation to the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority for a hosted visit to the Wye Valley AONB.

9. Undergrounding update

We received a report regarding the undergrounding work of overhead powerlines.

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In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Western Power Distribution (WPD) works in collaboration with the AONB Unit on identifying a programme of undergrounding electricity power-lines in the AONB.
- WPD requires the Joint Advisory Committee to approve new undergrounding schemes prior to further investigation and evaluation work taking place.
- The new proposed schemes requiring Joint Advisory Committee approval are for power lines across Coppett Hill and between Penterry and Reddings Farm near Tintern.
- Two previously approved schemes are still being investigated for potential undergrounding.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- It is not possible to provide details of the timescales involved before undergrounding work could commence, as Western Power Distribution needs to assess the schemes to ensure that they are viable.
- Western Power Distribution operates a rolling programme for assessment of potential sites for undergrounding.
- Undergrounding tends to be a relatively simple process of trenching, with public footpaths only likely to be blocked for a short period of time. However, public footpaths will be temporarily diverted, if required.
- In response to a Committee member's question, it was noted that 7,600metres of electricity lines had already been undergrounded in the Wye Valley AONB with an investment of £600,000 undertaken by Western Power Distribution and its predecessor.

We resolved to endorse the programme of undergrounding work including the new schemes at Coppett Hill, Reddings Farm and Penterry.

10. Wye Valley River Festival 2016 initial evaluation

We received a report regarding the achievements and the initial evaluation of the Wye Valley River Festival 2016.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The Wye Valley River Festival journeyed through the AONB from Hereford to Chepstow between 29th April and 15th May 2016, celebrating nature, culture, landscape and life along the River Wye, and the global connections that water brings us.

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- There were over 28,000 visits or acts of engagement in over 30 Wye Valley River Festival events.
- This second Festival was organised by the Wye Valley AONB Unit and a professional Festival Management team with an overall budget of £200,000, working with arts professionals and conservationists in collaboration with local communities.
- A wide variety of organisations and communities supported the Festival including many hours of volunteer time and sizable financial contributions from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), Arts Council of Wales, Arts Council England, Shire Hall Monmouth, Environment Agency, Ernest Cook Trust, Forestry Commission, New Grove Trust, Ross Town Council, and a significant range of smaller donations and commercial sponsorship.
- A great many people dedicated time and energy to making the Wye Valley River Festival such a broad, innovative and enjoyable series of events.
- A full evaluation of the Festival is being undertaken to appraise lessons learned and whether the original proposal to establish a biennial Festival remains a viable option.

Having received the report, it was noted that the event had been a success, especially the events that were connected to local communities. It was hoped that a further River Festival will be held in 2018.

We resolved to note the success of the Wye Valley River Festival 2016.

11. National Grid Visual Impact Provision (VIP) Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)

We received a report in which the Committee was informed of the opportunities to develop projects in Walford, Goodrich and Marstow Parishes through the National Grid Visual Impact Provision (VIP) and Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- National Grid surveyed all AONBs and National Parks which have National Grid overhead electricity lines or substations within their area.
- National Grid established the Visual Impact Provision (VIP) to mitigate the visual impact of National Grid's infrastructure and enhance the quality of the affected landscapes in 30 National Parks and AONBs.
- The Wye Valley AONB has 4.1km of National Grid overhead high voltage powerlines, in the Parishes of Walford and Marstow and 2.5km of lines already underground under the Wye in front of Goodrich Castle.

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- The Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) allows the AONB Partnership to apply for 75% funding to deliver significant benefits that enhance the landscape and reduce the visual impact on the ground of the National Grid infrastructure.
- The scheme does not relate to the smaller pylons that go through Walford and Marstow and over the river, as these are Wester Power Distribution cables.
- National Grid is working in four other National Parks and AONBs to underground dominant powerlines currently on pylons.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

12. National AONB Conference

We received a report in which the Committee were updated on the recent Landscapes for Life 2016 National AONB Conference.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Three representatives from the AONB Partnership had attended the national AONB Landscapes for Life Conference, held between Tuesday 28th and Thursday 30th June 2016, based in Lilleshall National Sports and Conferencing Centre.
- Sharing, Learning, Inspiring were the themes of the conference, focusing on the case for natural beauty in relationship to the health and wellbeing of society.
- The Wye Valley AONB hosted a Field Trip on Wednesday 29th June 2016, a Briefing session was held on Greg Dunn's PhD work in the Wye Valley and there was a plenary presentation MindSCAPE project.
- The Conference had been very interesting and successful with a good turnout.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

13. AONB Reports / Partner Progress

We were provided with details of activity of the AONB Unit and other partners in respect of the following initiatives:

- LEMUR+ placements and Phase 1 Habitat mapping.
- Youth Rangers: 3rd cohort.
- MindSCAPES, into year 3.
- AONB Farming Awards 2016 – applications close on 4th July 2016.

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- Ross Riverside, collaboration with Ross Town Council via the AONB LEMUR+ placements.
- Wye Valley Woodland project with Deer Initiative, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Natural Resources Wales and Woodland Trust.
- Potential historic / archaeological project along Offa's Dyke, in partnership with Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, Nexus Heritage, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales and University of Chester.
- Forestry Commission - Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Deer Project Area.

Having received the report, the following points were noted.

- Diane McCrea, Chair of Natural Resources Wales, visited the AONB and was taken around the Wye Valley. She was introduced to the work that the AONB Partnership was undertaking and was impressed with the progress being made.
- The AONB Officer informed the Committee that his presentation to the Brecon Beacons National Park had been well received and was webcast and available to view.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

14. Next meeting

We noted that the next meeting will be held in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford, on Monday 7th November 2016 at 2.00pm.

The meeting ended at 3.45 pm