

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
7th November 2016

LOCAL AUTHORITIES' CONTRIBUTIONS 2017/2018

Purpose

To request contributions from the four constituent local authorities to the budget for the Wye Valley AONB Partnership for 2017/2018 as outlined in the AONB Memorandum of Understanding between the four local authorities.

Recommendations

That the JAC request from the constituent local authorities the agreed financial contributions for the Wye Valley AONB.

Key Issues

- The AONB Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is intended to give medium term security and commitment to the AONB Partnership up to and including 2017/18.
- Prior to the MoU in 2015 the JAC annually recommended to the constituent local authorities the contribution required for the continued effective operation, management and governance of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership.
- The contributions from the local authorities form the foundation to the budget managed by the AONB Unit.
- Defra and Natural Resources Wales grant offer letters are appended to the MoU, with offers up until 2020 and 2018 respectively.
- For every £1 of Local Authority contribution the AONB Unit has levered in over £8 on average in recent years.

Reasons

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides a framework for the delivery of duties and obligations in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) arising from Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 including the operation and management of the AONB Partnership and the AONB Unit. The MoU is intended to give medium term security to the AONB Partnership and sets out a shared vision for, and commitment to, AONB management by the funding local authority partners. The MoU outlines the functions of the AONB Unit and the expectations on all parties to achieve the shared vision, which includes the understanding that:

- AONB management structures should be strongly supported by partners and relevant authorities.
- the statutory requirement to produce a Management Plan provides an important opportunity to strengthen partnerships and achieve better outcomes.
- security of funding and flexibility of funding for the AONB will deliver better outcomes.
- there should be a “can do” culture which is not risk-averse but where lessons from novel approaches are encouraged and learnt from, in both success and failure.
- monitoring of environmental outcomes is essential and needs to be undertaken to develop a sound, spatially-relevant evidence base.

- opportunities should be taken to maximise the synergies between the outcomes of the Management Plan with the plans of other Parties, and of the wider Protected Landscape network.

Implications

The following Local Authority partner contributions were outlined in the MoU. They are based on land area in the AONB in an established historical formula.

Funding Partner	2017/18
Herefordshire Council	£23,860
Monmouthshire County Council	£15,716
Forest of Dean District Council	£5,826
Gloucestershire County Council	£3,600
Total LA contributions	£49,002

The proposed base budget for the AONB Unit for 2017/18 is £285,177 (down from £317,538 in 2013/14) and includes the anticipated Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in Wales. The local authority contributions receive up to 75% match-funding for core AONB initiatives from Defra and Natural Resources Wales (NRW). Defra and NRW have provided funding offers up until 2020 and 2018 respectively. For 2017/18 the Defra and NRW grants will be £126,234 and £52,210 respectively. The remainder of the AONB budget is made up from income from other sources.

In addition during 2015/16 the AONB Unit is managing partnership projects totalling £183,508, including MindSCAPES, the Wye Valley River Festival, LEMUR+ Trainees and the AONB Youth Rangers programme. These externally funded projects extend the work of the AONB Unit and allow project investment as well as some elements of cost recovery. Currently the contracts for the two LEMUR+ Trainees are being extended with funding from Natural England for project work on the Garren and Gamber brooks and works on Ross riverside with Ross Town Council. The development and delivery of externally funded projects will continue into 2017/18 and beyond. Over recent years for every £1 of Local Authority contributions the AONB Unit has levered in more than £8.

The AONB Unit is constantly reviewing the structure and delivery of services in the AONB alongside income streams. Some members of staff are already working reduced hours. However, based on current budget projections the AONB Unit will need to downsize during 2018/19 from 5 core posts to 4. It is hoped that this can be accommodated through voluntary redundancy or retirement. The AONB Steering Group ensures that staff and resources are maximised and operational structures are fit for the future in the face of ongoing budgetary pressures. However the focus remains on consolidating the activity of the core AONB Unit to maximise the leverage and spend on the delivery of initiatives that fulfil the statutory purpose of the AONB designation and benefit the landscape and local communities in the Wye Valley.

Background

Each Local Authority has a statutory Duty of Regard towards the purposes of AONBs under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. A considerable amount of the AONB Unit's core and project work (planning / promotion / advice / preparation & delivery of the Management Plan etc.) goes towards supporting each Local Authority in fulfilling its Duty of Regard. Through project delivery the AONB Unit also supports the Local Authorities' Statutory Duty for biodiversity under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006.