

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'  
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB  
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
7<sup>th</sup> November 2016

## WYE VALLEY RIVER FESTIVAL 2016 INITIAL EVALUATION

### *Purpose*

To present the Evaluation reports for the Wye Valley River Festival 2016 and seek endorsement to commence developing a Wye Valley River Festival 2018.

### *Recommendations*

That the JAC

- A. welcomes the evaluation reports for the Wye Valley River Festival 2016 and the conclusions and lessons learned
  
- B. endorses commencing the development process for a Wye Valley River Festival 2018.

### *Key Issues*

- The full evaluation reports of the Wye Valley River Festival 2016 have been completed and are appended.
- There are a number of lessons learned and conclusions in the reports that are being assimilated by the AONB Unit and the Festival Development Team.
- The summary evaluation of the 2016 Festival is that it was a success, achieving, and in many instances, exceeding its targets and introducing several innovations and exemplars.
- The Wye Valley River Festival 2016 was Highly Commended at the Visit Herefordshire Awards for Excellence 2016 in the Best Festivals & Events (Community) category, which was won by the Hereford River Carnival, part of the Wye Valley River Festival.
- The original proposal to run a biennial Festival in 2014, 2016 and 2018 remains a viable option.
- In order to repeat the previous levels of success, work needs to commence promptly on the research, development and fund raising for a Wye Valley River Festival in 2018.
- The proposed theme for a 2018 Festival is Trees and woodland, which shroud and define the Wye Valley in the AONB and follow the River almost continuously for 30 miles.
- Consideration will also need to be given to the most appropriate delivery model for any Wye Valley River Festival after 2018.

### *Reasons*

The Evaluation and Reflection Report of the Wye Valley River Festival 2016 was compiled by the Festival Director (attached) and concludes that the Festival exceeded its targets and overall was a considerable success. The Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) at University of Gloucestershire produced the Final Evaluation report (also attached) based on the analysis of 148 audience feedback forms and 35 responses from Festival performers, participants and crew as well as 6 in-depth interviews. It is clear from the largely

positive comments of both audience and participants that the aims of the Festival were achieved: to create high quality inclusive art 'of' and 'in' the landscape which was immersive and interpreted the Wye Valley.

The Hereford River Carnival won the Best Festivals & Events (Community) and the Wye Valley River Festival was Highly Commended at the Visit Herefordshire Awards for Excellence 2016 at Eastnor Castle on Tuesday 20th September. That is double praise and recognition for all the creative effort that went into the Wye Valley River Festival 2016.

The proposed theme for the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 is Trees and Woodland. The AONB Management Plan identifies Woodlands, Ancient Trees and Orchards as three of the Special Qualities of the AONB. The woodlands shroud and define the Wye Valley throughout the AONB and follow the River almost continuously for about 30 miles from Goodrich to Chepstow. Meanwhile there are nearly 2,400 veteran trees recorded in the AONB. By 2018 the impact of Chalara / Ash Dieback may also be more pronounced and the importance. Therefore the River Festival would be an opportune moment to celebrate the significance of trees and woodland in the nature, culture, landscape and life of the Wye Valley.

### ***Implications***

There are many lessons to be learned, outlined in the evaluation reports. Importantly, the capacity of the Festival team was stretched during the Festival fortnight. However many of the best innovations were in the engagement processes with schools and community groups in creative events building up to the Festival itself. This also helped build anticipation, awareness and enhanced the local audiences through attracting 'friends & family' to attend.

A key finding is that the Festival research and development needs to start as early as possible and build more consistently throughout the run up to the Festival fortnight itself. Promotion and publicity also need to start earlier, with sufficient dedicated resources. Consequently the fundraising and application bids also need to start promptly.

The original Business Plan envisaged that by the 2018 Festival an international element would be introduced to the Festival.

### ***Background***

The inaugural Wye Valley River Festival was held over 2 weeks in early May 2014. The second Wye Valley River Festival was held over 2 weeks in late April and early May 2016. The original Business Plan envisaged establishing a biennial Festival initially in 2014, 2016 and 2018.