

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
7th November 2016

AONB FARMING AWARDS

Purpose

To seek approval for a broadening of the AONB Farming Awards eligibility criteria.

Recommendations

That the JAC agrees to the broadening of the AONB Farming Awards to include organisations and individuals managing land that also make an outstanding contribution to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB.

Key Issues

- The Wye Valley AONB Farming Awards have been running for nine years and are presented at the Monmouthshire Show.
- From 2017 the Monmouthshire Show day changes from late August to early July.
- Farmland covers 65% of the Wye Valley AONB and the AONB Farming Awards are a good opportunity to promote the work that farmers and land manager do in keeping the Wye Valley such an outstanding place for so many people.
- Since 2008 twenty seven farms have entered the competition, however numbers of entries have been reducing over recent years.
- Increasing promotion and broadening entry to include land management organisations and individuals should help reinvigorate the Awards.

Reasons

The AONB Unit annually seeks nominations of farms that make an outstanding contribution, in any shape or form, to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB. Farms in or adjacent to the Wye Valley AONB are eligible to enter. The winner receives a cheque for £400, the prestigious Farming Award Trophy and the winner's certificate, presented at the Monmouthshire Show.

The ninth Wye Valley AONB Farming Awards were presented to winning Herefordshire farmer and cider producer Mike Johnson of Broome Farm, Peterstow. The JAC Chairman presented the Award at the Monmouthshire Show on 25th August 2016. Square Farm near Mitchel Troy, was selected for the Highly Commended Award and received a cheque for £200 and a certificate. Last year's winners Ann and Jim Herbert from Lewstone Farm, Whitchurch in Herefordshire won due to their contribution to the Wye Valley landscape with their provision of educational visits alongside their free range egg production and environmental work. Previous winners are listed below.

The Farming Awards were devised to recognise the value of good farming and reward excellence in land management practices which conserve and enhance the landscape. Management of the land, with reference to the AONB purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape and the social and economic needs of local communities are important factors in the judging. Twenty seven farms have entered the competition over the 9 years. Numbers of entries have been declining in recent years suggesting that the Farming Awards may have reached most of the interested or eligible farmers.

It therefore seems appropriate to both broaden the entry criteria to include organisations and individuals that are actively involved in land management and to increase the marketing and promotion of the Awards.

Implications

There would be no need to alter the current application, shortlisting or judging procedures for the Farming Awards. The nomination or application process has always been designed to be as simple as possible. Applicants simply have to be nominated by anyone or express an interest in applying themselves. The AONB Development Officer then visits the farms and completes a simple evaluation form with the farmer to gather the necessary information and take some photos etc. A shortlist is determined by the AONB Unit and shortlisted farms are visited and judged by an experienced panel. This currently includes Andrew Blake, Wye Valley AONB Manager, David Price, NFU Wales and Caroline Hanks, farming and conservation consultant. Usually the previous winner also joins the judging.

The change in date of the Monmouthshire Show will bring forward the application, shortlisting and judging process. The enhanced marketing and promotion of the Awards will accommodate the programme shift. A small increase in time and resources will be required to achieve this.

Background

The Wye Valley AONB Farming Awards started in 2008. This followed on from the AONB Producer Award that was run for a couple of years as part of the AONB Savour the Wye campaign. It was decided to change the annual award to focus on farming rather than just local food as that better reflected the purpose of AONB designation which is to 'conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape'.

Originally the Farming Awards entry criteria were:

- The farm must be situated within or adjoining the Wye Valley AONB
- The farm must be run as a business enterprise and producing a commodity from the land
- The individual farm owner/tenant must be making a full or part time living from the land
- The winning farm may be required to provide an event in conjunction with Open Farm Day the following June.

Scoring of farms was based on: landscape benefits; environmental benefits; economic benefits; and community benefits.

In 2009 the Farming Awards were alternated between large farms one year and small farms the next. This was because the judges found it difficult to compare a 35 hectare farm with a 440 hectare farm. Farms up to 100 hectares were considered small and anything over 100 hectares were large.

In 2013 the entry criteria was modified again. Most of the complicated scoring system was dropped as well as the categorisation by farm size. A farm could be nominated by anyone and the criteria was simplified to any farm 'that makes an outstanding contribution to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Wye Valley'. This was because we found that many farms were doing excellent work within a single area of operation i.e. they may have made a huge commitment to conserving their historic buildings, but still failed to score highly because they were weak on other areas. Selection was now based on the merit of a farm based on a specific strength or combination of aspects.

Previous winners are:

2008	Henry and Esther Rudge, Ballingham Court Farm, Ballingham
2009	Alan Morgan, Gadr Farm, Monmouth
2010	Gareth Williams, Caplor Farm, Fownhope
2011	Mark O'Brien and Liz Vice, Mabley Farm, Woolhope
2012	Henry and Esther Rudge, Ballingham Court Farm, Ballingham
2013	Simon Cutter, Home Farm, Courtfield Estate, Welsh Bicknor
2014	Lyndon Edwards, Severndale Farm, Tidenham
2015	Ann and Jim Herbert, Lewstone Farm, Whitchurch
2016	Mike Johnson, Broome Farm, Peterstow

The prestigious Farming Award Trophy was designed by Forest of Dean ironwork sculptor and blacksmith Steve Bluett.