

LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT PROJECTS

Purpose

To seek members' support for two forthcoming landscape enhancement projects.

Recommendations

That the JAC:

- A. Supports the Coughton Enhancement Project application to National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).
- B. Support the development of a wild Venison Feasibility Study in the lower Wye Valley.

Key Issues

- The National Grid 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 Coughton Enhancement Project is our first proposed application under the LEI.
- There is currently a lack of information on where and how wild venison is sold locally and little marketing of the local landscape benefits of wild venison.
- The proposed Venison Feasibility Study will investigate the current situation of where wild venison, primarily from Fallow deer, is processed, sold and marketed in and around the Wye Valley AONB.
- The AONB Partnership plays a key role in facilitating and enabling collaborative funding applications and projects on a landscape scale.

Reasons

At the last JAC members were 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). The Coughton Enhancement Project is the first project proposed under the LEI. The settlement of Coughton is dominated by views of the nearby pylons which are considered to have high combined landscape and visual impacts. There is a relatively dense network of public rights of way locally, which are also affected by the views the electricity infrastructure.

Much of the woodland in the lower Wye Valley is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The current high Fallow deer population, and subsequent high levels of browsing, are having a significant detrimental impact on woodland in the Wye Valley AONB. Wild Deer are managed by landowners through a variety of organisations and individual stalkers. There appears to be little evidence of venison being taken through local sale or of

marketing that highlights the provenance and conservation value of local venison. Therefore a study into venison marketing is proposed for the lower Wye Valley.

Implications

Collaborative funding bids that the AONB Development Officer has been co-ordinating are:-

A. The Coughton Enhancement Project

The project will take place primarily on two sites owned and managed by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust; Coughton Marsh and Parish Field in Walford. The two sites together cover approximately 2 hectares and are both approximately 400m from National Grid pylons and lines, which runs between the two. The entire project will take place within half a mile of the electricity transmission infrastructure. Coughton Marsh is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is the last remnant of the much larger peaty wetland area that existed in the 19th century. Parish Field is a remnant of what was originally an extensive area of wet common meadow between Old Hill Court and Coughton, from which the National Grid Infrastructure is highly visible.

This project will provide the opportunity to increase the current level of positive conservation management on the sites and provide opportunities for long term sustainable management to take place for the benefit of the habitat and species they support, as well as the appreciation and enjoyment of people who visit them. Public enjoyment and appreciation of these important sites will be enhanced through improved waymarking of access routes and interpretation on site and in the village of Walford. Coppicing will take place in Coughton Marsh. Stock proof fencing will be installed around Parish Field to allow for light seasonal grazing and wet grassland management. Volunteers will assist with practical management work. Guided walks and school educational activities will complement the conservation works. Herefordshire Council Archaeology Unit will assist with the production of interpretation and delivery of the community engagement work. The project will contribute toward improving public access and enjoyment of the area, and has been unanimously supported by Walford Parish Council who “considered [the project] to be a positive and exciting one, to provide useful information and better access to local sites”.

The total cost of the project is estimated as £38,957 with an application for National Grid LEI funding for £29,100 (74.7%) with a mixture cash and in-kind match funding anticipated from Severn Waste and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, Herefordshire Council, the Wye Valley AONB Unit and volunteer time.

B. Venison Feasibility Study

The Wye Valley AONB Unit, in partnership with the Deer Initiative, are proposing to study the feasibility of the production, marketing and sale of locally supplied and processed wild venison in and around the Wye Valley AONB. Natural England and Monmouthshire LEADER have both been approached to ensure there is a cross-border, landscape scale approach as the wild deer do not adhere to administrative boundaries.

The feasibility study will investigate the current situation regarding wild deer, primarily Fallow, in and around the Wye Valley AONB, where venison is processed and sold, and how it is marketed. It will also investigate whether there are opportunities to develop a local market for wild venison. It will assess what stages of the supply chain need to be developed. Also whether wild venison can be supplied, processed, distributed and marketed locally using the benefit to woodland habitats as a marketing tool.

Recommendations produced within the feasibility study will form the basis of future applications for funding to enable the development of the route to market. This further work will provide economic benefit locally to all those within the supply chain, including woodland managers, stalkers, butchers, distributors, retailers and consumers.

Similar studies into wild venison processing and marketing have taken place elsewhere in the UK, for example Lincolnshire and the east of England. There are also many examples of studies into production, marketing and promotion of local farmed products that benefit the natural environment. Such a comprehensive study into wild venison has not been undertaken in the Wye Valley AONB before and will make use of good practice examples from similar work.

Natural England has offered funding towards the study. Welsh funding is currently being sought for the study in Monmouthshire, primarily through LEADER and the SDF. Other partners include Natural Resources Wales, Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust. The study area will encompass the Lower Wye from Symonds Yat to Chepstow, and extend across to Wentwood in Monmouthshire. The estimated project cost is £9,5 00.

Background

The landscape scale approach identifies the four landscape management strategies of Conserve, Enhance, Restore and/or Create. This, and an understanding of landscape character, is a guiding principle of the AONB Management Plan and the AONB Partnership's work. This helps to direct conservation and enhancement of the features and Special Qualities that maintain the uniqueness and natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB.