

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'  
WORKING PARTY REPORT

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

## **AONB REPORTS**

### ***Purpose***

To advise members of activity of the AONB Unit and other partners.

FOR INFORMATION

The AONB Manager will give a brief verbal report on the following AONB initiatives, outlined below:-

- a. Future Landscapes Wales & Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales
- b. AONB Partnership Study Tour feedback
- c. Chalara update
- d. LEMUR+ extensions
- e. Europarc visit
- f. MindSCAPE

### **a. Future Landscapes Wales & Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales**

The Future Landscapes Wales Working Group will be convening once again on 10<sup>th</sup> November to review the final report on the Future Landscapes Wales programme. This is then due to be signed off by the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM and Lord Dafydd Ellis-Thomas AM, chair of the Working Group, on 8<sup>th</sup> December as part of the Gower AONB's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations.

The AONB Manager has been part of the drafting group working with Welsh Government officers on assimilating the material presented to the last Working Group in June and the subsequent responses.

### **b. AONB Partnership Study Tour feedback**

A total of 31 people participated in the annual AONB Partnership Tour, with a good turn out of Town, Parish and Community Council representatives. There was a good spread of representation from throughout the AONB even though the Tour was focused on the Monmouthshire part of the AONB. The Tour visited Tintern Abbey, Old Station Tintern, Kingston Brewery, lunched at Abbey Mill, then visited Upper Wyndcliff and Penterry Church. Feedback from attendees of the Tour has been extremely positive.

Of the 31 participants on the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour, 7 came from Gloucestershire, 11 from Monmouthshire, 6 from Herefordshire plus 6 others. 12 were from Town/Parish/Community Councils, 9 were JAC members or officers, and 10 others.

**c. Chalara / Ash dieback update and Natural England National Nature Reserve Summit**

The AONB Unit has been involved in observations and investigations into the extent of Chalara / Ash dieback in the Wye Valley AONB. There has been a noticeable increase in the presence of Ash dieback in the AONB as this year has progressed. Further eastwards in England 80-90% of Ash trees appear to be infected with this disease in some woodlands. Kent has experienced a devastating impact from Ash Dieback.

Woodland extent in the AONB is 8,954 Ha (27% of the AONB), of which 6,083 Ha are Ancient woodland. There is not an easy way to identify how much Ash is in those woods. It was reported to the JAC last November that “Approximately 30% of the Wye Valley Woodlands Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) is Ash dominated woodland”. The AONB Veteran Tree Survey has 2,389 veteran trees logged, of which 162 (7%) are identified as Ash. The number or extent of individual field, hedgerow, garden and road side Ash trees is currently not known. However, these are likely to be the more significant trees in terms of landscape impact and public safety. A number of local authorities are developing Chalara / Ash dieback strategies, particularly for Ash trees along highways and in public open spaces. Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council are assessing the value of producing similar documents.

The AONB Unit are contributing to ‘The Ash Project’, a culturally led response to Ash Dieback which seeks to record and celebrate ash trees and ash landscapes before they are lost. This has been piloted by the Kent Downs AONB with the Woodland Trust and Archie Miles, well-known author and photographer of trees (and Herefordshire resident). A number of AONBs across the country are now collaborating in this project.

Natural England hosted a summit for the three National Nature Reserves (NNRs) on the English side of the Wye Valley AONB. These are Lady Park Wood, Highbury Wood and The Hudnalls NNRs. About 20 woodland managers and experts met in Redbrook on 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> October, spending the 1½ days visiting each NNR and debating the most appropriate management strategies for the 3 woodlands in the context of the Wye Valley and the series of NNRs across the country. The AONB Manager attended and gave a presentation to the group on the Wye Valley AONB.

**d. LEMUR+ (Learning Environments in Marine, Urban & Rural areas) placements**

The two LEMUR+ trainees have been carrying out Phase 1 Habitat Surveys predominantly in the south Herefordshire part of the AONB, along with other tasks supporting the work of the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

The 4 month LEMUR+ placement completed her contract in September. However, the trainee has accepted an extension to their contract supported by funding from Natural England for project work on the Garren and Gamber brooks and works on Ross riverside with Ross Town

Council. Similarly it is anticipated that the contract for the 9 month LEMUR+ trainee will be extended when their placement formally ends in late November. These extensions add valuable capacity to the AONB Unit, which is currently suffering from reduced staffing due to long term sickness absence.

**e. Europarc visit**

On 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> October a delegation of nine people from 6 German National Parks and Europarc Germany spent 1½ days in the AONB focusing primarily on ‘Regional development and sustainable tourism’. The AONB Manager had assisted with developing their itinerary and on arrival gave a presentation to the group on the Wye Valley AONB. The AONB staff met with the group and assisted with their transport to Yat Rock. The group stayed in The Royal Hotel at Symonds Yat East. On the second day the AONB Manager guided them on a walk via Biblins Bridge and the Symonds Yat hand ferry. They then visited Redbrook Bridge, Tintern Abbey and Old Station Tintern. They were also visiting the Cotswold AONB and Brecon Beacons National Park.

**f. MindSCAPE**

The Annual Report has been published for the second year of the four year Big Lottery funded project. Artspace Cinderford continue to deliver the on-going activities with Dementia sufferers and their carers.

Hannah Elton-Wall, General Manager Artspace Cinderford, will be giving a presentation on the mindSCAPE project at the ‘Delivering the health and wellbeing benefits of the natural environment’ seminar in Bristol on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2016. This event is jointly hosted by the South Region Sustainability and Health Network and the South West Local Nature Partnerships. The event aims to demonstrate how to incorporate evidence based examples of natural therapy into service provision in health and social care. The AONB Manager and Community Links Officer will also attend the event.