

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held
at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford. on Monday,
5th November, 2018 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor P. Cutter (Chair) (Herefordshire Council)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: D. Dovey and M. Lane

Gloucestershire County Council

County Councillors: T. Hale and P. Molyneux

Herefordshire Council

Councillors: J. Hardwick and E.J. Swinglehurst

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillors: G. Davies and B. Hogan

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers

HALC – Mr. R. Gething

One Voice Wales – Councillor G. Powell

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire – Mr. B. Nash

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

National Farmers Union Wales – Mr. D. Price

Technical Advice Officers:

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

Wye Valley AONB – Mr. C. Radford

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor A. Webb, Dr. G. Peterken, Mr. R. Niblett, Ms. H. McDowell, Mr. A. Nixon and Mr. R. Hesketh.

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1. Introductions

The Chair introduced Mr. C. Radford, Lower Wye Catchments Project Officer, to the Joint Advisory Committee.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Joint Advisory Committee members.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee meeting dated 2nd July 2018 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

4. Chair's announcement regarding filming / broadcasting Joint Advisory Committee meetings

The Joint Advisory Committee were informed that the Council Chamber now has a facility to film and broadcast meetings. It was agreed that investigations be made to ascertain whether it would be feasible to live stream future meetings of the Joint Advisory Committee and report back to the next meeting.

5. Public Question Time

There were no members of the public present.

6. AONB Management Plan Review

We received a report outlining the programme for the preparation and publication of the AONB Management Plan 2020 – 2025.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The current Wye Valley AONB Management Plan (2015-2020) needs to be reviewed, under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 Section 89, by the end of 2020.
- The Wye Valley AONB Memorandum of Understanding 2018-2021, signed by the four local authorities, delegates the Management Plan review to the AONB Partnership.
- In mid-July 2018 Biodiversity, Landscape and Planning officers from the local authorities met to discuss the format of the Review.
- The conclusion was that a balanced review is needed which modifies, updates and simplifies the existing Plan, being proportionate but slightly more than a 'light touch' review, while building on the sound foundation of the existing Plan.

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We resolved that the Joint Advisory Committee endorses a balanced and proportionate review of the AONB Management Plan which modifies, updates and simplifies the current Plan, but builds on the sound foundation of the existing Plan.

7. Wye Valley River Festival

We received the Evaluation reports for the Wye Valley River Festival 2018.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The full evaluation reports of the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 have been completed and are available on-line.
- 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 original Business Plan to run a biennial Wye Valley River Festival in 2014, 2016 and 2018 has been delivered with most targets achieved or exceeded.
- The general consensus is that all three Wye Valley River Festivals to date have been a success, raising the appreciation of the landscape with innovative and entertaining outdoor art.
- The Wye Valley River Festival won The Bowland Award at the national Landscapes for Life conference, voted on by AONBs across England and Wales.
- There is widespread local support to continue with the Festival, although constraints with the current format are recognised. Therefore, discussions are being held with key partners and funding organisations looking at the future of the Wye Valley River Festival.
- Visit Wales 'product development' funding has enabled the commissioning of a study on governance options, audience demographics and funding models to inform a new five year business plan to take the Wye Valley River Festival forward to 2024.
- The theme of 'Time' is proposed for a Wye Valley River Festival 2020, reflecting the palimpsest nature of the landscape and past, present and future forces for change.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- On behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee, the Chair thanked the Wye Valley AONB Manager and his team for organising and facilitating the River Festival event and congratulated the AONB Unit on winning the Bowland Award.
- It was noted that it will be the 50th anniversary of the Wye Valley AONB in 2021 and the 200th anniversary of Bigsweir Bridge in 2027. These events will be celebrated and consideration should be given to incorporating these events into future Wye Valley River Festival events.

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We welcomed the evaluation reports for the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 and the conclusions and lessons learned and endorsed the development process for the future of the Wye Valley River Festival.

8. Wye Navigation Advisory Committee nomination

We received a report requesting the Joint Advisory Committee to nominate a representative from the AONB Partnership to the Wye Navigation Advisory Committee (Wye NAC).

In doing so the following points were noted:

- The AONB Manager has represented the AONB Partnership on the Wye Navigation Advisory Committee (Wye NAC) since the establishment of Wye NAC in 2003 and his fifth 3-year term ended on 30th September 2018.
- Several other members of the Joint Advisory Committee sit on the Wye NAC in other capacities.
- The Environment Agency (EA) services Wye NAC and has membership guidance which recommends that appointments should not exceed 10 years unless there is good reason.
- The Joint Advisory Committee needs to consider who should represent it on Wye NAC for the next three years.

We resolved that the Wye Valley AONB Manager, Andrew Blake, represents the Wye Valley AONB Partnership on the Wye NAC.

9. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

We received a report regarding the new guidelines from Welsh Government for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) is a delegated grant from Welsh Government administered by the Wye Valley AONB Partnership and confirmed for 2018/19 and 2019/20 at £55,000 per annum.
- New guidance for the SDF has been issued by Welsh Government.
- The SDF Assessment Panel is established as a sub-group of the Joint Advisory Committee. It currently has a number of vacancies making this an opportune moment to review membership.
- The SDF Assessment Panel is made up of public, private and voluntary sector representatives with two appointees from each sector to ensure a balance across

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social, community, economic and environmental interests, with additional officers' support.

- It is proposed that the Joint Advisory Committee nominates three members, one for each sector, to complement three independent co-opted appointees to the Panel.
- The current allocation of SDF grants has £13,776 remaining to be allocated in 2018/19.

We resolved:

- (i) to adopt the new guidelines from Welsh Government for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).
- (ii) to nominate three Joint Advisory Committee members to the SDF Assessment Panel to complement three independent co-opted appointees to the Panel. The three Joint Advisory Committee members being:

Councillor A. Webb (Monmouthshire County Council)
Councillor G. Davies (Forest of Dean District Council)
Mr. A. Thomas (Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire)

- (iii) that Mr. D. Price (National Farmers Union Wales) represents the Private Sector on the Panel and that the AONB Manager investigates private and voluntary sector nominations for co-option onto the Panel.

10. Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales

We received a report regarding the publication of 'Valued & Resilient: Welsh Government's Priorities for AONBs & National Parks' and the response to the Minister's letter on greater parity between AONBs and National Parks.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Valued & Resilient: Welsh Government's Priorities for AONBs & National Parks was published in July 2018 and is intended to bring the Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales to a close.
- At the July 2018 Joint Advisory Committee, members welcomed the letter from Hannah Blythyn AM, Minister for Environment to Welsh AONB lead officers, the National Association for AONBs and Natural Resources Wales requesting, by early September 2018, views on how to provide greater parity for AONBs with National Parks in Wales.
- A joint response to the Minister's letter was submitted in late September 2018.
- Officers from the Welsh AONBs, the National Association for AONBs and Natural Resources Wales are meeting the Minister to further discuss the response on 14th

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November 2018. The AONB Manager will report back to the Joint Advisory Committee regarding this matter.

- Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority is hosting the Designated Landscapes Wales Seminar on 5th-6th November 2018 and the AONB Manager will attend as part of this seminar.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- It was noted that the review of Designated Landscapes in Wales was coming to a close following five years of review. During this time much had been learned. However, the Designated Landscape review in England was only just beginning.
- The Wye Valley AONB is in a unique position straddling the border between England and Wales. Though there are challenges to be overcome, the AONB tends to make its unique situation work and it is anticipated that it will continue to do so even though the designated landscapes reviews for England and Wales are at different stages of development and may lead to further divergence.
- County Councillor A. Webb is also attending the Designated Landscapes Wales Seminar as a member of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.

We welcomed the publication of Valued & Resilient: Welsh Government's Priorities for AONBs & National Parks and endorsed the joint response from the Welsh AONB lead officers, National Association for AONBs and Natural Resources Wales to the Welsh Government Minister for Environment addressing greater parity between AONBs and National Parks in Wales.

11. Designated Landscapes Review in England

We received a report regarding the Designated Landscapes Review in England and determined how to respond to the 'call for evidence'.

In doing so the following points were noted:

- Environment Secretary Michael Gove MP launched the Review of Designated Landscapes (National Parks and AONBs) in May 2018, appointing Julian Glover to lead a small advisory panel.
- The advisory panel has simplified the name to the Landscapes Review and has opened a call for evidence.
- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) has been leading collaboration and liaison with DEFRA and the Review panel prior to the formal consultation and call for evidence.

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- It is proposed that the Joint Advisory Committee nominates a small Task Group to collate a response to the call for evidence on behalf of the AONB Partnership, supported by the AONB Manager.

We welcomed the Landscapes Review call for evidence and resolved that a Task Group be established to prepare a response by the 18th December 2018 deadline.

The Task Group will comprise of:

Councillor J. Hardwick (Herefordshire Council)
Mr. C Evers (Gloucestershire Association of Parish / Town Councils)
Mr. B. Nash (Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire)

The AONB Manager will circulate the findings of the Task Group to the Joint Advisory Committee.

12. Lower Wye Catchments Green Infrastructure & Natural Flood Management Project

We received a report regarding the Lower Wye Catchments Natural Flood Management (NFM) & Green Infrastructure (GI) Project.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Collaboration Funding has enabled the recruitment of a Lower Wye Catchments Natural Flood Management (NFM) & Green Infrastructure (GI) Project Officer until Dec 2019.
- The Project Officer is employed by Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) and seconded to the Wye Valley AONB Unit.
- The project aims to deliver a catchment based partnership approach, covering four Wye tributaries and 54km² of the Wye Valley AONB in Monmouthshire.
- Chris Radford commenced work as the Project Officer on Monday 8th October 2018.
- The first Project Steering Group meeting was on Monday 29th October 2018.
- The Project will be a part of the AONB Partnership Tour next year.

We noted the report.

13. Former Railway Bridges

We received an update report regarding Lydbrook Black Bridge and the situation with the other former railway bridges in the lower Wye Valley.

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In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The condition of three former railway bridges over the River Wye, at Tintern (Wireworks), Redbrook and Lydbrook (Stowfield Viaduct), has been a cause for concern for a number of years.
- In December 2013 the AONB Unit had submitted an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the conservation and restoration of Redbrook railway bridge totalling £1.1million. This was unsuccessful.
- In March 2018 the AONB Manager assisted Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) in submitting a Heritage Grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the restoration of Lydbrook Black Bridge totalling £1.5million. The application was also unsuccessful.
- Over the summer of 2018, Gloucestershire County Council has undertaken essential safety work to Lydbrook Bridge and has managed to reopen the bridge by installing a temporary walkway on the bridge structure.
- It is anticipated that if all three bridge structures are not significantly refurbished in the next 10 years they may cease to be usable as footbridges.
- The AONB Unit is investigating a revised partnership approach for the conservation of all three former railway bridges over the River Wye in the AONB to ensure that the bridges remain viable as footbridges for the next 30-50 years.

Having received the report, the following information was noted:

- A scaffolding structure was installed on Lydbrook Bridge which allowed for the creation of a temporary walkway on the bridge structure.
- The AONB Manager has convened a meeting with bridge engineers from the three county councils to assess the options for the three bridges. The AONB Manager will report back to the Joint Advisory Committee following assessment of the options for the bridges.

We noted the report.

14. AONB Partnership Study Tour feedback

We received feedback on the success of the AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- A total of 29 people attended the annual AONB Partnership Tour on 21st September 2018.

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- There was good representation from throughout the AONB even though the Tour was focused predominantly on the northern part of the AONB in Herefordshire.
- The tour visited a wide variety of land uses and land management types across the area.
- Feedback from attendees of the Tour has been extremely positive.

We noted the report.

15. National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) update

We received a report regarding activity through the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB).

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) Chairman's Conference and AGM is on 29th November 2018 and will focus on "The Designated Landscapes Review in England". The AONB Manager will attend.
- The national AONB 'Landscapes for Life' Conference, in Canterbury in July 2018, was attended by the AONB Manager and AONB Community Links Officer.
- The Wye Valley River Festival won the Bowland Award at the 'Landscapes for Life' Conference.
- The NAAONB has received a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Resilient Heritage grant of £164,300 to help develop organisational and professional capacity across the AONB Family through a Future Landscapes Project.
- The AONB Development Officer and the AONB Community Links Officer will both participate in the professional training 'Taking the Lead' programme as part of the Future Landscapes Project.
- Outstanding Week was 15th – 23rd September 2018 with 65 events held nationally.

We noted the report.

16. AONB / Partner progress updates

We received a report of the activity of the AONB Unit and Partners, relating to:

- AONB Farming Awards.

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- Marketing of local Wild Venison.
- mindSCAPE.
- Offa's Dyke Collaboratory.
- Undergrounding.
- Water Environment Grant (WEG).

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- A small amount of funding had been received in England to take forward some of the recommendations arising from the marketing of local wild venison study. This did not include the marketing of wild boar meat due to the limited level of funding.
- An update report regarding the introduction of Pine Martens into the Wye Valley AONB will be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee.
- Ballingham Court Farm had won the AONB Farming awards for the third time. The farm was visited as part of the Joint Advisory Committee tour. Future opportunities to involve Farming Awards winners will also be investigated.
- A Beaver enclosure had been introduced to a location just outside of the AONB in the Forest of Dean. The Joint Advisory Committee could visit this location in the future as part of the tour.

We noted the report.

17. **Next Meetings**

Future meetings of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee will be held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford, on the following dates:

4th March 2019

1st July 2019

4th November 2019

The meeting ended at 3.17 pm.