

## **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, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 6th November, 2023 at 2.00 pm**

**PRESENT:** County Councillor A. Webb (Chair)

### **Elected Members (with voting powers)**

#### **Monmouthshire County Council**

County Councillors: E. Bryn and S. Garratt

#### **Gloucestershire County Council**

County Councillor T. Hale and G. Morgan

#### **Herefordshire Council**

Councillor: E. O'Driscoll

#### **Forest of Dean District Council**

Councillor: C. McFarling

### **Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers**

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers

### **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

Local Tourism Sector – Ms. R. Clay

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust - Dr. J. Hynes

### **Technical Advice Officers**

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

AONB Planning Officer – Mr. J. Bailey

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### **APOLOGIES:**

Councillors B. Durkin, D. Wheeler, B. Vine and M. Price, Ms. C. Spicer, Mr. M. Lewis, Mr. A. Taylor and Ms. E. Whitehouse

#### **1. Declarations of Interest**

None received.

#### **2. Public Question Time**

The Wye Valley AONB Manager will liaise with Monmouthshire County Council Highways Engineers for an update on the planned resurfacing works on the Wye Bridge in Monmouth and diversion arrangements and report back to the Joint Advisory Committee. The proposed closure of Wye Bridge is scheduled to commence in the Spring of 2024.

#### **3. Letter from the Minister for Climate Change**

We received a copy of a letter from Julie James AS/MS, Minister for Climate Change, Welsh Government, to the Chairs of National Park Authorities (NPA) and AONB Joint Committee Chairs (JACs).

It was noted that Welsh Government officials are developing a training package comprising three online training modules for all NPA and AONB JAC members. Each module is likely to be delivered over the autumn and winter.

The three priority areas are:

- Introduction to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (for NPA and AONB JAC members).
- Tackling the Nature and Climate Emergencies (for NPA and AONB JAC members).
- Effective Governance (for NPA members only – the National Association for AONBs is exploring options for governance training programs tailored specifically for AONBs).

We resolved that the AONB Manager would keep the Joint Advisory Committee informed of the online training modules, going forward.

#### **4. Confirmation of Minutes**

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

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### **5. Annual Report 2022/23**

We received a report regarding the annual report for 2022/23 on the achievements of the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- High levels of achievement were maintained by the AONB Unit despite the challenges and on-going impacts of Covid-19 restricting many activities and some reduced capacity due to staffing issues.
- The AONB Unit has levered in nearly £22 for every £1 of local authority contribution during 2022/23.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The impact of Covid-19 is no longer having a negative impact on the work being undertaken by the AONB Unit. AONB staff have developed a hybrid working system using Microsoft Teams, which is reducing the Unit's carbon footprint.
- Alternative treatments to dispose of Japanese Knotweed are being explored such as RootWave instead of Glyphosate. However, this alternative treatment does not appear to be as effective on some of the target species. Other alternative treatments are also being explored.
- With regard to the Wye Valley AONB Unit Expenditure 2022/23, it was noted that the AONB initiatives equated to £6,073. This figure refers to the internal operating costs within the AONB Unit, such as public relations, the AONB website and social media.

We welcomed the Annual Report of AONB achievements for 2022/23.

### **6. Changes to AONBs**

We received a report in which the Joint Advisory Committee was advised of forthcoming changes occurring to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, particularly relating to the duties of relevant authorities and the re-branding of AONBs to National Landscapes.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Government amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB), announced in September 2023, strengthen the duty on relevant authorities towards conserving and enhancing natural beauty and enhances AONB Management Plans by enabling a stronger link to national targets and a requirement on partners to contribute to their delivery.

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- The LURB amendments require relevant authorities in England to ‘seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty’ of the AONB. Meanwhile, relevant authorities in Wales retain the ‘duty of regard’ to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty.
- LURB amendments also allow the Secretary of State to make provision to require relevant authorities in England “to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review” of an AONB Management Plan and for the Plan to contribute to meeting targets set under the Environment Act 2021.
- DEFRA resourcing for AONBs, particularly through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme and Access for All funding has increased over the last two years and been consolidated until March 2025. Meanwhile DEFRA is working on a review of the funding formula for National Parks & AONBs.
- On 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) will host an event at the Royal Society, London, to launch when all the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty across England and Wales become National Landscapes. The following day is the NAAONB AGM and Chairs’ Conference on Ambition and Leadership. The AONB Manager is intending to represent the AONB at these events.
- The Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change is supportive of Welsh AONBs adopting the National Landscape rebrand and intends to sponsor an event in the Senedd to raise the profile of AONBs.
- Together the LURB amendments, consolidated funding and National Landscape rebrand significantly progress the Glover Landscapes Review Proposal 24 that “AONBs should be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, and renamed as National Landscapes.”
- The Government’s formal response to the Glover Landscapes Review is expected to be published shortly.
- The NAAONB, DEFRA and Welsh Government will be producing respective guidance on the LURB amendments and the National Landscape rebrand later in the year.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The tagline ‘Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ will still be used below the rebranding. However, we will begin to refer to the AONB much less and move towards referencing the National Landscape, going forward.
- Each AONB will receive in the region of £3000 to cover the cost of the rebranding.
- Discussions with Welsh Government are ongoing regarding funding.

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- Discussions are being held with civil servants in DEFRA and it is hoped that sufficient resources will be provided.
- The re-branding will be bi-lingual with the logos provided through the funding from DEFRA.
- In response to a question raised regarding monitoring progress, it was noted that until we know what we will be monitoring from Natural England, responsibilities lie across a number of public bodies, not just AONBs.

We acknowledged the forthcoming changes to AONBs relating to legislation in England on the duties of relevant authorities and the national re-branding of AONBs to National Landscapes.

#### **7. AONB Position Statements**

We received a report in which the Joint Advisory Committee was asked to formally endorse two Position Statements, which intend to establish the position of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership on key issues affecting the area, helping guide the Partnership and relevant plan-making and decision-making bodies to articulate how the AONB designation should be protected, conserved and enhanced. To be made aware of intended upcoming position statements, which seek to aid all interested parties to uphold and deliver the vision and priorities contained within the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Currently, the AONB Partnership does not have Position Statements. Position Statements provide further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to the specific Wye Valley AONB Management Plan Strategic Objectives and associated issues.
- The 'Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting' Position Statement advises housing development to be based on robust evidence of need arising from within the Protected Landscape. Currently, assessment of housing need and housing requirements are based on local authority boundaries, not the AONB boundary. This could be avoided if 'housing need' and 'housing requirements' are clearly differentiated.
- The Landscape-led Position Statement advises that development within the Wye Valley AONB and, where relevant, in its setting, should be 'landscape-led'. Ideally, there should not have to be a binary choice between conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB and planning for and permitting new development. The aspiration should be to deliver new development in a way that is compatible with and positively contributes to the AONB as a nationally designated protected landscape.

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- The Position Statements have had formal public consultation between 4<sup>th</sup> August and 29<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (inclusive), following which comments submitted have been considered and amendments made, with the revised version being brought to the Joint Advisory Committee for endorsement.
- Shared experience from the similar Position Statements for the Malvern Hills AONB has helped inform, revise and strengthen both sets of Position Statements.
- It is intended that guidance and associated Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies for the Wye Valley AONB will be prepared and presented at a future Joint Advisory Committee meeting. These will aim to promote good practice and assist those proposing new development in the AONB and its setting.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Training will commence at the end of November 2023, with a proposed session for Herefordshire Council Planning officers.
- Training will be extended to Forest of Dean District Council officers. This will also be provided for Malvern Hills and Monmouthshire County Council Officers, going forward.
- Online training will be provided to town, community and parish councils in due course.
- The position statements are being prepared while a number of local authorities are reviewing their local plans. It is hoped that the position statements will be incorporated into the local plans, going forward.
- Via the NAAONB, AONB planning officers meet several times a year to exchange information. The AONB Planning Officer is able to gain feedback from these meetings.

We resolved to:

- (i) note the public consultation undertaken by Wye Valley AONB Unit Staff on the 'Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting' Position Statement and 'Landscape-led' Position Statement, which took place between 4<sup>th</sup> August and 29<sup>th</sup> September 2023.
- (ii) formally endorse the 'Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting' Position Statement, and its associated Appendices.
- (iii) formally endorse the 'Landscape-led Development' Position Statement, and its associated Appendices.
- (iv) note that Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies intend to be presented at a future Joint Advisory Committee meeting.

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### **8. AONB Memorandum of Understanding**

We received a report regarding the progress with the AONB Memorandum of Understanding between the four local authorities for 2024 – 2027.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The AONB Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is intended to give medium term security and commitment to the AONB Partnership.
- The current MoU ends in March 2024 and a revised three year edition, until March 2027, is being prepared between the four local authorities.
- When the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill amendments becomes law, local authorities in Wales retain the 'duty of regard' to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, whereas in England relevant authorities 'must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of the AONB.
- DEFRA and Welsh Government are not signatories to the MoU but their grant offer letters are appended to the MoU. Their current AONB grant funding allocations extend to March 2025.
- Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has proposed outline offered allocations of AONB project funding until March 2027.
- The MoU includes the minimum contribution expected from the local authorities which form the foundation of the budget managed by the AONB Unit. Contributions are proposed to remain at existing levels.
- AONB leverage in 2022/23 brought in £21.80 for every £1 of Local Authority contribution.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Funding requests from the local authority partners do not include inflation due to current local authority budget pressures. However, local authority partners can increase their allocation by choice.
- The funding received from each local authority partner is based on the percentage area of each authority within the AONB.

We resolved to:

- (i) encourage the constituent local authorities to finalise and agree the AONB Memorandum of Understanding for 2024 – 2027.

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- (ii) welcome the provisional allocations of funding until March 2027 from Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

#### **9. FiPL, SDF & HCF AONB Fund update**

We received a report regarding the progress of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The DEFRA funded Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme in England has an allocation of £339,063 for 2023/24 and £362,384 for 2024/25.
- The FiPL Assessment Panel has approved grants totalling £303,675 in 2023/24 with £35,387 remaining. For 2024/5, £157,270 has already been allocated, leaving £205,113 remaining in what is understood to be the last year of the programme.
- Guidance and assistance to farmers and land managers applying to the FiPL programme is provided by Anna Stankiewicz, AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer, along with Farm Advisors from the Wye & Usk Foundation and Herefordshire Meadows.
- The Welsh Government Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) currently has £82,961 allocated from the £100,000 available for 2023/24, plus £15,000 from a returned grant leaving £32,038 available. There is also £53,227 already allocated from the £100,000 available for 2024/25, leaving £46,773 available.
- Community groups, local organisations and individuals wishing to apply for the SDF can get assistance from Lucinda James, AONB Community Links Officer.
- The Wye Valley AONB Fund hosted by the Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) is currently closed for applications and opportunities to grow the Fund need to be sought.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding Pasture for Profit in Protected Landscapes, the AONB Manager would liaise with the AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer to obtain an update and report back.

We endorsed the allocations of grants under the FiPL programme, SDF and HCF AONB Fund to date for 2023/24.



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### **10. AONB Partnership Study Tour 2023 & Winter Seminar 2024**

We received a report regarding the success of the AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour and the proposition for a Winter Seminar on Planning in a National Landscape.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- A total of 37 people attended the annual AONB Partnership Tour on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2023.
- There was a good variety of representation from throughout the AONB even though the Tour was focused around the lower Wye Valley between Monmouth and Tintern.
- The tour visited a range of sites associated with social and/or land-use management initiatives supported in various ways by the AONB, including a One Planet Development, a Village Hall, two farms - one a Nature Reserve and other a youth farm charity, and Old Station Tintern.
- Feedback from attendees of the Tour has been extremely positive and the time and dedication of the speakers and hosts was greatly appreciated.
- It is proposed that a Winter Seminar is held in February or March 2024, on the theme of Planning in a National Landscape, focusing on Strategic and Development Control issues and implications for the AONB as a National Landscape.

Having received the report, the Joint Advisory Committee thanked the AONB Manager and his team for providing the AONB Partnership Tour.

We welcomed the positive feedback on the AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour and endorsed a late Winter Seminar on the theme of Planning in a National Landscape.

### **11. AONB Unit and Partner updates**

We received a report regarding the activity of the Wye Valley AONB Unit and other partners relating to:

- NAAONB Conference & Wye Valley Field trip.
- River Wye update & Wye Catchment Partnership & Collaborations:
  - Wyescapes: food, nature, water ELMS Landscape Recovery 2 bid.
  - Wye Adapt to Climate Change Project.
- Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project.
- Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails Strategy & Consultation.

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- Green Blue Infrastructure – Herefordshire Council Mapping and Strategy.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The Wyescares: food, nature, water ELMS Landscape Recovery 2 bid intends to secure landowners' commitments to the restoration of farmland on the floodplain to increase water retention and improve water quality. If the bid is approved there will be a two-year development phase before a 20 year scheme which will be transformative for the Wye.
- The AONB Manager will provide an update regarding pollution in the River Wye at the next Joint Advisory Committee meeting.

We noted the report.

### **12. Dates of next meetings:**

Monday 4th March 2024 at 2.00pm.

Monday 1st July 2024 at 2.00pm.

Monday 4th November 2024 at 2.00pm.

The meetings will be held in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

**The meeting ended at 3.42 pm.**