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County Hall
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NP15 1GA

Monday, 30 October 2023

Notice of meeting:

Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Monday, 6th November, 2023 at 2.00 pm,
The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High
Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG

AGENDA

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13.	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.	

Paul Matthews

Chief Executive

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CYNGOR SIR FYNWY

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:

Local Authority Members with Voting Powers

Gloucestershire:

T. Hale
G. Morgan

Herefordshire:

B. Durkin
G. Biggs
E. O'Driscoll
S. Cole

Monmouthshire:

E. Bryn
S. Garratt
D. Rooke
A.E. Webb

Forest of Dean:

D. Wheeler
C. McFarling

Town / Parish Community Councils with Voting Powers

C. Evers – Gloucestershire Association of Parish / Town Councils
B. Vine – Herefordshire Association Local Councils
Councillor R. Edwards – One Voice Wales

Co-opted Members with Voting Powers

Vacancy – Voluntary Conservation Sector in Gloucestershire
B. Nash - Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire
A. Thomas - Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire
H. Dale – Country Land and Business Association
M. Price – National Farmers Union

Co-opted Members without Voting Powers

C. Barron – Wye Valley Society
R. Hesketh – River Wye Preservation Trust
A. Lee – Recreation Sector
R. Clay – Local Tourism Sector
C. Spicer – Local Wildlife Trusts
D. Price – National Farmers Union Wales

Public Information

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Welsh Language

The Council welcomes contributions from members of the public through the medium of Welsh or English. We respectfully ask that you provide us with adequate notice to accommodate your needs.

Aims and Values of Monmouthshire County Council

Sustainable and Resilient Communities

Outcomes we are working towards

Nobody Is Left Behind

- Older people are able to live their good life
- People have access to appropriate and affordable housing
- People have good access and mobility

People Are Confident, Capable and Involved

- People's lives are not affected by alcohol and drug misuse
- Families are supported
- People feel safe

Our County Thrives

- Business and enterprise
- People have access to practical and flexible learning
- People protect and enhance the environment

Our priorities

- Schools
- Protection of vulnerable people
- Supporting Business and Job Creation
- Maintaining locally accessible services

Our Values

- **Openness:** we aspire to be open and honest to develop trusting relationships.
- **Fairness:** we aspire to provide fair choice, opportunities and experiences and become an organisation built on mutual respect.
- **Flexibility:** we aspire to be flexible in our thinking and action to become an effective and efficient organisation.
- **Teamwork:** we aspire to work together to share our successes and failures by building on our strengths and supporting one another to achieve our goals.
- **Kindness:** We will show kindness to all those we work with putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions.

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change

Ein cyf/Our ref:MA/JJ/1703/23

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Chairs of National Park Authorities
Relevant Council Leaders
AONB Joint Committee Chairs

Cc: NPA Chief Executives
NPA Heads of Democratic Services
Relevant Local Authority Heads of Democratic Services
AONB Lead Officers

25 September 2023

Dear Chairs and Council Leaders,

I attach great importance to the role of our Designated Landscapes, both our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, in helping deliver key Welsh Government priorities including addressing the nature and climate emergencies. For these bodies to be successful in these endeavours it is important to ensure that the governance of these bodies, the National Park Authorities (NPAs) and AONB Joint Advisory Committees (JACs), are as effective as possible. Consequently, I am keen to ensure the members of these bodies, many of whom are County Councillors, have the full range of skills, and the latest information, at their disposal to best discharge their duties for their communities and the people of Wales.

To help with this important task, my officials are developing a training package comprising three online training modules for all NPA and AONB JAC members. Each module will last for around two hours and are likely to be delivered over the autumn and winter. They will be delivered online and we will strive to arrange them at the most convenient times for attendees given their other duties. We will also strive to ensure bilingual provision.

The three priority areas, developed in consultation with the NPAs, AONBs and Natural Resources Wales, 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).

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi / We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I am keen that we work together so that members can maximise the opportunities they have to protect and enable access to our most cherished landscapes and to ensure robust governance arrangements are in place so that NPAs and AONBs can carry out their important roles. I therefore ask that you help in promoting and encouraging these opportunities amongst members.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change

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, 3rd July, 2023 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor A. Webb (Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: E. Bryn and D. Rooke

Herefordshire Council

Councillors: E. O'Driscoll, B. Durkin and S. Cole

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillors: C. McFarling and D. Wheeler

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers

Herefordshire Association Local Councils – Mr. R. Gething

One Voice Wales – Ms. R. Edwards

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire – Mr. B. Nash

National Farmers Union – Mr. M. Price

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

Local Tourism Sector – Ms. R. Clay

National Farmers Union Wales – Mr. D. Price

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust - Dr. J. Hynes

Technical Advice Officers

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

AONB Planning Officer – Mr. J. Bailey

AONB Business Support Assistant – Mrs. Juliana Foster

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APOLOGIES:

County Councillor S. Garratt, Councillor G. Biggs, Councillor T. Hale, Mr. R. Hesketh, Mr. R. Niblett and Ms. E. Whitehouse.

1. Election of Chair

We elected County Councillor Ann Webb as Chair.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

We appointed Councillor Chris McFarling as Vice-Chair.

3. Introductions & New Members

The Chair welcomed the new Committee Members to the meeting.

4. Declarations of Interest

Councillor D. Wheeler declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as he is the Chair of Forest of Dean District Council's Planning Committee.

Councillor C. McFarling declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 8 – Planning Guidance & AONB Position Statements as he lives within the AONB.

5. Public Questions

None received.

6. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 6th March 2023 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

In doing so, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that there were two vacant positions on the Joint Advisory Committee. However, it was intended to fill these positions in time for the next meeting.

7. River Wye update

We received a report regarding an update on the River Wye.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Natural England recently updated the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition assessment for the River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) from

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'unfavourable recovering' to 'unfavourable declining' due to a decline in key wildlife species.

- There remains widespread concern about high nutrient and pollution levels in the Wye catchment. The main excess nutrient that is causing concern is phosphate.
- With the recent hot weather, Environment Agency (EA) monitoring equipment (sondes) located along the river Wye have shown water temperatures that can be injurious and potentially lethal to salmon.
- There has recently been a bloom of brown algae in the River Wye in Herefordshire.
- Environment Secretary Thérèse Coffey met local farmers, councillors, environmental groups, MPs and Welsh Government Members in Hereford in late May 2023 to discuss actions to improve the state of the River Wye.
- The Wye Catchment Partnership is meeting on 4th July 2023 and will investigate opportunities for a Landscape Recovery bid for the River Wye.
- A Swansea University PhD student will be on placement with the AONB Unit for five weeks in late summer researching their thesis 'Water as a contested space - Improving the quality of our rivers'.
- The AONB Unit continues to manage partnership projects and collaborative initiatives including through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and the Wye Invasive Species Programme, to support farmers and land-managers in and around the AONB.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding whether the National Government is providing emergency funding to address the decline in the river Wye, it was noted that this matter would be raised at the Wye Catchment Partnership meeting on 4th July 2023.
- Local people are concerned at the lack of action being undertaken by National Government to improve the condition of the river Wye. A committed programme of work is required over the next ten years to address this matter.
- Parish Councils are concerned regarding the quality of the drinking water coming from the river Wye following treatment. It was considered that the Environment Agency and Ofwat should be ensuring that Severn Trent Water is providing high quality drinking water from the river Wye.
- Forest of Dean District Council Cabinet will contact Severn Trent Water regarding the quality of the drinking water from the river Wye.

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- In response to a question raised, it was noted that two Herefordshire Council representatives will be attending the Wye Catchment Partnership meeting on 4th July 2023.
- The Committee was aware of the limitations in the Landscape Recovery bid. However, this year's bid will focus on a workable area within the catchment.
- The PHD student will be on placement with the AONB unit for five weeks in the summer. The Committee looks forward to seeing the outcome of the study in due course.

We resolved:

- (i) to support a proposed Landscape Recovery bid for the River Wye by the Wye Catchment Partnership.
- (ii) to welcome the PhD placement with the AONB Unit on 'Water as a contested space - Improving the quality of our rivers'.

8. Planning Guidance & AONB Position Statements

We received a report regarding Planning Guidance and Position Statements which intends to establish the position of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership on key issues affecting the area, helping guide the Partnership and relevant planning bodies and decision-making bodies to articulate how the AONB designation should be protected, conserved and enhanced.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Currently, the AONB Partnership does not have Position Statements. Without them, there can be unnecessary pressure to accommodate unnecessary development.
- Position Statements provide further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to the specific Wye Valley AONB Management Plan Strategic Objectives and associated issues.
- The draft '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 draft 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

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in a way that is compatible with and positively contributes to the AONB as a nationally designated protected landscape.

- The draft Position Statements, if endorsed, will go out to formal consultation before being brought to the Joint Advisory Committee for further consideration and final sign off.
- It is intended that guidance and associated Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies be presented at a future Joint Advisory Committee meeting. The guidance documents 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:

- The Planning Guidance and Position Statements tighten up the planning framework in the AONB.
- A case should be made for equal standing with the Local Plan.
- Recommendation 5.7.7 – ‘at least 50% affordable housing in market housing developments’ – This is in line with other AONBs.
- There was a need to reduce the number of second homes in the AONB.
- This document is in draft form. A formal consultation process with all elected members within the AONB will be undertaken in early August 2023.

We resolved:

- (i) to endorse the ‘Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting’ Position Statement, and its associated Appendices, as a consultation draft;
- (ii) to endorse the ‘Landscape-led Development’ Position Statement, and its associated Appendices, as a consultation draft;
- (iii) to agree that if future amendments are required, as necessary, that these can be made by Wye Valley AONB Unit staff, in consultation with the Wye Valley AONB Manager, unless materially significant, in which case they will be brought to the Joint Advisory Committee for further consideration and final approval;
- (iv) to agree a formal review date of both Position Statements to take place every five years unless otherwise amended.

9. National Association for AONBs & National Landscapes re-branding

We received a report regarding the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB), including the re-branding of AONBs to National Landscapes and the National AONB Conference in Bath on 5th-7th September 2023.

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In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) is leading on the rebranding of AONBs to National Landscapes, to be implemented later this year.
- The title National Landscape does not remove or replace the legal definition of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in law but is a simpler common name without a complicated acronym.
- The NAAONB will rename as the National Landscapes Association.
- A suite of complementary logos for all AONBs / National Landscapes are being designed and will be presented to the next Joint Advisory Committee in November 2023 for adoption.
- The National AONB Conference will be on 5th - 7th September 2023, with the focus on 'Invested and Investing in Landscape – who, why, how'.
- The Conference is at Bath University with field trips to the co-hosting AONBs of Cotswolds, Cranborne Chase, Mendip Hills, North Wessex Downs, Quantock Hills and Wye Valley on 6th September 2023.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Some Committee Members expressed concern that the rebranding of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be known as National landscapes would lead to a diminution of the AONB.
- Other Committee Members considered that the change in name would provide a form of national identity to the AONB.

It was agreed to consider the two recommendations of the report separately.

Recommendation A:

It was proposed and seconded that recommendation A be amended as follows:

- That the Joint Advisory Committee does not endorse the proposal to rebrand Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be known as National landscapes.

Upon being put to the vote, the following votes were recorded:

In favour of the proposal	-	11
Against the proposal	-	2

We resolved that the Joint Advisory Committee does not endorse the proposal to rebrand Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be known as National landscapes.

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Recommendation B:

We resolved to encourage AONB partners to attend the National AONB Conference at Bath University on 5th – 7th September 2023.

10. Grants update - FiPL, SDF & HCF AONB Fund

We received a report regarding 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:

- DEFRA has provided a revised and increased allocation for the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme in England of £339,063 for 2023/24 and £362,384 for 2024/25.
- Currently FiPL grants & payments for 2023/24 total £239,552 with £99,510 remaining. For 2024/5, which is the last year of the programme, £85,972 has already been allocated.
- The AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer, Anna Stankiewicz, is able to assist farmers and land managers applying to the FiPL programme.
- The allocation of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) currently has £63,108 allocated from the £100,000 offered by Welsh Government for 2023/24, with £100,000 also available for 2024/25.
- The AONB Community Links Officer, Lucinda James, is able to assist organisations, community groups and individuals applying for the SDF.
- Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) hosts the Wye Valley AONB Fund, which currently has a balance of £64,500.
- Applications are welcome for all three sets of funding for 2023/24 and 2024/25.

We resolved to endorse the allocations of grants under the FiPL programme, SDF and HCF AONB Fund to date for 2023/24 and encouraged the sound uptake of the remaining funds.

11. AONB Partnership Study Tour 2023 - Lower Wye Nature Networks project

We received a report regarding the Annual AONB Partnership Study Tour.

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In doing so, the following information was noted:

- This year the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour will be held on Friday 22nd September 2023.
- The programme is still being finalised but will focus predominantly on achievements and management issues relating to the Lottery funded Lower Wye Nature Networks Project in the Monmouthshire part of the AONB.
- Initial invitations for expressions of interest to attend will be dispatched in due course.
- Invitations could be extended to representatives from our neighbouring Designated Landscapes and other appropriate partner organisations in the interest of sharing good practice and broadening collaboration.

We resolved:

- (i) to note the date of Friday 22nd September 2023 for the Study Tour and encourage a good attendance.
- (ii) to invite representatives from our neighbouring Shropshire Hills and Malvern Hills AONB Partnerships, the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority and other appropriate partners.

12. Review of Designated Landscapes in England & Wales

We received a report regarding progress with the respective Reviews of Designated Landscapes in England and Wales.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- DEFRA has yet to publish the Ministerial response on the consultation to the Landscape Review, which will be influenced by the finalised Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.
- Progress is being made on establishing the National Landscapes, Parks & Trails Partnership, between the NAAONB, National Parks England, National Trail UK and Natural England, to be known as the Protected Landscapes Partnership.
- Ministerial Responsibility for AONBs in Wales has moved back to the Climate Change portfolio, under Julie James MS.
- The Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) is co-ordinating a range of activities and projects across the 8 Designated Landscapes in Wales.

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- AONB Lead Officers in Wales are in the process of meeting with Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to review future funding options.
- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) continues to liaise and co-ordinate collaboration with both governments and key stakeholders over progressing the agenda for AONBs.

We noted the report.

13. **Partner and AONB Unit progress reports and updates**

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

- Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects.
- Cleddon Bog & NRW Peatland funding.
- AONB Species Action Plans.
- Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project.
- Integrated Recreational Access Strategy - Monmouthshire.
- INNS & WISP Gloucestershire CPRE Award.
- Access For All.
- Youth Rangers.
- Offa's Dyke Collaboratory.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The AONB Manager informed the Committee that the AONB Unit would be content to receive telephone calls / emails from the public regarding Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) in the AONB, such as Japanese Knotweed, with a view to providing the appropriate treatment to deal with these invasive species.
- The Species Action Plan for Hedgehogs is in the final development phase. Dylan Allman and his Hedgehog Aware campaign has been working with local suppliers of gardening equipment with a view to encouraging people to be more aware of hedgehogs. He has received a modest SDF grant to help support his conservation efforts.
- The Integrated Recreational Access Strategy and Action Plan is funded via Welsh Government. Therefore, can only focus on the Monmouthshire area at present.

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We noted the report.

14. Date of next Meeting

Monday 6th November 2023 at 2.00pm at the Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

Before closing the meeting, the Chair informed the Joint Advisory Committee that this would be Richard Gething's last meeting as the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils representative. Richard has been a member of the Joint Advisory Committee since 1997. On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Richard for his contributions over the years and wished him well in the future.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm.

ANNUAL REPORT

Purpose

To present the annual reports for 2022/23 on the achievements of the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

Recommendations

That the JAC welcome the Annual Report of AONB achievements for 2022/23

Key Issues

- The 2022/23 Annual Report on the Work Programme for the AONB Unit is appended, along with the summary financial report.
- 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.

Reasons

The Annual Work Programme Report for the AONB Unit is usually presented to the July JAC. However the Report was delayed due to work pressures and staff shortages. The impacts of Covid-19 have continued to affected many aspects of life over the past year.

Implications

The AONB Unit Work Programme Plan was risk assessed in relation to Covid-19 restrictions and reviewed by the AONB Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP). AONB staff developed a hybrid working systems with several staff predominantly returning to the office but also more flexibly 'Working from Home' as needs required. This will also have helped reduce the AONB Unit's carbon footprint, along with the Office refurbishment and decarbonisation. Extensive use of Microsoft Teams has also contributed to office efficiency, but hopefully not at the expense of networking and building stakeholder relationships. Site works and commissioning contractors on the ground was easier without Covid lockdowns. Staff capacity was increased through the successful recruitment of the FiPL Officer and the (shared) AONB Planning Officer, however the Finance & Administration Officer then put in their notice at the end of the year, which has impacted on subsequent reporting.

The overall turnover of the AONB Unit increased in 2022/23, mostly accounted for by the income and expenditure of the DEFRA Farming in Protected Landscape programme and the Partnership projects such as the Lower Wye Nature Networks Lottery funded project. Total turnover in 2022/23 was £1,073,021. The leverage of the AONB Partnership means that for every £1 of local authority contribution, the AONB Unit brought in £21.80.

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Annual report 2022 – 2023 including financial summary

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Agenda Item 6b

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives</i> AONB Unit Initiatives		AONB Unit Achievements & Outcomes 2022-23
WV-L1 WV-P3	AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 1) Publicise and promote Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2) Monitor use of Management Plan in Planning Applications, Public Inquiries and by stakeholders	1) Reference to the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan is made in almost all planning application representations, reiterated by the appointment in January of the sPO, helping uphold the vision for the designation and the priorities for its management, particularly in relation to development management. 2) Since the sPO was appointed more consistent monitoring was achieved. a) From reading planning officer reports after the sPO has made representation and when decisions are issued by LPAs, the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, which is a material planning consideration in decision-making, is often either ignored or misinterpreted by LPAs. b) The sPO has identified that, frustratingly, genuine constructive comments and request for conditions such as 'no additional external lighting being implemented unless otherwise agreed with the LPA prior to installation', which itself would help the promotion of dark skies and conserve biodiversity, is often being ignored - bearing in mind that this condition would appear to meet the Welsh Government Circular (WGC) 016/2014 "The Use of Planning Conditions for Development Management" and/or the 'six tests' within Planning Practice Guidance and would help avoid unacceptable light pollution in the AONB.
WV-D1 WV-D2 WV-D3 WV-P4	AONB Planning & Development Control 1) Review contract for Planning Advice support jointly with Malvern Hills AONB Partnership. 2) Comment on relevant Planning Applications and strategic planning documents 3) Annually monitor and review development trends and the approach taken by planning authorities to issues that affect the AONB	1) In late 2022, the Wye Valley AONB and Malvern Hills AONB appointed a (shared) AONB Planning Officer, to work jointly between the two AONBs. 2) The sPO now sees all planning applications within the Wye Valley AONB and its setting and filters those applications which require a formal review / site visit / representation. This often leads to filtering out applications relating to tree/hedgerow works & Listed Building Consents as it is felt that the LPAs have technical consultees who are suitably qualified to make formal input. Some applications are also filtered out where it is clear that the development will not have an adverse impact on the AONB or its Special Qualities.

AONB Unit Work Programme <i>AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives</i> AONB Unit Initiatives		AONB Unit Achievements & Outcomes 2022-23
	4) Engage in development and consultation on national strategy in liaison with NAAONB 5) Deliver CPD & training for LA Planning staff & members	3)a) Since commencing in February 2023, the sPO has made representation on 60 planning applications, including 10 formal objections to planning applications. A particular success has been at Beaulieu Barn, 25 Kymin Road, The Kymin, Monmouthshire (MCC reference: DM/2022/01819) where an application was made, albeit retrospectively, to remove a condition relating to no external lighting being added to the barn, largely in the interests of biodiversity, where light pollution has been a particular concern with lighting added to the barn in breach of condition. A detailed objection by the sPO was supported by MCC planning officers and reflected in the reasons for refusal of planning permission. 3)b) However, it is noted that when a representation is made by the sPO to a planning application, particularly on smaller scale &/or full householder, these are often ignored, whereas applications for minor dwellings/commercial/major applications, the comments will be considered and often lead to positive dialogue between the LPA / applicant / AONB Planning Officer, leading to amended plans to benefiting the AONB. 4)a) The sPO also made representations to strategic planning consultations including the National Planning Policy Framework draft consultation and Herefordshire Council's Agricultural Planning SPD. 4)b) The sPO engaged with NAAONB consultations and contributed as appropriate. 5) With the sPO in post, preparations commenced for a future training programme for LPA staff which is definitely needed as many are young, inexperienced and would benefit from greater awareness and understanding of what the AONB designation is about and why the AONB Management Plan is important, particularly in relation to plan-making and decision-making. This is also important as many LPAs are experiencing high turnover of staff.
WV-L1 WV-L2 WV-L4 WV-B2 WV-B3 WV-B4 WV-F4 WV-W3 WV-W4 WV-P3 WV-P4	Nature Recovery & Landscape connectivity 1) Develop AONB Nature Recovery and Species Action plans to focus priority areas for habitat creation and connectivity particularly between woodland, species rich grassland, riparian habitats, orchards and veteran trees. 2) Complete Species Action Plans for Orchards (Noble Chafer), River (Water Crowfoot), Woodland (Woodland Butterfly assemblage), Grassland (Bumblebee assemblage), and Hedgehogs. 3) Manage the Lower Wye Nature Networks Project with National Lottery Heritage Fund and Gwent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust.	1) AONB Nature Recovery Plan (NRP) is under development, led by DO, and a draft is to be produced and circulated. AONB NRP is and will be feeding into Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Monmouthshire LNRS 1)&2)a) The Species Action Plan for the Noble chafer beetle (orchard species) has been prepared by the NRO and approved by the JAC and partner organisations. A partnership with People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL) resulted in the NRO conducting a pheromone lure trapping survey for the beetle in June/July 2022, surveying 27 orchard sites across the 3 counties of the AONB, revealing a small meta-population of the beetle in the Woolhope Dome, Herefordshire. 1)&2)b) A successful FIPL application resulted in a small grant to run a traditional orchards project in Herefordshire, planting 20 fruit trees at priority orchard sites, installing 12 Noble chafer beetle boxes, running 2 orchard management training

<p align="center">AONB Unit Work Programme AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives AONB Unit Initiatives</p>	<p align="center">AONB Unit Achievements & Outcomes 2022-23</p>
<p>4) Continue Lower Wye Green Infrastructure (GI) initiatives working with local land owners, managers & stakeholders</p> <p>5) Manage control of Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) particularly Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and American Skunk Cabbage through Wye Invasive Species Programme (WISP)</p> <p>6) Promotion of Natural Flood Management (NFM) & Riparian Trees initiatives</p> <p>7) Organise regular volunteer task days, including on partner sites and Reserves</p> <p>8) Host Woolhope Dome workshop and collaborate over outputs and outcomes</p> <p>9) Collaborate and support landscape connectivity initiatives including 'Wye to Wyre'.</p> <p>10) Investigate opportunities for the National Grid Visual Improvement Programme (VIP) for area between Ross & Goodrich with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust & landowners</p> <p>11) Continue liaison with Herefordshire Meadows Network, Monmouthshire Meadows and Parish Grassland Project.</p> <p>12) Develop and support partnership projects that deliver landscape scale conservation activity and initiatives within and adjoining the AONB particularly those linked to improving water quality in the Wye.</p>	<p>events, producing leaflets, and securing a pheromone supply to run the survey again in June 23.</p> <p>1)&2)c) 48 landowners across the AONB have been engaged through the Noble chafer project so far, either by taking part in the pheromone survey or by attending orchard training events. This includes partner organisations such as Plantlife and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust. In September 22, as part of the annual AONB Study Tour, 25 JAC members heard a talk on the noble chafer project from the NRO.</p> <p>2)d)i) Species Action Plan for the Hedgehog (engagement species) is in the final development stage. Action for this species has largely been focussed on engagement with local communities, in partnership with hedgehog champion Dylan Allman and his Hedgehog Aware campaign, including events such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - June 22: AONB programme of activity for Ashfield Park Primary School - 290 children engaged on the topic of species recovery for hedgehogs. - November 22: Joint talk between AONB and Dylan Allman for Herefordshire Wildlife Trust branch group – 7 people engaged on the topic of hedgehogs, their current plight, and conservation measures. - March 22: Joint event between AONB and Dylan Allman for local community in Monmouth, with talks, stands and children's activities – 60 people engaged on the topic of hedgehogs, including 5 new Hedgehog Champions signed up. <p>2)d)ii) The AONB has also been able to support Dylan's hedgehog conservation efforts further through an SDF grant and by acting as a supporting organisation for a grant from GAVO.</p> <p>1)&2)e)The Species Action Plans for Bumblebee Assemblage and Woodland Butterfly Assemblage commenced evidence gathering phases with further development in summer 23.</p> <p>3) Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks project continued throughout 22/23, oversee by DO. Positive management of 7 SSSIs undertaken by partnership of AONB, Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust. Extension received from NLHF to allow programme delivery to September 2023. 10 farms engaged and received habitat connectivity advice from The Environment Partnership (TEP). NRO led on subsequent farm liaison and project work, including hedgerow restoration, protection of riparian habitats and wetland creation/NFM intervention, also control of invasive Cherry laurel in Cleddon Shoots and woodland SSSI.</p> <p>4) Green Infrastructure: Development of an Integrated Recreation Access Strategy (IRAS) was progressed with discussions between the AONB Unit and MCC (Highways and PRoW) leading to agreement that a strategic and consultative</p>

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	<p>approach is required to address the complex issues around the Unclassified County Roads and linked PRow network. Welsh Government SLSP funding has been secured up to 2025 to support the consultancy-led development of an integrated strategy and action plan. The invitation to tender was produced and the procurement process supported by Herefordshire Council.</p> <p>5) Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) - the AONB Unit's INNS work falls under the umbrella of WISP – Wye Invasive Species Project. WISP unites a number of funding pots (Severn Trent's B4B, NRW's BERF, Welsh Govt. SLSP) to tackle Himalayan balsam, American skunk cabbage and Japanese knotweed within the lower Wye Valley. WISP is managed by the PO and delivered together with the NRO and the team were invited to present at the 2022 national conference run by the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat.</p> <p><u>Himalayan balsam</u> – activities include: raising awareness through a communications campaign during national INNS Week; evening presentations; 9 community balsam bashes in the Brockweir-Hewelsfield area and providing support to another 5 balsam bashes run by groups in Hereford and Tintern; 2 'Balsam Training Days' with partner organisations for people to learn about the plant's lifecycle, balsam control and biosecurity; launched our new Balsam Action Toolkit (B.A.T) (English version) during national INNS Week in May. See Outreach Activities for more info.</p> <p><u>Japanese knotweed</u> – activities include: continuing GIS mapping and monitoring the spread of Japanese knotweed; liaising with +200 landowners to gain written consent to access their land and treat their knotweed; carrying out treatment of +120 sites in early September; upskilling local contractors with stem injection training enabling more targeted treatment; exploring alternatives to glyphosate such as RootWave; continuing promotion of our online Report it! form.</p> <p><u>American skunk cabbage</u> – activities include: liaising with 15 landowners in 3 sub-catchments – Brockweir, Whitebrook and Cleddon; continuing GIS mapping the spread of skunk cabbage; a spring appeal to landowners to live-head their skunk cabbage flowers to halt the seedbank accumulation; working with one local contractor to treat cabbage plants in the three areas.</p> <p>6) NFM opportunities developed in conjunction for landowner, Monmouthshire CC and Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales.</p> <p>7) Volunteer Task Days: 9 volunteer task days, with monthly (sometimes twice a month) sessions, with around 8-10 volunteers per session, clocking up a fantastic 341 hours. CLO & Volunteers worked with a number of local landowners, community groups and organisations and completed a range of tasks including: - Tree planting (200 trees in one day at Townsend Farm); - New hedgerows at Checkley and at</p>

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		<p>Jamie’s Farm (2 days) where 2000m (8000 plants) were funded though SDF; - Monmouthshire Meadow were supported on 2 occasions, making bee hotels & invertebrates’ homes around a newly dug pond & restored weir (also through SDF); - joint litter pick with Gwent Wildlife Trust & SARA at Piercefield; - Scything around the Angidy pools with the Tintern Angling Club.</p> <p>8) Woolhope Dome workshop delivered Sept 22, funded by Woolhope Environmental Trust, with 70 attendees. Event report produced by Herefordshire Meadows signposting attendees to sources of advice & funding.</p> <p>11) Members of both Herefordshire Meadows and Monmouthshire Meadows groups have been engaged through the Noble chafer project, highlighting the biodiversity value of both ancient trees and wildflower meadows to support our priority species.</p> <p>12) £40k secured through Environment Agency to run a programme of education and understanding in relation to Water Resource Management. In partnership with Farm Herefordshire, NFU & Herefordshire Meadows, events run included: Herbal Leys for water management; Floodplain meadow restoration and management for farmers and farm advisors; AONB Winter Seminar with water focus. Better event feedback analysis was developed through purchase of iPads for Farm Herefordshire.</p>
WV-L1 WV-L2 WV-L4 WV-B2 WV-B3 WV-P3 WV-P5	<p>Climate Emergency Action</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Prepare & implement action plan from Carbon Neutral Designated Landscapes Organisation assessment 2) Develop action plan from Wales Designated Landscapes Carbon Footprint Programme 3) Continue Peatland Restoration initiatives particularly at Cleddon Bog SSSI 4) Support grassland sequestration investigations with Herefordshire Meadows and Floodplain Meadows Partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two staff members, PO and NRO, received Carbon Literacy training via Monmouthshire County Council and are now Certified Carbon Literate. <p>1)&2) Three reports relating to Climate Change were completed for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenhouse gas emissions assessment and target scenario for the Wye Valley AONB landscape/area, by Small Work Consulting (Nov 22) • National Landscapes Carbon Audit & Metric, by School of Water, Energy and Environment, Cranfield University (July 22) • Carbon Neutral Designated Landscapes Organisation Pathway to Net Zero Report for Wye Valley AONB Unit, by Aquatera (Aug 22) <p>Analysis commenced of these reports to inform the development of Wye Valley AONB action plans.</p> <p>3) Cleddon Bog SSSI / Precious Peatlands Project – £16K from NRW’s SAF to start to restore the 15ha peatland, we’ve received. The grant covers vegetation management split into 2 tasks led by the PO: a) manual sapling clearance and b) conservation grazing, plus monitoring and stakeholder management:</p> <p><u>Sapling clearance:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • following unsuccessful tendering an innovative approach was adopted where we teamed up with a local contractor and invited local residents to apply for two-day’s work with on-the-job-training, tools, health and safety and welfare provision.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +20 local residents applied, received training, had their PPE assessed and were allotted tasks. The workparty cleared ¼ acre of birch/willow carr, treated and brash stacked on the perimeter of the Bog. We intend to repeat the approach over the next couple of years, subject to funding and contractor agreement. <p><u>Conservation grazing:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In March 2023 a short conservation grazing pilot commenced with Grazing Management Ltd. and 4 Belted Galloway cattle wearing no-fence collars. The pilot lasted 2.5 weeks and, although their impact on the Molinia and scrub was limited, it was clear to see their impact within their preferential areas. Valuable lessons learned will be applied for the next round of grazing (subject to funding). Jointly funded by AONB and NRW Forestry, 10 local residents were trained as Livestock Checkers and became LANTRA certified prior to the pilot. Registered as AONB Volunteer Group members, they did daily checks of the cattle, reporting their locations and health, in conjunction with the checks carried out by the grazier team and no-fence data. This system has worked well and helped to smooth public relations on site and on social media. <p><u>Project & stakeholder management:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> continuing liaison with landowners, commoners and interested parties to gain their advice and support for the work reporting to NRW: SSSI team, Grants team and National Peatland Action team.
WV-U2 WV-P4	Undergrounding Continue working with Western Power & local communities to identify power-lines within the AONB suitable for undergrounding, via Western Power South Wales Protected Landscape Undergrounding group and the West Midlands Undergrounding group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 480m of 11kv powerline have been undergrounded just south of the Kymin, removing powerlines from the view of walkers on the Offa's Dyke National Trail. This an extension to previously undergrounded line towards Redbrook. Final scheme cost £63,843 150m of 11kv powerline have been undergrounded alongside the A4136 Monmouth to Coleford road, directly opposite the Kymin junction. At a lower level set in fields, the lines were at low level in driver (and passengers) eyelines when looking into the valley. Final scheme cost £23,946 Work begun on 2 further schemes near Tintern Quarry & Bishopswood Village Hall. A further scheme at Sollers Hope Church is costed and planned.
WV-S1 WV-S2 WV-R1 WV-P5	Wye Valley Walk 1) Support Wye Valley Walk Partnership 2) Launch new website www.wyevalleywalk.org including replacement of Passport scheme	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership meeting held on Teams in December 2022 Website development and finalisation led to soft-launch and testing. Tree safety work completed and path diversion investigations carried out. Pathcare and route maintenance options investigated with Monmouthshire County Council and WYW Partnership.

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<p>3) Continuing Piercefield Walk enhancements with Gwent Wildlife Trust and landowner</p> <p>4) Pursue creation of Friends of Wye Valley Walk</p> <p>5) Audit & co-ordinate refresh of way-marking</p> <p>6) Collate route counter data & review options</p> <p>7) Review Cicerone Route Guide</p> <p>8) Facilitate future options for Lydbrook Bridge and Redbrook Bridge.</p> <p>9) Progress Wyesham riverbank improvements</p> <p>10) Review & republish 'Easy Access' walks.</p> <p>11) DEFRA Access for All Funding</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop project to improve access 2. Support local communities and groups to improve access. 3. Improve access along the WVV and create loop walks 4. Raise awareness of improvements needed to develop access for all projects. 	<p>5) & 7) Preparations made for walking whole route and revising Route Guide to follow from Source to Sea, rather than going upstream.</p> <p>6) Counter options in Piercefield reviewed and new counters commissioned.</p> <p>8) Engaged in Wireworks Bridge refurbishment as precursor to other bridge works.</p> <p>9) Wyesham riverbank improvements – progress continued with SLSP funding supporting the production of a topographic survey, footpath infrastructure designs and protected species surveys.</p> <p>10) Liaison and scoping with Disabled Ramblers and other accessibility consultants.</p> <p>11) DEFRA- Access For All funding lead by the CLO has enabled the AONB unit to support the following projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To purchase 41 gates & material for Ross Walkers are Welcome group enabling them to continue the Miles without Stiles project around the Ross area, specially the Herefordshire Trail and loop walks • To purchase 11 gates for Fownhope PC • To purchase 2 gates for Sellack PC • To replace 1 stile on the English Bicknor Heritage loop walk, which has now made the whole walk barrier free. • To purchase 1 large mobility kissing gate to be installed at Homs Road car park in Ross-on-Wye as part of the Willow Walk. • To run a training session for volunteers (including the AONB volunteers) on how to install gates correctly and a separate session also train up the British Army to install gates for the AONB during a 3 day challenge. • To replace the front doors of Brampton Abbots Village Hall with fully accessible automatic doors. • To develop a new fully accessible loop walk off the WVV-The Willow Walk – a walk from Ross-on-Wye to Townsend Farm, Brampton Abbots. • 1 disabled accessible compost toilet at Townsend Farm. • 1 new footbridge along a permissive section of the Willow Walk at Netherton. • The development of a picnic site with 3 accessible benches for public use at Townsend Farm. • The continuation of surface improvements at Townsend Farm down to the River and picnic site for public use. • The design and scope to replace a narrow footbridge along the WVV/ Willow Walk at Ross Rowing Club. • The design of a leaflet for the Willow Walk.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purchase of hand tools and back pack for future Wye Valley Walk Volunteers 'Friends of the WYW'. An audit of the proposed Willow Walk by Experience Community CIC. Running a 2 day Access training course for local authorities, local walking groups, associated community groups and representatives from the 'Wheeler' community lead by Craig Grimes from Experience Community CIC. <p>There will be further DEFRA Funding in FY24/25, of which the CLO has already earmarked most of the funding for community projects. It is also planned that the Willow Walk will be further developed to include more of the WYW.</p>
WV-H1 WV-H3 WV-P5	Overlooking the Wye legacy Continue to develop heritage & Community projects as part of the legacy of the Overlooking the Wye (OLW) Landscape Partnership Scheme <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing Cleddon Falls & Wordsworth Walk enhancements with landowner(s) Review & reprint of Walks leaflets 3) Audit and repair & maintenance of OLW infrastructure 	1) Cleddon Falls and Wordsworth Walk enhancements - the invitation to tender for the replacement of the unsafe bridge in the lower gorge was not successful. Permissive path closure and diversion signs have been erected and we hope to go back out to tender again soon or explore alternative options such as volunteers. 2) The Wordsworth Walk leaflet is currently being redrafted with new information about the Cleddon Shoots and Woodland SSSI. 3) Audit of OLW sites commenced with planned completion in 2023.
	Offa's Dyke Collaboratory <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate opportunities for future cross border partnership projects along the corridor of Offa's Dyke, promoting archaeological research & investigation into the landscape significance of the 8th century monument Participate in Collaboratory conferences and events Support community based research and events. 	1) & 3) Discussion about projects in & around Chepstow continued to be impacted by Covid-19 and resourcing complications. 2) AM Collaboratory Convenor and sits on Offa's Dyke Journal Editorial Board. Convenors' meetings held on-line in May & in Knighton in March.
WV-C2 WV-A1	Communications & social media <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Regular social media (SM) posts e.g. Facebook, Instagram and twitter On-going updating and management of www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk. Regular publication of on-line AONB newsletter 'Picturesque' Revise and publish AONB Map & Guide 	1) Facebook 162 published posts with 4,495 followers, receiving 3,800 'likes' and reach up 18.5% to 102,269. 2) Website expansion and review on-going. 3) Winter edition of Picturesque published 4) Map & Guide reviewed and design options appraised.
WV-C2 WV-E4 WV-A1	Outreach Activities Promote the AONB through <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Talks/presentations to local groups Stands at relevant shows. 	1) Talks and presentations to local groups including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May 22 – Llandogo Village Produce Association meeting – INNS talk (PO, NRO) September 22 – Annual AONB Study Tour for JAC members (NRO, DO, AM) January 23 – INNS presentation at GBNNSS National Conference (PO & NRO)

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	3) Promote, sponsor &/or lead guided walks, events, activities and countryside craft /rural skills courses in and around the AONB 4) Support the Wye Valley River Festival 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - February 23 – INNS presentation for St Briavels WI (PO) 2) Stands at relevant shows including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - July 22 – Friends of the Lower Wye ‘Wye July’ event (AM, PO & NRO) 3) Guided walks, events and activities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - April 22 – Lancout guided walk for Chepstow Walking Festival (IO & NRO) - May 22 – INNS Himalayan balsam training event with WaREN & WUF in Tintern (PO & NRO) - May 22 – INNS Himalayan balsam training event with WaREN & WUF in Llandogo (PO & NRO) - June 22 – Delivering weeklong programme of activity with Ashfield Park Junior School, Ross-on-Wye, engaging with 290 children around the topics of species recovery, particularly hedgehog and bumble bees, as well as water quality issues. (DO & NRO) - June 22 – Capler guided walk for Herefordshire Walking Festival (NRO) - June 22 - Guided walk relaunching Herefordshire Trail, attended by Jesse Norman MP (DO & IO) - June 22 – Balsam bash event with Raleigh International (PO & NRO) - July 22 – Brockweir balsam bash community event (PO, NRO & IO) - August 22 – 3 x Brockweir balsam bash community events (PO, NRO & IO) - September 22 - Woolhope Dome Workshop. 70 attendees, funded by Woolhope Dome Environment Trust, facilitated by Herefordshire Meadows. (FO, DO, AM, NRO) - December 22 – 2 x Cleddon Bog winter work parties (PO, NRO & IO) - January 23 – Traditional orchard management training event (NRO) - February 23 - Tree planting day organised by Woodland Trust as part of and promoting AONB facilitated Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks Project. (DO, AM, NRO) - February 23 – Dark Skies Week planetarium event (IO & FO) - March 23 – AONB Winter Seminar event, funded by the EA and attended by over 80 people (FO, AM, PO, NRO, IO) - March 23 – Hedgehog Aware Monmouth event with Dylan Allman (NRO & IO) - March 23 – INNS and recreation management talk for University of Worcester students (NRO, PO & AM) 4) Hosted WVRF Advisory Board & planning meetings at AONB Office. But little AONB presence at WVRF events due to lack of staff availability.

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WV-F4 WV-C2 WV-P6	Youth Rangers 1) Review programme and further opportunities to continue the model of engaging young people in conservation and heritage 2) Train new Leaders and scope for next Cohort, as required/appropriate	1) Programme reviewed with the new programme planned to be launched late summer 2023. The new programme will target a wider age range, from around 11-16 years of age and will include children and young people with additional needs. 2) The success of the Youth Rangers will depend on the recruitment of a number suitable volunteers to support the Community Links Officer during each session. A volunteer Job description was written with a view to recruit by mid-July. A training programme for new volunteers was reviewed & drafted. Questionnaire drafted for the taster event which will also be available on the website.
WV-P1 WV-P2 WV-P6 WV-P7	Governance 1) Service and set agendas for JAC, TOWP and Steering Group 2) Organise AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour of key sites &/or issues in late September 2022 3) Run AONB Partnership Seminar/forum in winter 4) Continue implementation of recommendations from AONB Good Governance Review	1) 3 JACs, 3 TOWPs & 2 Steering Groups serviced and hosted. 2) 33 people attended the annual AONB Partnership Tour visiting a range of sites associated land-use and land management around various AONB projects and initiatives along with regenerative farming and recreation, including variously football, fishing and hostel accommodation in Ross-on-Wye, Brampton Abbots, Lydbrook & Welsh Bicknor in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire in the AONB. 3) Seminar on 16th March 2023 'Enhancing water catchment through innovative land management' 77 attendees. Speakers & topics included Andrew Blake, Wye Valley AONB, Emma Whitehouse, Environment Agency, Chris Uttley 'Working with nature to reduce flooding', Stephen Briggs 'Using agroforestry to meet water quality and land management challenges', Niels Corfield 'Towards the weatherproof farm', & Q&As. 4) Preliminary discussions with Inclusion, Diversity and Governance Excellence Strategic Lead from Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales.
WV-R2 WV-P1 WV-P3 WV-P4 WV-P5 WV-P6 WV-P7	Local Partnerships & Collaboration Influence & attend partnerships as appropriate; eg: 1) Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire 2) Wye Catchment Partnership 3) Wye Navigation Advisory Committee (WyeNAC) 4) Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism Association, South East Wales Tourism Forum, Visit Monmouthshire and Visit Herefordshire 5) Wye Valley River Festival CIC Advisory Board 6) Gloucestershire Food and Farming Partnership 7) Gwent Green Grid Partnership 8) Monmouthshire Local Access Forum 9) Support Town, Parish & Community Councils with advice & guidance as appropriate	1) Nature Recovery Officer sits on the Herefordshire Local Wildlife Site Partnership and attended 3 meetings on 29/09/2022, 25/01/2023 & 10/03/2023. 2) Development Officer attended Wye Catchment Partnership meeting 3) AM attended 2 WyeNAC meetings 4) AM & IO liaised with WyeDean Tourism, South East Wales Tourism Forum & Visit Monmouthshire. 5) WVRF CIC Advisory Board meetings hosted at AONB Office. 6) PO gave presentation to LAF DO sat on Farm Herefordshire Steering Group - 5 meeting and/or events sub group. DO & NRO organised and facilitated 3 meetings of Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks Project Partnership

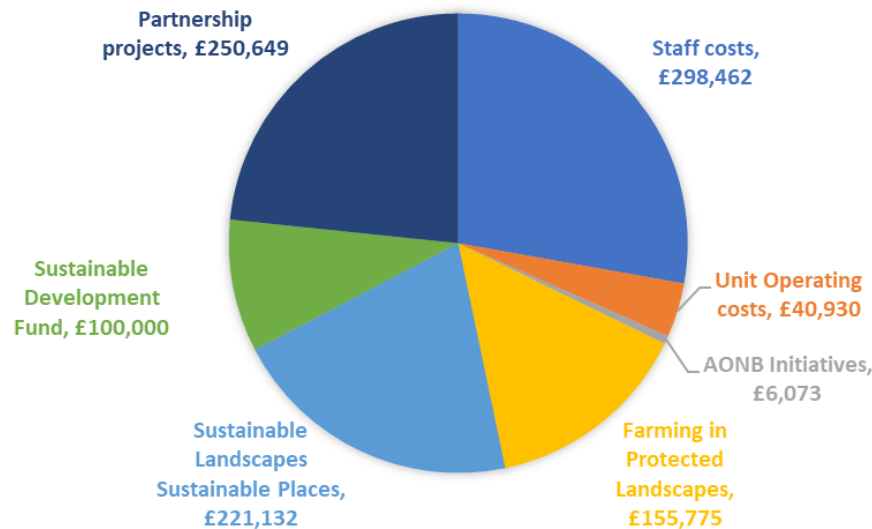
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WV-P4 WV-P5 WV-P9	National Collaboration 1) Support and engage with the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) and attend appropriate seminars & events 2) Work with Welsh Government and Landscape Wales (National Designated Landscapes Partnership) and other stakeholders, including NRW & NAAONB 3) Work with DEFRA and others in progressing the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes in England, including Natural England & NAAONB	1) Attended National Association for AONB's conference September 2022 for talks networking, workshops and field visits. (AM, PO, NRO, DO, FO & IO). AM represented AONB at NAAONB AGM & Chairs' Conference. - All AONB team took part in pilot Perception of Landscapes interviews & team discussion for 'Modelling Landscape Perceptions in European Protected Areas'. 2) Met with Emma Story from Tirweddau Cymru Landscape Wales (TCLW) in January 2023 to discuss the Wye Valley AONB, Nature Recovery and Carbon Sequestration initiatives, and wider work in this area. Also collaborating with Tom Johnstone from TCLW on NFM leaky dam works at Lower Gockett Farm, as a case study for 'quick win' NFM implementation and strong working relationships with County Council Flood Risk teams. 3) AM contributed to AONB Lead Officers; Meetings and DEFRA meetings/seminars.
WV-L4 WV-B5 WV-H2 WV-S3 WV-P8	Monitoring 1) Ongoing updating of the AONB GIS and State of the AONB data, 2) Complete Phase 1 Habitat Survey mapping & digitising 3) Progress Nature Recovery Network map & ground-truthing 4) Investigate opportunities to update heritage, tourism and recreation monitoring. 5) Monitor and review implementation of the AONB Management Plan 6) Undertake Fixed point photography across the AONB	1) – 3) Nature Recovery Plan in progress. Wye Valley Nature Recovery Plan feeding into development of Local Nature Recovery Strategy in Gloucestershire. Noble Chafer surveys contributed new records for SoAR. 2) Some progress made but digitised dataset still incomplete. 6) Summer and Winter Fixed Point photography completed.
WV-P1 WV-P2 WV-P3	Funding and resources 1) Prepare grant bids and claims for NRW, Welsh Government and DEFRA, and other funding bodies as required. 2) Continue pursuing funding and develop opportunities for external funding and securing sources for strategic and partnership projects 3) Develop fundraising campaign for HCF Wye Valley AONB Fund	1) All claims submitted but delays with NRW bid due to disproportionate requirements necessitating bid to be submitted 3 times. 2) Lottery Climate Action Fund bid pursued with Herefordshire & Radnorshire Wildlife Trusts. 3) AM & CLO met with HCF and AM attended HCF AGM.
WV-P5 WV-P9	Work placements 1) Support the needs of student placements/group projects. 2) Investigate new under-graduate and post-graduate research opportunities	1) Some unsolicited requests received. But no placements offered primarily due to uncertainty over Covid rules and hosting requirements. 2) preliminary investigation made over PhD research placement.

AONB Unit Work Programme AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives AONB Unit Initiatives		AONB Unit Achievements & Outcomes 2022-23
Delegated Grant Programmes		
WV-L5 WV-F1 WV-F2 WV-F3 WV-F4 WV-F5 WV-C2 WV-E2	Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme 1) Provide advice & guidance, as directed by DEFRA, to farmers and land managers to develop applications to help deliver bigger and better outcomes under the themes of Climate, Nature, People and Place. 2) Service the Local Assessment Panel in determining applications and allocating funding. 3) Manage delegated grants (<£5k) 4) Administer grant payments and monitor and report to DEFRA 5) Consider using the AONB Farming Award to present to a notable project.	1) FiPL officer Anna Stankiewicz started August 2022 2) Programme budget of £172,739 received. Issues relating to contractor availability, seasonal issues and other delays resulted in £6,667 end of year underspend. - 4 Panel meeting convened. - 78 FiPL enquiries received in 2022/23 - 59 site visits delivered (including enquiry, progress, claim sign-off) August 2022-March 2023 - 18 projects approved, 2 declined. - 23 grant payments issued (also multi year projects) 3) 5 delegated grants approved (under 5K) 4) Examples of 2022/23 outcomes (from Headlines Return Yr2): - 43 ha of woodland managed, 26ha of scrubland managed, 59ha of land managed through regenerative farming, 3 projects to improve soil health, 2 projects to reduce flood risk, 244m of hedgerow planted, 580m of hedgerow managed, 958 trees planted (including 950 native trees), 112 ha of positive management of SSIs, 91ha of land managed for INNS to preserve landscape features, 2 ponds created or restored, 5 projects to make landscape more inclusive for visitors, 16 volunteers engaged through the programme, 3 educational days, 6 projects increasing resilience of sustainable farm businesses. 50 farmers engaged, 15 farmers engaged who have not been engaged with the PL before, total land supported 1250ha Monthly monitoring forms submitted to DEFRA throughout the year. 5) LAF considered criteria for Farming Award.
WV-L1 WV-C1 WV-S2 WV-S4 WV-R4	Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) 1) Deliver & manage Welsh Government capital investment scheme focussed on: a) Promoting Biodiversity and nature recovery b) Accelerating Decarbonisation c) Supporting Resilient and Green communities d) Delivering Sustainable tourism. including 2) Wye Valley AONB Villages Plan implementation 3) Wye Valley Walk enhancements a) Piercefield Permissive Path b) Wyesham Riverbank revetment	1a) various projects in 'Nature Recovery & Landscape connectivity' above supported. 1b) Work towards the decarbonisation of Community facilities includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pelham Hall were able to purchase new economical electric showers. • Llandogo received match funding to support their Lottery bid for solar panels and storage battery. • The Drill Hall purchased new thermal blinds and roof insulation. • Llanishen village hall purchased a new boiler and LED lights. • Monmouth sports pavilion have received a grant towards a new boiler and roof insulation. 1c) & 2) Wye Valley Villages signage installed in all the 9 villages in the AONB in Monmouthshire; Devauden, Llanishen, Trellech, The Narth, Penallt, Catbrook, Llandogo, Tintern and St Arvans. Wye Valley Villages Delivery Group established.

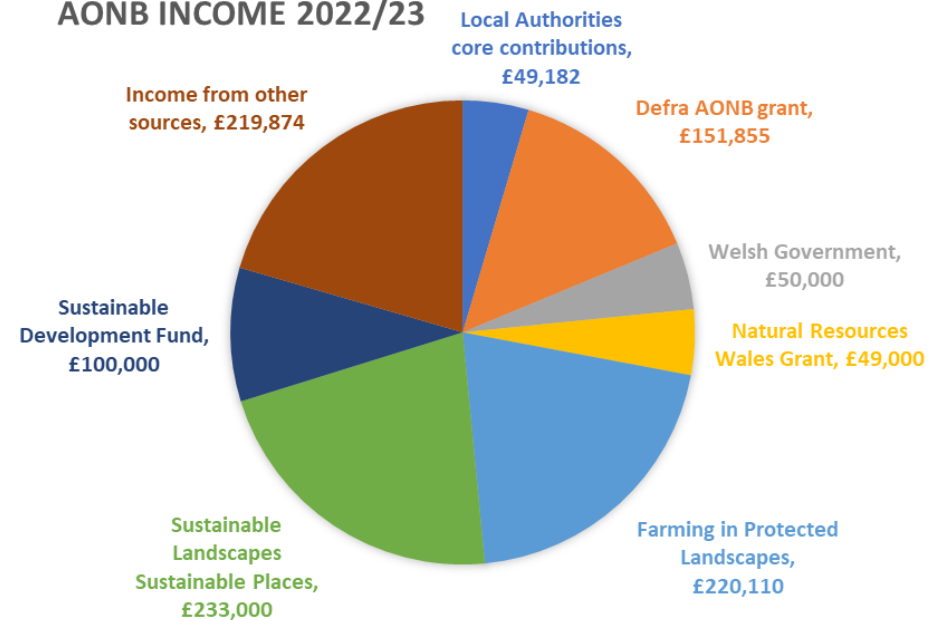
AONB Unit Work Programme AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 Strategic Objectives AONB Unit Initiatives		AONB Unit Achievements & Outcomes 2022-23
	4) Engagement in collaborative projects across multiple Designated Landscapes a) Wales Dark Skies	1d) Devauden village hall has had a cycle repair station installed in the hall carpark for public use. 3) see 'Wye Valley Walk' above. 4) contributed to Wales Dark Skies Week with planetarium event.
WV-L1 WV-B3 WV-C1	Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) 1) Promotion of SDF to potential applicants 2) Assist potential applicants with application process and project development 3) Service SDF Assessment Panel for allocating SDF funds. 4) Manage delegated grants and Landscape & Biodiversity Enhancement Grants (<£3k) 5) Training for SDF Assessment Panel members 6) Administration of grant scheme and reporting to Welsh Government	8 SDF applicants have been supported though the application process, 7 of which have been approved. 2 projects were delegated as they were under £3,000 and 6 were presented to the SDF Panel during a face to face meeting on the 11 th May, 1 was rejected and sign posted to MCC NIN project. The SDF application received are below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACE Monmouth- Climate Festival • Diverse Artist Network- Walk out West • Wye Coppice CIC- Woodland management apprentice scheme • Coed Lleol-Small Woods- Nature-based Wellbeing in the Wye Valley • Gwent Wildlife Trust- Restoring the Wern • Wye Valley Community Council- Repairs to The Pound • Wye Valley Community Council- Repairs to the Tintern VH retaining wall • ACE Monmouth- Schools Group- Rejected
WV-L1 WV-B3 WV-C1	Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) 1) Promote Wye Valley AONB Fund with HCF to potential applicants 2) Assist potential applicants with application process and project development 3) Collate applications for the SDF Assessment Panel and liaise with HCF 4) Service SDF Assessment Panel recommending allocations to HCF.	There has been continued progress to promote the AONB fund and work with HCF. This has led to a number of discussions with applicants to assist them in applying for funds, the flowing project have been approved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brampton Abbots Village hall have successfully applied for funding to improve and repair the wall around the village hall that is adjacent to the road. • Save the Wye have successfully applied for funding to run an event at this year Hereford River Carnival. The event will be family oriented using arts engagement to connect local people to the river and the threats it faces. Outdoor event followed by a joint Ukrainian dance in local church. • Ross-on-Wye Rowing Club were successful in applying for funds to improve facilities and reach out to the wider community including refugees etc. Pipeline projects- Arts project in conjunction with the Wye Valley River Festival, the LGBT community and Gay Pride events within the English areas Wye Valley AONB.

Wye Valley AONB Unit Accounts		2021/22	2022/23		2021/22	2022/23
Expenditure		£	£	Income	£	£
Staff costs		243,843	298,462	Local Authorities core contributions	49,182	49,182
Unit Operating costs		23,260	40,930	Defra AONB grant	132,443	151,855
AONB Initiatives		15,970	6,073	Welsh Government	75,000	50,000
Farming in Protected Landscapes		96,525	155,775	Natural Resources Wales Grant	45,500	49,000
Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places		233,000	221,132	Farming in Protected Landscapes	96,525	220,110
Sustainable Development Fund		100,000	100,000	Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places	227,500	233,000
Partnership projects		91,525	250,649	Sustainable Development Fund	100,000	100,000
	TOTAL	804,123	1,073,021	Income from other sources	77,973	219,874
				TOTAL	804,123	1,073,021

WYE VALLEY AONB UNIT EXPENDITURE 2022/23



AONB INCOME 2022/23



Key officers' abbreviations: AM = AONB Manager; DO = Development Officer; CLO = Community Links Officer; IO = Information Officer; FAO = Finance & Admin. Officer; PO = Lower Wye Project Officer; NRO = Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer; FO = Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer; SPO = shared AONB Planning Officer.

CHANGES TO AONBS

Purpose

To advise members 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.

Recommendation

That the JAC acknowledges 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.

Key Issues

- Government amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB), announced in September, 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. The amendments are appended.
- 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 2 years and been consolidated until March 2025. Meanwhile DEFRA are working on a review of the funding formula for National Parks & AONBs.
- On 22nd November 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.

Reasons

The ‘Glover’ Landscapes Review of National Parks and AONBs in England, published in September 2019, contained 27 Proposals for Government. Proposal 24 stated that “AONBs should be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, and renamed as National Landscapes.” The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) has been working closely with DEFRA, Welsh Government and colleagues in Northern Ireland to foster collaboration and collective action and create a national landscape designation fit for the 21st Century.

It is understood that the Government originally intended to introduce new legislation for National Parks & AONBs in 2020. But due to the Covid Pandemic and changes in Government, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) became the legislative opportunity to improve the duties and powers relating to Designated Landscapes. A series of amendments were submitted in the House of Lords by Lord Randall, Baroness Jones and Baroness Willis focusing on enhancing the ‘duty of regard’ and increasing the responsibilities around National Park and AONB Management Plans. The Government announced they were adopting these amendments on 13th September at the Third Reading in the Lords, requiring relevant authorities in England to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty and enabling the Secretary of State to make provision to require relevant authorities in England to contribute to furthering Management Plan targets and actions. The definition of who or what a relevant authority is in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 (see appended amendments).

The LURB amendments are designed not to affect devolved responsibility for National Parks & AONBs in Wales.

Implications

The Government amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) as they relate to AONBs are appended. The main changes for AONBs relate to the powers and responsibilities of any “relevant authority”, as defined in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. This includes all level of government from Town & Parish Councils up

through District & County Councils to Government Agencies and Ministers, and anyone in 'public office'. The amendments only affect England. The changes are as follows:

New duty 'to further the purpose' of AONBs

Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, Section 85 - General duty of public bodies:

- Any relevant authority exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.

The "must seek to further" duty is a significant augmentation of the original "have regard" CRoW Act Section 85 duty, which remains in Wales. The existing 'duty of regard' can allow a public body to acknowledge that the AONB (or National Park) will be affected but without an explanation of how they have factored this into their decision, especially what weight was given to the designation in reaching their decision. This is sufficient to comply with the duty. Consequently 'having regard' may be a cursory or general consideration, based on assumptions rather than an analysis of the evidence about the impact of the action or proposal.

The addition of "must seek to further" will ensure that more rigorous attention is paid to the statutory purposes of the designation which is greater than simply giving or having consideration when taking decisions or undertaking actions which may affect the designation. The proposed change would provide for a more structured and proactive process, one which is undertaken with greater transparency of the best endeavour. This would help public bodies, like local authorities or Natural England, to fully understand why, for example, if a scheme or proposal does not further AONB purposes what other actions, adaptations or mitigations are implemented instead. It should also help Planning Inspectors in their role. This simple legislative change can therefore help the planning system and associated appeals procedures to operate more efficiently by providing a more substantive test against which decisions can be measured.

Enhanced Management Plans

CRoW Act 2000, Section 90 - Supplementary provisions relating to Management Plans:

Note: The amendments make use of secondary legislation to make provision for regulation through statutory instruments.

- The Secretary of State may make provision requiring an AONB Management Plan in England to contribute to meeting any target set under Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Environment Act 2021;
 - These are long-term Environmental targets, which relates to—
 1. (a) the natural environment, or
(b) people's enjoyment of the natural environment.
With priority areas of (a) air quality; (b) water; (c) biodiversity;
(d) resource efficiency and waste reduction.
 2. Particulate matter
 3. Species abundance

Making AONB Management Plans contribute to these national targets will significantly strengthen the status of AONBs and their Plans.

- The Secretary of State may make provision requiring a relevant authority in England to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of AONB Management Plans.

Currently, under the CRoW Act Section 89, local authorities have to produce an AONB Management Plan and review it every 5 years. But there is no requirement to implement the Plan. This provision amends that oversight.

It is worth noting that the Secretary of State will also be covered by the new duty 'to further the purpose' of AONBs, which would be progressed by making these new provisions.

Wye Valley clauses

Due to the Welsh Government's devolved responsibility for AONBs and National Parks, the LURB amendments only cover the English part of the Wye Valley AONB. This is explained in the somewhat cumbersome differentiation in the LURB amendments between England and devolved Welsh authority. However, as and when the LURB is enacted and the provisions start to be implemented, the differences may start to become more significant for the Wye Valley AONB. This will mean that the local (& relevant) authorities in England will have different powers and purposes to those in Wales. Likewise the requirements of the AONB Management Plan may differ. Natural England and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are both currently working respectively on new Management Plan Guidance. However, under the CRoW Act, the constituent local authorities are still required to 'act jointly'. It remains to be seen how significant these differences will become for the management, and governance, of the Wye Valley AONB.

The Government's formal response on the implementation of the Glover Landscapes Review is expected to be published shortly and a new Outcomes Framework. It is anticipated that this will be followed by more detailed guidance on the LURB amendments. These measures will set out a plan of action for Protected Landscapes and define the contribution that they should make to national environmental targets. This will help the global goal to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030. DEFRA officials are also working on a review of the funding formula for National Parks & AONBs. Resourcing for AONBs has increased significantly over the last 3 years, particularly through the introduction of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme and Access for All funding. It is hoped that the new funding formula may be introduced in advance of the next funding allocation cycle from April 2025.

Similarly Welsh Government are also considering how best to further the interest of the 8 Designated Landscapes in Wales. This also includes a proposed review of funding in advance of April 2025, and opportunities to refresh legislation. These two aspects are currently incorporated within the remit of the Biodiversity Deep Dive Designated Landscapes Working Group, which the AONB Manager sits on.

National Landscapes

The NAAONB will be launching the rebrand of AONBs to National Landscapes on 22nd November. DEFRA have been fully supporting the rebrand. The Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change, Julie James, has expressed her support for the collective decision to

rebrand. Meanwhile, in the absence of an elected assembly in Northern Ireland, civil servants have been engaging on behalf of the 8 AONBs there.

The rebrand to National Landscapes has been mooted and discussed for a number of years. Some AONBs are already being referred to locally as National Landscapes, where teams and partnerships had already recognised the power of this change to enhance the status of the designation in their area. The strength of AONBs is that it is a national designation which is managed locally. The rebrand is the opportunity to assert a collective national identity as part of a family of locally managed and celebrated landscapes.

The NAAONB, working with a design agency and supported by DEFRA, have created the new brand guidelines to help shape each National Landscape's branded communications and create consistency across all applications and media. This covers the different elements that make up the new National Landscapes identity, including the logo, colour, typography, graphic language, iconography, illustration and photography styles.

The new logo for the Wye Valley is below. It is an evolution of the AONB's existing branding, featuring an abstracted version of the distinctive shape of the Wye Valley.



Dyffryn Gwy
Tirwedd
Cenedlaethol

Wye Valley
National
Landscape



Dyffryn Gwy
Tirwedd Cenedlaethol

Wye Valley
National Landscape

The tagline can be used as necessary:

Ardal o harddwich naturiol eithriadol
Area of outstanding natural beauty

eg: Wye Valley National Landscape
Area of outstanding natural beauty

Below is a selection of the new logos. The brand styling is consistent across all National Landscapes which is intended to give a more unified identity across the AONB family, to better show the collective size, ambition and the potential impact of the AONB/National Landscapes network. However, the full suite of new National Landscape logos is embargoed until the launch.

The use of the National Landscape branding negates the need for the supplementary 'Landscapes for Life {AONB family}' logo and branding, which was developed over 10 years ago to give some consistent national identity for AONBs.



Stage 1 of the rebranding programme completes with the national launch. Following the launch, Stage 2 commences with a national campaign raising awareness of the new branding. The implementation of the new branding will be accompanied by a comprehensive set of assets including:

- a. A Brand identity for each National Landscape
- b. Branding guidelines that will support each AONB to implement the brand, including guidance on how to use the brand, fonts to use and a range of templates for design platforms
- c. A licence to use the design font Effra that will be available for all AONBs to download
- d. A presentation that articulates why we are making the change and what it is – it will be designed for all National Landscape teams to use to communicate to their partners. This will include guidance on the use of the new brand and when the legal designation should be referred to.
- e. The National Association will trademark each of the brand identities ensuring that each marque is protected and giving each National Landscape free use of the brand.

Funding is available for each National Landscape to begin the process of changing brand identity. This will balance the need for creating local recognition and awareness with value-for-money and pragmatism in delivering the local rebrand appropriately.

Legally, the designation will remain an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Joint Advisory Committee will remain, technically, the “Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee” as established under agreement by the 4 constituent authorities. There will be an indefinite transition period until legislation and policy catches up with the rebranding, during which time we all will need to assist our stakeholders with any confusion that may arise. In the meantime the new logo will start to be adopted and used in key situations and the Wye Valley AONB Unit will rebrand as the Wye Valley National Landscape team and the Wye Valley AONB Partnership will be referred to as the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership. The ‘Area of outstanding natural beauty’ tagline will continued to be used where appropriate.

The following is a summary of officers’ views of the positives and negatives of either a) resisting the current rebranding exercise, or b) aligning with the national initiative:

(a) If we don’t rebrand

Pros

- People continue to recognise our individual local brand (assuming they currently do)

Cons

- Risk of damage to relationships and collaborative approach with other AONBs/National Landscapes and the National Association
- Any subsequent rebrand would be out of step with other AONBs/National Landscapes which could weaken our impact
- We would lose the funding that DEFRA is making available for the implementation of the rebrand.
- Future DEFRA, and possibly Welsh Government, funding agreements may be contingent of implementing the rebrand.

(b) If we do rebrand

Pros

- Gives us time to rebrand and use the national campaign as part of engaging with partners and stakeholders
- We will receive DEFRA funding to support implementation of the rebranding, plus brand guidelines, materials and Trademarking
- Results in us working collaboratively with the National Association and other AONBs/National Landscapes (and being seen to do so)
- Allows the rebrand to settle in before the next Management Plan Review in 2026.
- Aligns with Proposal 24 of the Glover Landscapes Review and provides greater parity with National Parks

Cons

- Need to be clear on financial implications and that DEFRA and Welsh Government support contributes to costs, including staff time
- Rebranding needs to be integral to the other aspects of the Glover Landscapes Review Proposal 24 – i.e. a new funding formula, plus improved purposes, along with consolidated powers and resources.

At the previous meeting the JAC resolved to overturn the recommendation to endorse the National Landscapes rebranding. The reservations were fed back to the NAAONB. However the rebranding is progressing with the support of DEFRA and endorsement from Welsh Government. Therefore changes to AONBs nationally will occur and the benefits of collective rebranding outweigh the advantages of excluding the Wye Valley AONB from the ambition, collaboration, commitment and readiness to redefine the designation for the 21st century. Therefore it is recommended that the JAC acknowledge the rebranding and allow the AONB team to make the necessary arrangements to implement it in a proportionate way.

The AONB Manager is signed up to attend the launch event in London on behalf the AONB Partnership, on the evening of 22nd November at the Royal Society, London. The next day is also the NAAONB AGM and Chairs' Conference in London which the AONB Manager will also attend to represent the Wye Valley AONB. The conference theme is Ambition and Leadership, addressing the opportunities and leadership challenge in realising the potential of National Landscapes. This is in acknowledgement that the need for ambition and leadership in delivering for nature, climate, people and places has never been greater. As leaders of National Landscapes the time is ripe for a step change in mobilising people and partners to deliver for nature and communities. The Conference will focus on what that ambition has to be, and the strong leadership needed to drive forward significant change.

Background

The DEFRA Secretary of State tabled a Written Ministerial Statement on 13th September setting out a package of measures to support Protected Landscapes in England, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nature-recovery-to-be-accelerated-in-englands-protected-landscapes>. This package included a commitment to new legislation through an amendment to the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill at Third Reading delivered by Lord Benyon. The full statement is available here <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-09-13/hcws1021>. Lord Benyon's announcement is available to view here <https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/b2efa2b3-ac1a-4615-850d-ba38955fb29e?in=11:54:59>. This forms part of the government's commitments following the Landscapes Review.

The NAAONB is a charity that provides a strong collective voice for the UK's AONBs. It works on behalf of its membership, fostering collaboration and collective action between the 300 staff of the AONB Family, the 700 elected members that support the AONB partnerships and the many partners with whom the NAAONB does business at the local and national levels. For more information see: www.landscapesforlife.org.uk

The rebranding to National Landscapes will be implementing many of the recommendations made in the Glover Landscapes Review (2019) in England, building on the work of the Marsden Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales (2015). Both Reviews recognised that a simpler name for the AONBs, which promoted the national status and gave greater parity to the National Park designation, should be introduced.

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LURB amendments – 3rd Reading Sept 2023

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

85.— General duty of public bodies etc.

(A1) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.

(A2) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a devolved Welsh authority must have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.

(1) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in Wales, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.

(1A) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision about how a relevant authority is to comply with the duty under subsection (A1) (including provision about things that the authority may, must or must not do to comply with the duty).

(2) The following are relevant authorities for the purposes of this section—

- (a) any Minister of the Crown,
- (b) any public body,
- (c) any statutory undertaker,
- (d) any person holding public office.

(3) In subsection (2)—

“devolved Welsh authority” has the same meaning as in section 157A of the Government of Wales Act 2006 (see, in particular, section 157A of that Act);”.

“public body” includes

- (a) a county council, county borough council, district council, parish council or community council;
- (b) a joint planning board within the meaning of section 2 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990;
- (c) a joint committee appointed under section 102(1)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972;
- (d) [...]1 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 Page 96 [
- (e) a corporate joint committee established by regulations made under Part 5 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021;] 2

“public office” means—

- (a) an office under Her Majesty;
- (b) an office created or continued in existence by a public general Act; or
- (c) an office the remuneration in respect of which is paid out of money provided by Parliament. [

“statutory undertaker” means a person who is or is deemed to be a statutory undertaker for the purposes of any provision of Part 11 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.] 3

87.— General purposes and powers.

(A1) It is the duty of a conservation board established in relation to an area in England, in the exercise of their functions, to seek to further—

(a) the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty, and

(b) the purpose of increasing the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the area of outstanding natural beauty,

but if it appears to the board that there is a conflict between those purposes, they are to attach greater weight to the purpose mentioned in paragraph (a).

(1) It is the duty of a conservation board established in relation to an area in Wales, in the exercise of their functions, to have regard to—

(a) the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty, and

(b) the purpose of increasing the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the area of outstanding natural beauty,

but if it appears to the board that there is a conflict between those purposes, they are to attach greater weight to the purpose mentioned in paragraph (a).

(2) A conservation board, whilst fulfilling their duties under subsection (A1) or (1) (as the case may be) while having regard to the purposes mentioned in subsection (1), shall seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the area of outstanding natural beauty [...] and shall for that purpose co-operate with local authorities and public bodies whose functions include the promotion of economic or social development within the area of outstanding natural beauty.

(3) Sections 37 and 38 of the Countryside Act 1968 (general duties as to the protection of interests of the countryside and the avoidance of pollution) apply to conservation boards as they apply to local authorities.

(4) The powers of a conservation board include power to do anything which, in the opinion of the board, is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to—

(a) the accomplishment of the purposes mentioned in subsection (1), or

(b) the carrying out of any functions conferred on it by virtue of any other provision of this Part or by virtue of any enactment not contained in this Part.

(5) The powers conferred on a conservation board by subsection (4) do not include—

(a) power to do anything in contravention of any restriction imposed by virtue of this Part in relation to any express power of the board, or

(b) power to raise money (whether by borrowing or otherwise) in a manner which is not authorised apart from that subsection,

but the things that may be done in exercise of those powers are not to be treated as excluding anything by reason only that it involves the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights.

(6) Schedule 14 (which relates to the supplemental and incidental powers of conservation boards) has effect.

(7) An order under section 86(1) may—

(a) make further provision with respect to the supplemental and incidental powers of the conservation board to which it relates or the limits on those powers, including provision relating to the borrowing of money, and

(b) provide for any enactment which relates to or limits the supplemental or incidental powers or duties of local authorities or relates to the conduct of, or transactions by, local authorities to apply in relation to the conservation board with such modifications as may be specified in the order.

90.— Supplementary provisions relating to management plans.

(1) A conservation board or relevant local authority which is proposing to publish, adopt or review any plan under section 89 shall—

(a) give notice of the proposal—

(i) if the area of outstanding natural beauty is in England, to [Natural England] 1
[...]²,

(ii) if the area of outstanding natural beauty is in Wales, to the [NRBW] 3 , and

(iii) in the case of a conservation board, to every local authority whose area is wholly or partly comprised in the area of outstanding natural beauty,

(b) send a copy of the plan, together (where appropriate) with any proposed amendments of the plan, to every body to which notice of the proposal is required to be given by paragraph (a), and

(c) take into consideration any observations made by any such body. [

(1A) In the case of an area of outstanding natural beauty in Wales, a conservation board or relevant local authority which is proposing to publish, adopt or review any plan under section 89 must have regard to—

(a) the state of natural resources report published under section 8 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, and

(b) any area statement published under section 11 of that Act for an area that includes all or part of the area of outstanding natural beauty.]

(2) A conservation board or relevant local authority shall send to the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales a copy of every plan, notice or report which they are required to publish under section 89.

(2A) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision—

(a) requiring any plan under section 89 relating to an area of outstanding natural beauty in England to contribute to the meeting of any target set under Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Environment Act 2021;

(b) setting out how such plans must contribute to the meeting of such targets;

(c) setting out how any plan under section 89 relating to an area of outstanding natural beauty in England must further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of that area.

(3) In this section “relevant local authority” has the same meaning as in section 89.

90A Duty of public bodies etc in relation to management plans

(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision—

(a) requiring a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of plans under section 89 relating to an area of outstanding natural beauty in England;

(b) setting out how such a relevant authority may or must do so.

(2) In this section-

“devolved Welsh authority” has the same meaning as in section 157A of the Government of Wales Act 2006;

“relevant authority” has the same meaning as in section 85.”

PLANNING GUIDANCE AND POSITION STATEMENTS

Purpose

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.

Recommendations

That the JAC:

- a) 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 4th August and 29th September 2023;
- b) Discuss, amend (if necessary) and formally endorse the 'Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting' Position Statement, and its associated Appendices; and
- c) Discuss, amend (if necessary) and formally endorse the 'Landscape-led Development' Position Statement, and its associated Appendices.
- d) Note that Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies intend to be presented at a future JAC meeting.

Key Issues

- 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.
- The Position Statements have had formal public consultation between 4th August and 29th September 2023 (inclusive), following which comments submitted have been considered and amendments made, with the revised version being brought to the JAC 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 JAC meeting. These will aim to promote good practice and assist those proposing new development in the AONB and its setting.

Reasons

Position Statements 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 can be protected, conserved and enhanced. They provide further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to the specific Management Plan Strategic Objectives and associated issues. They do not create new policies. Adoption of Position Statements has become increasingly commonplace across Nationally Protected Landscapes, including the Cotswolds National Landscape and Malvern Hills AONB.

Implications

Once the position statements have been endorsed, the Position Statements will thereafter be referred to by the AONB Planning Officer in consultation responses to development management applications, as well as Strategic Planning consultation responses. Consideration should be given to how the AONB Partnership monitors development management decision-making within the Wye Valley AONB, to help demonstrate the effectiveness of the Position Statements and other policy and guidance in supporting Local Planning Authority decision-making.

Position Statement on Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting

The over-arching principle of this Position Statement is for housing development in the Wye Valley AONB and its setting to be based on robust evidence of need arising from within the nationally designated Protected Landscape. Currently, assessment of housing need and housing requirements are based on local authority boundaries, not the AONB boundary. Accordingly, current reliance on local authority housing need figures solely means there can be unnecessary pressure to accommodate residential development from the wider area within the AONB

boundary. This could be avoided if 'housing need' and 'housing requirements' are clearly differentiated. The recommendations help to filter, or screen, the initial local authority housing need figure down to a more appropriate level of housing provision within the Wye Valley AONB. This particularly applies when accommodating unmet needs, affordable housing, local connection, rural housing need surveys, choice based letting systems and second homes. Location & Design are considered, recognising climate change and needing to promote sustainable development.

Position Statement on Landscape-led Development

The over-arching principle of this Position Statement is that development within the Wye Valley AONB and, where relevant, in its setting, should be 'landscape-led'. The AONB Partnership recognises that there are a range of other considerations that must be weighted in the planning balance, including climate and ecological emergencies, and meeting housing needs and economic growth. However, there should not have to be a binary choice between conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB 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.

The Position Statement intends to provide a more balanced stance. A landscape-led approach should also consider all the factors that contribute to the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB. In principle, the landscape-led approach is applicable to all development in the Wye Valley AONB and its setting, albeit to a degree that is proportionate to the nature, scale, setting and potential impact of the proposed development. Recommendations are made in relation to strategic and neighbourhood planning, development management, including Major and EIA development and conserving and enhancing natural beauty on-site.

Renewables & Dark Skies Position Statements and Guidance

It is for the JAC to note for information that Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies intends to be presented at a future JAC meeting. The purpose of these Position Statements intend to assist anyone who is proposing new development in the AONB and its setting on these matters and how they can make a positive contribution to conserving the AONB, and awareness of its Features and Special Qualities.

Background

Position Statements seek to help to deliver the strategic objectives and policies contained within the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026. The Wye Valley AONB Management Plan is a statutory document and a material consideration in planning decision-making. However, it is the adopted development plan policies of the relevant local authority that planning decisions are required to be taken in accordance with, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Position Statements have been prepared by the Wye Valley AONB Planning Officer. The two Position Statements relate to one another and are thus presented together. As discussed at the

July 2023 meeting of the JAC, it was agreed by the Committee that if future amendments are required, as necessary, that these can be made by Wye Valley AONB Unit staff, in consultation with the Wye Valley AONB Manager. It was also agreed at the same meeting that a formal review date of both Position Statements is to take place every five years.

The two draft Position Statements, these being on Housing and Landscape-led Development, were endorsed by the JAC, as a consultation draft at the July meeting, along with its associated Appendices. Since then, a formal consultation took place between 4th August and 29th September (eight weeks) with the position statements being published on the Wye Valley AONB website, as well as direct email notifications being sent to the following:

- Elected members of Monmouthshire County Council, Herefordshire Council, Forest of Dean District Council and Gloucestershire County Council within the Wye Valley AONB;
- The Town, Parish and Community Council clerks within the Wye Valley AONB;
- Current members of the Wye Valley AONB JAC of relevance including NFU, NFU Wales, One Voice Wales, GATPC, HALC, The Voluntary Conservation Sector representatives, Wye Valley Society, River Wye Preservation Trust, Recreation Sector, Local Tourism Sector and Local Wildlife Trusts;
- Various organisations and interested parties; and
- Local authority staff.

12 consultation responses were received, broken down as follows:

- Town, Parish / Community Councils – 6
- Local Planning Authorities – 3 (Forest of Dean District Council and Gloucestershire County Council – Forward Plans for both; and Herefordshire Council – Built and Natural Environment Team)
- Agencies – 2 (Historic England and Natural Resources Wales)
- Public Representations – 1

Consultation feedback was positive, although there was sometimes a lack of clarity and context regarding one or two of the recommendations being put forward. What has helped is that given the AONB Planning Officer is shared with Malvern Hills AONB, they have undertaken a similar consultation exercise earlier in the year on similar position statements, meaning further comments have informed, revised and hopefully strengthened both sets of Position Statements. There is now a stronger narrative which, hopefully, provides a clearer context.

The Position Statements have been tweaked in a format too, acknowledging that the planning system is development-plan led, which will provide greater clarity on the purpose and scope of the Position Statements, including their relationship with key issues such as the climate and ecological emergencies. A more detailed summary of consultation feedback is available on request via the AONB Manager.



WYE VALLEY AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

POSITION STATEMENT: HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN THE WYE VALLEY AONB AND ITS SETTING

1.0 CONTEXT

1.1 The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is the nation's interest to safeguard it¹. The statutory purpose of its designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area².

1.2 The Wye Valley AONB is a living and working landscape, in which the social and economic well-being of local communities are important considerations. Maintaining vibrant and thriving local communities is essential to the long-term future of the AONB. Providing housing that meets the needs of local communities within the Wye Valley AONB plays an important role in achieving these aspirations.

1.3 However, these aspirations (including housing provision) need to be delivered in a way that is compatible with, and positively contributes to the statutory purpose of designation.

1.4 The outstanding natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB (along with its relative proximity to several cities), makes it a very desirable place to live. This brings with it increased pressure to build more houses. It also potentially results in house prices that are higher than in surrounding areas. This contributes to the housing market within the AONB becoming increasingly unaffordable to those with a local connection.

1.5 This is particularly important given that many of the jobs that are essential to (i) conserving and enhancing the natural beauty the area (e.g. farming and forestry) and (ii) increasing the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities (e.g. the tourism sector) are relatively and traditionally low paid. These workers, especially young people, are being priced out of the housing market in the landscapes and communities that depend on them.

¹ Section 82 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

² Defra (2019) *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: technical support scheme (England) 2019 to 2020*
Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (2021) - Section 6.3.7

1.6 As such, the provision of affordable housing that meets the needs of local communities, including housing that is affordable in perpetuity, should be a high priority in the Wye Valley AONB.

1.7 For these reasons, this position statement advocates two over-arching principles for housing development within the Wye Valley AONB and its setting:

- Housing development within the Wye Valley AONB and, where relevant, in its setting, should be 'landscape-led'.
- Housing development within the Wye Valley AONB should be prioritised for local need arising within the AONB.

1.8 Key recommendations relating to the 'landscape-led' approach to housing are provided in the Position Statement on Landscape-Led Development. This Position Statement primarily focusses on housing need and affordable housing, although it also briefly addresses the location and design of housing developments.

1.9 With regards to good practice, this Position Statement has been modelled significantly on approaches adopted by several nationally designated Protected Landscapes, including the Cotswold National Landscape's Housing Position Statement, the South Downs National Park Local Plan, West Oxfordshire Local Plans, Arnside & Silverdale AONB Development Plan, and the New Forest National Park Local Plan. The Appendixes to this Position Statement provide relevant case studies of these.

2.0 PURPOSE OF THE POSITION STATEMENT

2.1 The primary purpose of Wye Valley AONB Partnership Position Statements are to expand on relevant policies and Strategic Objectives within the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan. They provide context, guidance and recommendations in relation to specific policies and associated issues. They do not create new policies.

2.2 The recommendations within the Position Statements intend to help local authorities, particularly plan-making bodies, as well as relevant stakeholders, including those involved in decision-making:

- have regard, and positively contribute, to the purpose of the AONB designation;
- ensure the purpose of AONB designation is not compromised by development and that the outstanding natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB is conserved and enhanced;
- fulfil the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Planning Policy Wales (PPW), Planning Practice Guidance (or, where relevant, National Policy Statements), and Technical Advice Notes, with regards to AONBs and the factors that contribute to their natural beauty;
- take account of relevant case law;
- have regard to and be consistent with the AONB Management Plan and guidance published by the Partnership;
- emulate best practice in the Wye Valley AONB and other Protected Landscapes; and

- develop a consistent and coordinated approach to relevant issues across the whole of the Wye Valley AONB and its setting³.

2.3 With regards to housing need and affordable housing, the most relevant strategic objectives of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 are WV-D2, WV-D3 and WV-C3.

3.0 STATUS OF THE POSITION STATEMENT

3.1 Position Statements are supplementary to the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan. For development proposals to be compatible with the AONB Management Plan, they should be compatible with the relevant position statements.

3.2 The AONB Management Plan is a material planning consideration in decision-making. However, it must be acknowledged that, in a plan-led planning system, it is the policies of the relevant adopted local authority development plan that have the greatest weight. As such, within this planning system, the hierarchy is as follows⁴:

The adopted development plan comprises the Local Planning Authority Development Plan, and any 'made' Neighbourhood Development Plan (in England only, when adopted), and Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (Wales only), in which decision-making is to be taken in accordance with, unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.
Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, like the National Planning Policy Framework or Technical Advice Notes, are material planning considerations but do not form part of the adopted development plan.
Wye Valley AONB Position Statements and guidance documents supplement the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan.

4.0 ACHIEVING THE RIGHT BALANCE

4.1 The Wye Valley AONB Partnership recognises that achieving the right balance, in terms of the quantum and type of housing that should be delivered in the Wye Valley AONB and its setting, is a difficult challenge for local authorities, especially where a significant proportion of their area lies within the AONB.

³ Four local authority areas overlap with the Wye Valley AONB, with each with local authority having its own development plan.

⁴ In England, Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states: "If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise." The National Planning Policy Framework is itself a significant material consideration, although it is acknowledged regarding the presumption in favour of sustainable development under Paragraph 11, particularly in relation to plan-making and decision-making.

On Wednesday 13th September 2023, the DEFRA Secretary of State tabled a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) setting out a package of measures to support nature recovery in Protected Landscapes. The package includes a commitment to new legislation through an amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill at Third Reading which will enhance National Park and AONB Management Plans by placing a stronger requirement on partners to contribute to their delivery.

In Wales, national planning guidance prepared by the Welsh Government, is taken into account as a material planning consideration.

4.2 Achieving the right balance is likely to become more challenging, given the pressure on local authorities to allocate and permit more homes, combined with a decrease in the number of suitable sites, as more of these sites are developed over time.

4.3 We recognise that there may be exceptional circumstances in which major housing developments are permitted in the Wye Valley AONB, and/or its setting⁵, that have the potential to have significant adverse effects on the outstanding natural beauty of the AONB and/or meet needs arising elsewhere.

4.4 However, we hope this position statement will help ensure that the right balance can be achieved across the Wye Valley AONB and its setting, with an appropriate quantum and type of housing being delivered in a way that is compatible with the purpose of AONB designation and meets the needs of local communities within the AONB.

5.0 LOCAL NEED & AFFORDABLE HOUSING

5.1 Housing Need v Housing Requirements

5.1.1 The first step in the process of deciding how many homes need to be planned for in an area is to assess housing need. The NPPF sets an expectation that this assessment should follow the Government's 'standard method', although it does allow for an alternative approach to be used in exceptional circumstances⁶. Planning Policy Wales sets out that planning authorities, in partnership with the community, including the private sector, must develop policies to meet the challenges and particular circumstances evident in their areas. Alternative approaches can also be considered in exceptional circumstances⁷.

5.1.2 It is important to note that 'housing need', as calculated using the standard method, is an unconstrained assessment of the number of homes needed in an area⁸. In contrast, establishing the 'housing requirement' for an area requires consideration of 'constraints'⁹, including the AONB designation. As such, there is a clear distinction between 'housing need' and 'housing requirement'.

5.1.3 However, AONBs face a challenge. The standard method figure is based on the local authority area, as a whole, rather than the AONB area. Efforts to

5 Paragraph 177 of NPPF and Paragraph 6.3.10 of PPW

⁶ Paragraph 61 of the NPPF 2021

⁷ Paragraph 4.2.9 of Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (2021). Local Housing Market Assessment Guide, Welsh Assembly Government 2006 and Getting started with your Local Housing Market Assessment – A step-by-step guide, Welsh Government 2014.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>. Paragraph 001.

Local Housing Market Assessment Guide, Welsh Assembly Government 2006 and Getting started with your Local Housing Market Assessment – A step-by-step guide, Welsh Government 2014

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>. Including paragraphs 002, 010, 012, 013, 014, 015, 018, 021 and 025.

Paragraph 4.2.9 of Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (2021)

accommodate this housing need figure potentially risk harming the outstanding natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB and its setting.

5.1.4 The requirement to take account of AONBs in this process is an important factor in the UK Government's assertion that planning policies relating to AONBs 'may mean that objectively assessed needs cannot be met in full through the plan making process'.

5.1.5 Recommendations in the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Landscape-led Development Position Statement are an important consideration in this process¹⁰.

5.1.6 Recommendations:

- Housing need figures identified using the UK Government and Welsh Government 'standard method' should not be presented as a 'target' for housing provision. This can be tempered by a clear explanation if housing need cannot be met in full because of 'constraints' e.g. AONB designation.
- Recommendations outlined in the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Landscape-led Development Position Statement should be an important consideration when assessing housing and economic land availability.
- It should be recognised that national planning policies relating to AONBs and other relevant designations, may mean it is not possible to meet objectively assessed needs for development in full through the plan-making process.
- Consideration should be given to whether the constraints relating to the AONB designation merit exceptional circumstances which may justify an alternative approach to the standard method for assessing housing need.

5.2 Insufficient Sites/Broad Locations to Meet Needs

5.2.1 If objectively assessed needs cannot be met in full, factoring in constraints, guidance states that it will be important to establish how needs might be met in adjoining areas, although it is important to avoid hard development edges along the boundary of the AONB. The guidance goes on to state that if, following this, needs cannot be met then the plan-making authority will have to demonstrate the reasons why as part of the local plan examination¹¹.

5.2.2 Recommendation:

- If AONB-related constraints mean objectively assessed needs cannot be met in full, local authorities should seek to identify how these needs may be met within other areas of the local authorities' control, or in partnership with neighbouring local authorities.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#landscape>. Paragraph 041

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>. Paragraph 025.
Paragraph 4.2.9 of Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (2021)

5.3 Accommodating Unmet Needs, arising elsewhere, within the Wye Valley AONB

5.3.1 Three local planning authorities are within the Wye Valley AONB – Herefordshire Council, Monmouthshire County Council and Forest of Dean District Council. Gloucestershire County Council are also within the Wye Valley AONB.¹² As well as meeting their own housing needs, all local planning authority areas are required (through the duty to cooperate and statements of common ground) to accommodate unmet needs arising from adjoining local authorities. If this situation arises, this could add pressure for more housing within a local authority area, including the Wye Valley AONB.

5.3.2 Within the local planning authority areas that overlap the Wye Valley AONB, there are locations where the AONB boundary provides a clear delineation between the built environments of settlements that are adjacent to the AONB and relatively undeveloped land within the AONB. There is often pressure to, in effect, extend the built environment of these settlements into the AONB.

5.3.3 However, UK Government guidance makes clear that AONBs ‘are unlikely to be suitable areas for accommodating unmet needs arising from adjoining (non-designated) areas’¹³.

5.3.4 The Wye Valley AONB is unlikely to be a suitable area for accommodating unmet needs from adjoining local planning authority areas that do not overlap the AONB even if the overlapping local authorities have to accommodate unmet need. The same principle should apply for unmet needs arising from developed areas that are adjacent to an AONB and which are in the same local planning authority area as the AONB. It is unlikely that it would be appropriate to extend the built environment of adjacent settlements into the AONB.

5.3.5 It may be appropriate to apply the requirements under paragraph 177 of the NPPF (England) and Paragraph 6.3.10 of PPW (Wales), relating to ‘major development’, in this regard.

5.3.6 Recommendations:

- Where a local planning authority area that is located within the Wye Valley AONB, is required to accommodate unmet needs from neighbouring local authorities (including as part of a joint plan), this unmet need should not be factored into housing provision in the Wye Valley AONB at either plan-making or decision-making stages.’*

¹² Gloucestershire is a two-tier county, with the County Council responsible for planning applications related to mineral working and associated development, and the disposal of waste, whereas other planning applications are determined by Forest of Dean District Council.

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#landscape>. Paragraph 041. See also Paragraph 4.2.9 of Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (2021)

- Housing developments that would extend into the Wye Valley AONB, the built environment of settlements adjacent to the AONB should not be allocated or permitted. ‘*’

‘*’ - Except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that it would be in the public interest to do so. It may be appropriate to apply the requirements under paragraph 177 of the NPPF (England) and Paragraph 6.3.10 of PPW (Wales), relating to major development, in this regard.

5.4 Affordable Housing

5.4.1 Strategic Objective WV-C3 of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026, supports the development of affordable housing appropriate to local need in the AONB.

5.4.2 There are several reasons for prioritising the provision of affordable housing in the Wye Valley AONB. For example, the outstanding natural beauty of the Wye Valley makes it a desirable place to live. As a result, housing may be more expensive and less affordable than in areas outside the AONB.

5.4.3 UK Government guidance recognises National Parks, at least, ‘*are not suitable locations for unrestricted housing*’¹⁴. Similarly, the UK Government’s Planning White Paper (2020) states ‘*the whole purpose of National Parks would be undermined by multiple large scale housing developments*’¹⁵. ‘*The expectation [in National Parks] is that new housing will be focussed on meeting affordable housing requirements, supporting local employment opportunities and key services*’¹⁶.

5.4.4 AONBs have the same level of protection as National Parks, with regards to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty, and that the scale and extent of development in AONBs (as with National Parks) should be limited¹⁷. As such, it would be logical to apply the same principles, outlined above for National Parks, in AONBs as well.

5.4.5 The need to provide more affordable housing is addressed in the proposals of the UK Government-commissioned Landscapes Review Final Report (commonly referred to as the Glover Review/Report)¹⁸.

5.4.6 Recommendation:

- Housing provision in the Wye Valley AONB should be focused on – and prioritise – meeting affordable housing requirements.

¹⁴ Defra (2010) English National Parks and the Broads – UK Government Vision and Circular 2010. Para 78.

¹⁵ Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (2020) White Paper: Planning for the Future. Para 2.25.

¹⁶ Defra (2010) *English National Parks and the Broads – UK Government Vision and Circular 2010*. Para 78.

¹⁷ Paragraph 176 of the NPPF 2021

¹⁸ Defra (2019) Landscapes Review Final Report). Proposal 18: A new National Landscapes Housing Association to build affordable homes.

5.5 Affordable in Perpetuity

5.5.1 The term ‘affordable housing’ covers various types of affordable housing, some of which are intended to be affordable in the longer term (i.e. in perpetuity), and some of which are not¹⁹.

5.5.2 UK Government guidance for National Parks specifies that National Park Authorities should work to ‘ensure that ... affordable housing remains so in the longer term²⁰’. The Landscapes Review Final Report reiterates this, stating that ‘National Parks, as planning authorities, should consider using their powers to set conditions on new housing to ensure it remains affordable’²¹. This focus on housing that is affordable in perpetuity is reflected in many National Park Local Plans (see Appendix 2 for relevant case studies), with social rented housing a particular priority. Community Land Trusts are becoming increasingly common to identify and provide housing that is affordable in perpetuity.

5.5.3 As explained in the ‘Affordable Housing’ section, given that AONBs have the same status of protection as National Parks, in terms of conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty, it is logical to apply the same principles in AONBs.

5.5.4 If housing does not remain affordable in perpetuity, this will either lead to a reduction in the stock of affordable housing or will require the building of additional affordable housing to compensate for this reduction. As such, disproportionately more new housing would be required in scenarios where housing does not remain affordable in perpetuity. This would not be compatible with the requirement to limit the scale and extent of development in AONBs.

5.5.5 The Wye Valley AONB Partnership acknowledges that the UK Government and Welsh Government set certain requirements on the types of affordable housing that should be provided in new housing developments. Not all are affordable in perpetuity. We acknowledge that the type and tenure of new housing should reflect locally identified need. However, within these requirements, there remains scope to prioritise and set conditions for housing that is affordable in perpetuity.

5.5.6 Recommendation:

- Within the context of Government requirements and locally identified need, priority should be given to the provision of housing that is affordable in perpetuity, including social rented housing.

¹⁹ Annex 2: Glossary of the NPPF 2021 provides a helpful definition for affordable housing, as well as Local Housing Market Assessment Guide, Welsh Assembly Government 2006; and Getting started with your Local Housing Market Assessment – A step-by-step guide, Welsh Government 2014 <https://gov.wales/local-housing-market-assessment-guidance-local-authorities>

²⁰ Defra (2010) English National Parks and the Broads – UK Government Vision and Circular 2010. Para 79.
See also 4.2.29 of Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (2021)

²¹ Defra (2019) Landscapes Review Final Report. Supporting text for Proposal 18: A new National Landscapes Housing Association to build affordable homes.

5.6 Local Connection

5.6.1 In the Wye Valley AONB, there are three ‘choice-based lettings’ (CBL) schemes that allow applicants to search, apply and bid for social rented properties in their own local authority area – Home Point in Herefordshire, Homeseecker Plus in the Forest of Dean, and Homesearch in Monmouthshire.

5.6.2 All three schemes include some condition for local connection (usually to the local authority area)²². Additional local connection criteria may then also be applied for properties in rural villages where there can be shortages of housing sites with planning conditions. However, the approach is inconsistent between the schemes.

5.6.3 The Wye Valley AONB Partnership supports the priority given to local connection in CBL schemes. This is because we consider that this approach:

- helps to limit the scale and extent of new housing (by limiting the demand for affordable housing, within the Wye Valley AONB, from applicants that do not have a local connection); and
- is compatible with the duty to foster the social well-being of local communities, within the AONB.

5.6.4 It is worth noting that local connection (in terms of residence) is also, inherently, a feature of rural housing need surveys as the data in these surveys relates to households within a specific parish.

5.6.5 Recommendation:

- The local connection requirement of Choice-Based Letting (CBL) schemes should be applied consistently across the Wye Valley AONB.

5.7 Affordable Housing Provision

5.7.1 Another important consideration is the percentage of affordable housing that should be provided in housing developments.

5.7.2 In many Protected Landscapes nationally:

- market-led housing developments are required to provide 50% affordable housing;

²² Section 199 of the Housing Act 1996 specifies that someone has a local connection with the district of a local authority housing authority if they have a connection with it: a) because they are, or in the past were, normally resident there, and that residence is or was of their own choice; b) because they are employed there, c) because of family associations, or d) because of special circumstances.

See also 10.16 of TAN2 – Planning and Affordable Housing (2006)

- for Rural Exception Sites, there is an expectation that such sites will deliver 100% affordable housing (or, at least, a minimum of 75% affordable housing where 100% is not viable)²³;
- provision of affordable housing is sought for residential developments of 5 units or fewer²⁴.

5.7.3 Appendix 2 provides examples of 'good practice' case studies. In some Protected Landscapes, such as Arnside & Silverdale AONB, 50% affordable housing is required for developments of two or more dwellings²⁵.

5.7.4 The Wye Valley AONB Partnership supports these measures for several reasons. For example, having a high percentage of affordable housing will reduce the total number of houses that need to be built to meet locally identified affordable housing need²⁶. This would help to ensure that the scale and extent of development in the AONB is limited, as required under paragraph 176 of the NPPF and Paragraph 6.3.5 of PPW. The higher price tag associated with housing in Protected Landscapes is another factor in justifying a higher percentage of affordable housing in these areas.

5.7.5 It is worth noting that the Landscapes Review Final Report recommends that 'local planning authorities in AONBs should also make use of the provision that allows them to demand on-site affordable housing contributions on all sites, including developments of five homes or fewer'²⁷.

5.7.6 We acknowledge that the viability of such options would need to be tested in viability assessments.

5.7.7 Recommendations:

- At plan-making stage, consideration should be given to setting policies for affordable housing provision in the Wye Valley AONB that requires:
 - At least 50% affordable housing in market housing developments;
 - On-site affordable housing provision for housing developments of between two dwellings and above;
 - 100% affordable housing on Rural Exception Sites, with a lower percentage only being permitted in exceptional circumstances and the absolute minimum being 75%.

²³ The Partnership is aware of RES permitted for development in the Wye Valley AONB with the percentage of affordable housing as low as 50%. We consider this to be closer to the level that should be provided in market housing schemes. This level in a RES undermines the purpose of allowing such development, on sites where housing would not normally be permitted, which is to meet locally identified affordable housing needs. It also allows for excessive levels of market housing on such sites, which would not be appropriate in a protected landscape.

²⁴ This makes use of the provision in paragraph 64 of the NPPF, which allows for affordable housing to be required in residential developments of 5 units or fewer in designated rural areas. See also 10.13 of TAN2 – Planning and Affordable Housing (2006) which advises that local plans may locally define small rural exception sites.

²⁵ Lancaster City Council and South Lakeland District Council (2019) Arnside & Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Development Plan Document. Adopted Version 29 March 2019. Policy AS03 – Housing Provision.

²⁶ For example, the affordable housing need identified in rural housing need surveys.

²⁷ Defra (2019) Landscapes Review Final Report. Proposal 18: A new National Landscapes Housing Association to build affordable homes.

5.8 Evidence Of Local Need Arising Within The Wye Valley AONB

5.8.1 As outlined earlier, we acknowledged that the standard method is the starting point for calculating housing need in a local authority area. This housing need figure is then 'filtered' through the assessment of housing and economic land availability. This assessment, which takes account of relevant constraints, including the AONB designation, leads to a housing requirement figure. This housing requirement figure, together with the settlement hierarchy, forms the basis of the spatial strategy for housing provision, as set out in the Local Plan. These spatial strategies sometimes identify the housing requirement for specific sub-areas or individual settlements, which subsequently informs (reviewed) Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs).

5.8.2 Within this process, we encourage local authorities and other stakeholders to have regard to Strategic Objective WV-C3 of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026, which supports the development of affordable housing appropriate to local need in the AONB. Given WV-C3 prioritises affordable housing, priority should be given to the provision of affordable housing. A key consideration, in this context, is whether there is robust evidence of local affordable housing need arising from within the Wye Valley AONB.

5.8.3 Within this context, we consider that robust evidence of local affordable housing need arising from within the Wye Valley AONB includes:

- an up-to-date (rural) housing needs survey for parishes where housing is being considered²⁸;
- validated choice-based lettings system data where there is a local connection to – and preference for – the relevant parish/settlement (albeit with the caveats outlined later in this position statement);
- housing allocations, that address affordable housing need, in the relevant Neighbourhood Development Plan.

5.8.4 It is acknowledged that the evidence of housing need produced should only be based on data which is specific to the individual local authority and the different approaches to housing need analysis and CBL Schemes between the authorities. This issue is particularly relevant in the absence of a spatial housing strategy for the Wye Valley AONB as a whole. Consequently, when evidence of housing need is being considered within the Wye Valley AONB, and extends beyond a particular settlement, it therefore remains limited to the relevant local planning authority. In other words, it should not include evidence of need arising within the Wye Valley AONB in other local authority areas.

5.8.5 Recommendations:

²⁸ Ideally, where a parish overlaps with the boundary of the Wye Valley AONB, there should be some consideration of the extent to which the identified need arises within, or outside, the AONB (at least when the data is being applied to a particular housing proposal). See also the guidance and recommendations in this position statement relating to needs arising in adjacent, non-designated areas.

- At the plan-making stage, plan-making bodies should have regard to robust evidence of affordable housing need arising within the Wye Valley AONB (as defined above) when assessing potential housing allocations.
- At the development management stage, housing development proposals:
 - Within the settlement boundary, should have regard to robust evidence of affordable housing need arising within the Wye Valley AONB (as defined above);
 - Outside the settlement boundary, or equivalent, should be based on robust evidence of affordable housing need arising within the Wye Valley AONB (as defined above).

5.9 Rural Housing Need Surveys

5.9.1 As outlined above, rural housing need surveys (HNS) form an important part of the evidence base for potential housing developments. However, little weight is given to such surveys if out-of-date (i.e. more than five years old). Without this evidence base, more weight is likely to be given to the unitary or district-wide housing requirement figure (or even the housing need figure), which could potentially result in a larger number of houses being built.

5.9.2 Given the provision of affordable housing that meets local needs is a key priority, it may be appropriate to prioritise HNS in the AONB.

5.9.3 Recommendations:

- Housing need surveys should be kept up-to-date, particularly for parishes within the Wye Valley AONB where housing is likely to be allocated (for example, settlements higher up the settlement hierarchy) and/or, where there is strong developer interest in new residential development.
- Housing need surveys should be carried out on a five-year rolling programme.

5.10 Choice Based Lettings Systems

5.10.1 As outlined above, data from the three choice-based lettings systems (CBL) – Home Point, Homesearch and Homeseeker Plus - used by the local authorities whose areas overlap the Wye Valley AONB, form an important part of the evidence base for potential housing allocations/developments. However, there are acknowledged limitations in these systems regarding the data held, and this enables – albeit inadvertently – potential misinterpretation to present inflated affordable housing need figures. For example, some may not capture a homeseeker’s preference to remain or live in a particular parish. i.e. the registrant has noted simply that they live in the parish and wish to move. It may also fail to identify applicants who may have already moved or who no longer have a housing need.

5.10.2 CBL system data should not be used explicitly as a measure of affordable housing need. It may be more appropriate to cross-reference this data first with other evidence of affordable housing need, such as housing needs survey data.

5.10.3 The flowchart in Appendix 3, provides an illustration of the type of analysis that should be applied to data extracted from a CBL scheme register for it to provide effective evidence reports for use in decision-making.

5.10.4 Recommendation:

- Data from choice-based lettings systems should not be used explicitly as a measure of affordable housing need unless the data has been verified and there is a clear local connection to – and preference for – the settlement in question.

5.11 Second Homes

5.11.1 Second home ownership and buy to let can remove housing from the open market that could otherwise be made available to first-time homeowners. The resulting increased demand within a reduced pool of housing stock can inflate house prices, worsening affordability. This issue can be particularly challenging in protected landscapes, like the Wye Valley AONB, whose outstanding natural beauty makes them very desirable places to visit/holiday in. This issue is recognised as being sufficiently significant in some Protected Landscapes that it is explicitly addressed in Local Plan policies. For example, Policy HC-S4 of the Exmoor National Park Local Plan requires new market housing to be ‘principal residence’ housing²⁹.

5.11.2 Recommendation:

- When plan-making bodies are reviewing their development plans, they should consider setting policies that ensure that new, and change of use to, market housing in the Wye Valley AONB is used as a ‘principle residence’ rather than as a second home or holiday home/let.

6.0 LOCATION & DESIGN

6.1 Context

6.1.1 The UK Government’s planning practice guidance states that ‘*all development in ... AONBs will need to be located and designed in a way that reflects their status as landscapes of the highest quality*’³⁰. This guidance also states that poorly located or designed development in the setting of AONBs ‘can do significant harm’ to the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONBs. It adds that ‘*development within the settings of these areas will therefore need sensitive handling that takes these potential impacts into account*’³¹. Development that is “good enough to approve” should

²⁹ https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/257751/Part-6-Achieving-a-Thriving-Community.pdf. Page 153.

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#landscape>. Paragraph 041.

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#landscape>. Paragraph 042.

demonstrate convincing evidence of local need, prioritise affordable housing and follow the Welsh Government 'Design' Technical Advice Note (TAN) 12 (2016).

6.2 Location

6.2.1 As outlined in the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Landscape-led Development Position Statement, proposals should be genuinely landscape-led throughout all stages of the planning process.

6.2.2 Another key consideration is locating new housing development close to essential services and facilities, to reduce/minimise reliance on car use to access these services and facilities. In other words, focussing on housing development on settlements higher up the 'settlement hierarchy'. The need to protect and conserve the significance of heritage assets and their setting, as well as historic landscape characterisation and other relevant evidence-based documents, should also be considered.

6.2.3 Recommendation:

- The location of new residential development should be consistent with the 'settlement hierarchy' approach, whereby housing is targeted towards settlements that have a good level of services and facilities and locations that facilitate opportunities to access them by a range of active travel measures, reducing car use dependency.

6.3 Design

6.3.1 The value of the Wye Valley AONB landscape relies in part on the standard and character of the buildings within it. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure that each development adds value to the Wye Valley AONB, through good design. This contributes to the enhancement of natural beauty and sense of place. Several Features and Special Qualities³² of the Wye Valley AONB relate directly to the design of housing, including:

- Distinctive 'villagescapes', including conservation areas, listed buildings and local features, that define a 'sense of place' in the settlements.
- Rural character and scale of settlements contribute to local distinctiveness, landscape character and sense of tranquillity.
- High-quality built environment characterised by numerous distinctive features, such as settlement patterns, landmark buildings, garden layouts, boundary elements and planting traditions
- There is no single building style, type of material or pattern of development in the AONB, reflecting the varying geology and topography. This creates a range of

³² See Statement of Significance, Vision and Tables 2 & 8 of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 for more information on relevant Features and Special Qualities.

styles that give character and distinctiveness to different parts of the area. Lack of attention to details can harm the Special Qualities of the AONB and diminish the distinctiveness of its built heritage.

- Listed buildings and Conservation areas.

6.3.2 The Special Qualities are reflected in numerous Strategic Objectives within the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026.

6.3.3 To sustain natural beauty, it is important to ensure future development is locally characteristic and distinctive, in terms of its design, siting and the materials used. There are many different styles of building that give character and distinctiveness to different parts of the area. Lack of attention to issues such as local design, layout, scale and materials can harm the Special Qualities of the AONB and diminish the distinctiveness of the built environment. The loss of specimen trees, stone walls, hedgerows and other landscape elements associated with development can also degrade local character and distinctiveness.

6.3.4 A key reference point for the design of new residential development are design guides/guidance. There is not an over-arching design guide for the whole of the Wye Valley AONB. However, the advancement of design codes should build a design vision, such as a masterplan or other design and development framework for a site/area, including emerging Local Plan/NDP policies.

6.3.5 An increasingly important consideration will be the extent to which new residential development incorporates energy conservation and renewable energy measures. This should be done in a way that is compatible with the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB.

6.3.6 Recommendations:

- New residential developments in the Wye Valley AONB should:
 - Respect locally distinctive characteristics of the existing settlement;
 - Respect the relevant Features and Special Qualities of the Wye Valley AONB;
 - Be consistent with relevant Strategic Objectives of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan;
 - Facilitate opportunities for people to travel and access services by a range of transport modes, reducing car use dependency;
 - Consider the significance of the historic environment, heritage assets, both designated and non-designated, and their setting;
 - Account for emerging design codes and guidance;
 - Protect Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land, where possible; and
 - where new residential development is proposed in 'open countryside locations' for instance, barn conversions or individual housing on greenfield sites requiring outstanding design standards, consider design, materials and location, as they individually and cumulatively affect local distinctiveness, special qualities, features of the landscape and visual effects, as well as effects on wildlife, which undermines tranquillity, all of which underpin the AONB designation.

- New affordable housing should be indistinguishable from open market housing in terms of both character and design quality; and should be fully integrated into the village fabric.
- The use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), where adopted, should be derived from new housing developments, for enhancing the natural environment within the Wye Valley AONB.
- The requirement for all landscape assessments – whether undertaken in support of a specific planning application or an allocation at the plan making stage – should be based on evidence on landscape and visual matters. In practice this means judgements are supported by clear reasoning which is linked to evidence.

7.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

7.1 In addition to the 'footnotes' provided throughout, this Position Statement is supported by several appendices (as a separate document), which provide:

- Extracts from the UK Government's guidance on 'Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment' (Appendix 1).
- Case studies of good practice (Appendix 2).
- A flowchart illustrating the extent to which CBL data equates to convincing evidence of need within a specific settlement (Appendix 3).
- Publicly available evidence base provided by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for Wales only (Appendix 4).



WYE VALLEY AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

POSITION STATEMENT: HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN THE WYE VALLEY AONB AND ITS SETTING – APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. EXTRACTS FROM THE UK GOVERNMENT'S GUIDANCE ON HOUSING AND ECONOMIC LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT

Reference (as of March 2023):

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>

The Government's guidance on 'Housing and economic land availability assessment' makes the following, helpful points in relation to AONB-related considerations and potential constraints on the suitability, availability or achievability of potential housing sites or broad locations for housing:

Paragraph 002: Plan-making bodies should consider constraints when assessing the suitability, availability and achievability of sites and broad locations. For example, assessments should reflect the policies in footnote 6 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which sets out the areas where the Framework would provide strong reasons for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area.

Paragraph 010: Identified sites, which have particular constraints (such as Green Belt), need to be included in the assessment for the sake of comprehensiveness but these constraints need to be set out clearly, including where they severely restrict development.

Paragraph 012: A 'call for sites' will need to set out the information sought from respondents, which could include ... constraints to development.

Paragraph 13: Plan-makers can assess potential sites and broad locations prior to a more detailed survey to [inter alia]:

- obtain a better understanding of what type and scale of development may be appropriate;
- gain a more detailed understanding of deliverability, any barriers and how they could be overcome.

Paragraph 015: During the [initial] site survey the following information can be recorded ...[inter alia]:

- current land use and character;
- land uses and character of surrounding area;

- physical constraints (e.g. access, contamination, steep slopes, flood risk, natural features of significance, location of infrastructure/utilities);
- potential environmental constraints.

Paragraph 018: A site or broad location can be considered suitable if it would provide an appropriate location for development when considered against relevant constraints and their potential to be mitigated.

Paragraph 018: When considering constraints, plan-makers may wish to consider the information collected as part of the initial site survey, as well as other relevant information, such as [inter alia]:

- potential impacts including the effect upon landscapes including landscape features, nature and heritage conservation.

Paragraph 021: Where constraints have been identified, the assessment will need to consider what action could be taken to overcome them. Examples of constraints include policies in the National Planning Policy Framework and the adopted or emerging development plan, which may affect the suitability of the site.

Paragraph 025: If there is clear evidence that strategic policies cannot meet the needs of the area, factoring in the constraints, it will be important to establish how needs might be met in adjoining areas through the process of preparing statements of common ground, and in accordance with the duty to cooperate. If following this, needs cannot be met then the plan-making authority will have to demonstrate the reasons why as part of the plan examination.

APPENDIX 2. CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1. WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN – EVIDENCE OF NEED

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan provides a useful case study of how and why housing needs arising within an AONB (in this case the Cotswolds National Landscape), and, in particular, why affordable housing needs should be taken into account in the Local Plan process.

As part of the evidence base for the West Oxfordshire Local Plan, West Oxfordshire District Council identified a '*broadly indicative minimum housing need*' for the Burford-Charlbury sub-area¹ for the 2015-31 plan period. However, the planning inspector, in his report on the examination of the Local Plan², stated that:

- *Whilst this is useful evidence as a starting point, it merely indicates the likely implications of various levels of housing growth for the sub-area's population and resident labour force. Neither it nor any other substantive evidence before the Examination identifies a housing requirement figure for the Burford – Charlbury sub-area which appropriately reflect needs, constraints, relevant national policy and the key issues for development and transport detailed in the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan.*³
- *Moreover, in the absence of a specific housing need figure for the sub-area, it is not possible to identify that new dwellings, over and above existing completions and commitments, are as a matter of principle, necessary specifically in the context of the AONB or the Burford – Charlbury sub-area.*⁴

The inspector concluded that '*in the absence of a housing need figure for the Burford – Charlbury sub-area and in the particular housing land supply circumstances of West Oxfordshire as a whole at the present time*', '*the allocation in the plan of housing sites, and the reliance on additional windfall housing development, in the Burford – Charlbury area, over and above existing completions and commitments, would not be sound.*'

It is evident that, in reaching this conclusion, the planning inspector acknowledged that there was already a commitment for a substantial amount of new housing in the sub-area and that the anticipated district-wide housing supply figure was already 99.5% of the district-wide housing requirement figure. The implication of this is that if there wasn't already a significant housing commitment within the National Landscape sub-area and / or if the anticipated District-wide housing supply figure wasn't close to the District's housing requirement figure then the inspector may have been more inclined to consider further allocations in the AONB sub-area. It is also worth noting that the planning inspector stated that his conclusion in relation to allocations in the Burford-Charlbury sub-area '*does not mean that development of further new housing in the Burford – Charlbury sub-areas would necessarily be inappropriate.*'⁵

¹ This sub-area broadly matched the section of West Oxfordshire District that lies within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

² Planning Inspectorate (2018) *Report on the Examination of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031*

³ As above – paragraph 218.

⁴ As above – paragraph 219.

⁵ As above – paragraph 220.

However, it is also evident that the lack of a housing need figure specifically for the part of the local authority area that lies within the Cotswolds National Landscape was a key factor in the planning inspector finding the proposed housing allocations unsound. In its own Housing Position Statement and associated Appendix document, the Cotswold National Landscape Board considers that, even where there is a potential housing shortfall (compared to objectively assessed needs), it would still be appropriate for the LPA to identify the amount of housing for the National Landscape sub-area that would '*appropriately reflect needs, constraints, relevant national policy and the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan*'. It considers that this information should be an important component of the evidence base in determining the housing requirement figure for the National Landscape sub-area. Further, they propose that this principle should apply even when LPA-commissioned landscape and heritage assessments have concluded that potential allocations are potentially suitable for development (as was the case with the proposed allocations in the Burford-Charlbury sub-area).

If West Oxfordshire had had a housing requirement figure for the National Landscape sub-area that reflected these considerations and had put forward proposed allocations that were consistent with this approach, then the planning inspector would have been more likely to deem the proposed allocations as being sound. If they had been found sound then there would be less opportunity for speculative – and potentially damaging - windfall development proposals within the National Landscape, as windfall developments would have played a less significant component of overall housing supply.

Therefore, having an appropriate housing requirement figure specifically for an AONB/ National Landscape section of a local authority area can potentially:

- (i) increase the likelihood of potential allocations that align with this figure being deemed to be sound;
- (ii) help to reduce the risk of potentially damaging, speculative windfall development proposals within the AONB/National Landscape.

With regards to windfall development in the Cotswolds National Landscape, the West Oxfordshire Local Plan states that:

- *Within the Cotswolds AONB, windfall housing proposals on undeveloped land adjoining built up areas ... will only be supported where there is convincing evidence of a specific local housing need such as needs identified through a neighbourhood plan or affordable housing needs specific to a particular settlement, for example through a rural exception site.*⁶ (N.B. Underlining added for emphasis).

The Cotswold National Landscape Board has strongly supported this approach, for example, by using it as a key reason for objecting to the proposed development of 68 dwellings in Stonesfield, West Oxfordshire. The Board was also a Rule 6 party in the planning appeal inquiry for this development (APP/D3125/W/18/3209551) in 2019. Following the positive outcome of this planning appeal, in which the appeal was dismissed and the developer decided to withdraw their proposed High Court

⁶ West Oxfordshire District Council (2018) *West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031* . Paragraph 5.39.

challenge to this appeal decision, The Cotswold National Landscape Board declare that there is even more justification for advocating the West Oxfordshire Local Plan approach across the wider area of the Cotswolds National Landscape.

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CASE STUDY 2: SOUTH DOWNS LOCAL PLAN⁷

Paragraph 7.18 (Housing): Provision of housing to meet local needs is crucial to ensure the sustainability and vitality of communities within the national Park ... However, the provision of housing should not be at the expense of a nationally protected landscape. The NPPF cites national parks as areas where development should be restricted and objectively assessed need not met.

Paragraph 8.5 (Need for the Development): There is a need for development to take place to meet growth needs, as far as it is compatible with the National Park purposes and the overarching ecosystem services led approach.

Strategic Policy SD28: Affordable Homes

1. Development proposals for new residential development will be permitted that maximise the delivery of affordable housing to meet local need, and provided that, as a minimum, the following are met:

- a) On sites with gross capacity to provide 11 or more homes, a minimum of 50% of new homes created will be provided as affordable homes on-site, of which a minimum 75% will provide a rented affordable tenure.
- b) On sites with gross capacity to provide between 3 and 10 homes, a proportion of affordable homes will be provided in accordance with the following sliding scale, applied to new homes created:

3 homes	Meaningful financial contribution, to be negotiated case-by-case
4 – 5 homes	1 affordable home
6 – 7 homes	2 affordable homes, at least 1 of which is a rented affordable tenure
8 homes	3 affordable homes, at least 1 of which is a rented affordable tenure
9 homes	3 affordable homes, at least 2 of which is a rented affordable tenure
10 homes	4 affordable homes, at least 2 of which is a rented affordable tenure

⁷ South Downs National Park Authority (2019) *South Downs Local Plan 2014-2033*.

Development proposals of 4 to 10 net dwellings will provide affordable housing on-site. Exceptionally, at the discretion of the Authority, financial contributions in lieu will be accepted.

2. Where, exceptionally, provision of affordable housing which complies with Part 1 of this policy is robustly shown to be financially unviable, priority will be given to achieving the target number of on-site affordable homes over other requirements set out in this policy.
3. Development proposals will be permitted provided that affordable housing units are integrated throughout the development, are indistinguishable in design and materials from the market housing on the site, and, where feasible, will remain affordable in perpetuity.
4. Occupancy conditions and local connection criteria will be applied to affordable housing to ensure local needs are met. Specific criteria will be determined by the Authority, in close partnership with established community-led and legally constituted organisations or CLTs where applicable.
5. Developers may not circumvent this policy by artificially subdividing sites.

Strategic Policy SD29: Rural Exception Sites

1. Proposals for new residential development of 100 per cent affordable housing outside of settlement boundaries as shown on the Policies Map will be permitted, provided that the following are met:
 - a) Affordable housing is provided in perpetuity;
 - b) The site selection process has considered all reasonable options, and the most suitable available site in terms of landscape, ecosystem services and overall sustainability has been chosen;
 - c) The scale and location relates well to the existing settlement and landscape character; and
 - d) It is shown that effective community engagement has fed into the design, layout and types of dwellings proposed.
2. The size (number of bedrooms), type and tenure, (for example, social and affordable rented, intermediate, shared ownership or older people's housing) of affordable homes for each proposal will be based on robust and up-to-date evidence of local community need.
3. Occupancy conditions and local connection criteria will be applied to affordable housing to ensure local needs are met. Specific criteria will be determined by the Authority, in close partnership with established community-led and legally constituted organisations or CLTs where applicable.

CASE STUDY 3: ARNSIDE & SILVERDALE AONB DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT⁸

Paragraph 3.1.4: Given the difficulties in apportioning the OAN [Objectively Assessed Needs], and the emphasis on the capacity of the landscape to accommodate development within the AONB, the Councils have concluded, taking advice from relevant Counsel and organisations such as Planning Advisory Service, that it is not necessary to identify a specific housing requirement for the AONB. In the AONB, the priority should be to meet identified affordable and other local housing needs within the capacity of the landscape.

Paragraph 3.1.6: Some housing needs may be met outside the AONB if suitable sites are not available within. This includes where development could not take place without harm to the statutory purpose of the AONB.

Paragraph 3.1.7: In line with the landscape-capacity led approach, the Councils have not sought to set targets for amounts of development to be achieved. This would require a particular quantum of development to be delivered regardless of its impacts upon the designated landscape. Instead, the Development Strategy ensures that only development that can be accommodated without harm to the AONB's primary purpose will be permitted, whilst maintaining a positive approach, recognising that appropriately located and designed development can contribute to conserving and enhancing the landscape and settlement character, including where opportunities for regeneration and redevelopment can be delivered.

Paragraph 4.1.3: A requirement for 50% of new homes to be affordable is justified because the AONB is a sensitive landscape protected at a national level. It is inappropriate to use those sites that are suitable for development in the AONB to deliver development that does not help to meet local affordable or other local needs. Doing so would mean that those needs would remain unmet and more sensitive sites would have to be developed in order to meet the needs, causing harm and compromising the primary purpose of the AONB designation.

⁸ South Lakeland District Council and Lancaster City Council (2019) *Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Development Plan Document (DPD) – Adopted Version, 28 March 2019*. This is the first DPD for an AONB in the country.

AS03 – Housing Provision

Within the Arnside & Silverdale AONB, the number, size, types and tenures of all homes provided should closely reflect identified local needs in accordance with current AONB housing needs evidence at the time of the application. Proposals for new housing development of two or more properties will be supported where they deliver no less than 50% affordable housing. Only where this is demonstrably unachievable will a lower percentage be acceptable. In assessing the level and type of affordable housing provision on each site, the Councils will have regard to site viability, individual site costs, other scheme requirements, and the guidance on affordable housing provision set out in Appendix 4.

Meeting the affordable housing requirement by commuted sums rather than by the provision of housing on site will be exceptional and require justification on a case-by-case basis.

Priority will be given to the delivery of affordable housing and maximising the potential for meeting identified local needs and local affordable needs from appropriate individual development opportunities. Proposals will be expected to demonstrate that densities make best and efficient use of land and reflect local settlement character.

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CASE STUDY 4: NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK LOCAL PLAN⁹

Policy SP27: Affordable housing provision within the Defined Villages and on allocated sites

50% of net dwellings ... will be provided as affordable homes to meet local needs. In practice:

- a) on developments of 1 – 2 net new dwellings, no affordable housing will be sought;
- b) on developments of between 3 – 10 net new dwellings, a target of 50% affordable housing will be sought on site. Exceptionally, at the discretion of the National Park Authority, financial contributions in lieu of on-site provision will be accepted on smaller sites;
- c) on development sites of 11 dwellings or more, a target of 50% affordable housing will be sought on site.

The layout and design of affordable housing will be appropriately integrated into each development. Local connection criteria will be applied to affordable housing to ensure local needs are met.

The tenure (social and affordable rented, intermediate, shared ownership and other) of affordable homes will be based on up-to-date evidence of local needs. A suitable mix will be determined through liaison with the local housing authority and the starting point is to seek 75% social / affordable rented tenure and 25% shared ownership / intermediate housing.

The proportion and tenure mix of affordable housing sought will take into account evidence of viability.

Policy SP28: Rural exception sites

Small-scale affordable housing developments may be permitted as “exceptions” on sites in or adjoining villages to meet the identified needs of local people in these areas. Proposals for exception sites should:

- a) meet a particular local need that cannot be accommodated in any other way
- b) be subject to a planning obligation under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990) to ensure that the dwellings provide for low-cost housing for local needs in perpetuity
- c) be capable of management by an appropriate body, for example a Registered Provider, the Authority, or a community land trust or similar accredited local organisation
- d) be located where there are appropriate local services (e.g. shops, schools and public transport).

100% of the housing on rural exception sites will be affordable.

⁹ New Forest National Park Authority (2019) *New Forest National Park Local Plan 2016-2036* .

CASE STUDY 5. Bridport Cohousing Microgrid, Hazlemead, Dorset (Dorset AONB)

Bridport Cohousing (www.bridportcohousing.org.uk) is a community-based organisation in West Dorset that seeks to provide community-led housing that is sustainable. It is a registered Community Land Trust (CLT), and part of the wider CLT network in the UK that seeks sites for affordable housing that deliver local housing need, often with a local connection to the communities they work in.

Supported by a grant from Homes England and crowdfunding investors, Bridport Cohousing has worked with housing provider Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA), architects Barefoot Architects and developers CG Fry to create a community in the market town of Bridport, Hazlemead. This is the town's first cohousing neighbourhood with affordable and sustainable eco-homes and is thought to be the largest of its kind in the UK. Cohousing schemes allow for self-contained living, in Hazlemead's case in individual properties, but with community facilities. In the Hazlemead community there will be shared outside space for recreation and food growing as well as common facilities, including a playroom for children, shared office space, a space for shared meals and promoting a carsharing scheme and food cooperative.

Built on a seven-acre site in the Dorset AONB, Hazlemead will consist of 53 sustainable homes, of which 26 flats are houses for social rent and a further 27 shared ownership properties, which will be partly managed by BCHA. There are also six two-bedroom houses to rent for National Health Service (NHS) staff. The shared ownership schemes are available for purchase between 30 per cent to 75 per cent of market value and rent is paid on the remaining balance. The lowest capital share they can be purchased at is 30 per cent and the maximum 75 per cent, or later staircased to a maximum of 80 per cent of the value at a later date. Applicants for social rent are available to those already registered on the Dorset Housing Register as looking for affordable housing properties.

As a CLT, the land is held in perpetuity for the benefit of the community, whereby all properties remain as affordable housing so they can be sold on the open market; as such Bridport Cohousing will retain the freehold of the properties to ensure this. A local lettings scheme will ensure that housing is allocated fairly.

Applicants need to be a member of Bridport Cohousing and be committed to the community. In addition, potential members of the new community need to meet the following conditions:

- have lived in the area for at least two years, or
- have worked in the area for one year (with a permanent contract), or
- have a close relative that has lived in the area for more than five years
- Potential residents need to subscribe to cultural norms and practices set by the community

See: <https://bridportcohousing.org.uk/neighbourhood-policies/>

The first residents moved in during the summer/autumn of 2022. The Hazlemead scheme reflects the coming together of various innovative strands reflective of the

potential of planning to deliver local, sustainable development. As a community-led, inclusive, low-carbon, self-sufficient scheme within walking distance of a thriving market town and located within an AONB, Hazelmead shows how planning can deliver progressive ideals of sustainable localism. The scheme has also utilised public funding, private investment as well as crowdfunding for its common facilities through the ethical trading platform Ethex. Investors in the common facilities also were offered a four per cent return and membership to the CLT, both of which act as incentives to translate intrinsic motivation to support community-based innovation with an additional financial and decision-making benefit. The scheme also brought together community, public, private and housing providers in a hybrid form of multi-stakeholder rural planning.

The scheme was very much a value-orientated approach, whereby the values of Bridport Co-housing were also reflected in the choice of delivery partners, such as BCHA which stimulates sustainable housing and health and well-being outcomes through its affordable housing strategy, for instance, and its agile way of working reflects the community's own commitment to sociocratic principles and collaborative approach³⁵. At the same time, there are still properties available, indicating that community housing schemes are not yet 'mainstream' which may pose a challenge for their scalability and take-up.

However, this is also in part because the group has staggered the release of plots as they are developed. In addition, that the UK's largest cohousing scheme has been developed with the support of public funding is similar to the fact that most of the former Code for Sustainable Homes highest level Code 5 and 6 properties were mostly affordable housing developed by social housing providers backed with public money. Thus, innovation in sustainable or community-led housing often requires the backing of government to leverage the investment required to get such schemes off the ground. Additionally, the contract rules governing energy supply allow innovation up to 2.5 megawatt (MW) under licence exemptions, but above that the sector is much more stringently regulated. Thus, in terms of scalability, such schemes may require 'regime' backing in order to facilitate 'niche' transitions, acting as a blend of alterity and institutional support to facilitate some of the more transformational potential of rural planning.

Or that such transitions become necessarily constrained over a certain threshold of regulation or social acceptance of innovative schemes, be that of the regulatory energy network or outside of intentional, sustainable communities. The stringent ground rules of the community certainly are not for everyone and attract an alternative mindset (though the community does recognise the rules can be changed to accommodate changing needs), so the types of people likely to live in a cohousing scheme may not be typical of UK residents. Therefore, the ability of planning to configure some of these innovative elements into a prefigurative, intentional community at scale are limited in many development schemes. However, schemes such as these do paint a picture of how the elements of the rural can be bundled into micro-sites for adaptation, linked to the wider service infrastructure of the wider community. Having evidenced the principles of co-housing in the town, the made Neighbourhood Plan also refers to co-housing as a means to support future development that can meet the needs of older people through 'Senior Co-housing', multi-generational schemes and other 'Community led housing' projects. Though, this is not a policy in the Plan per se but an action point for further exploration. But it

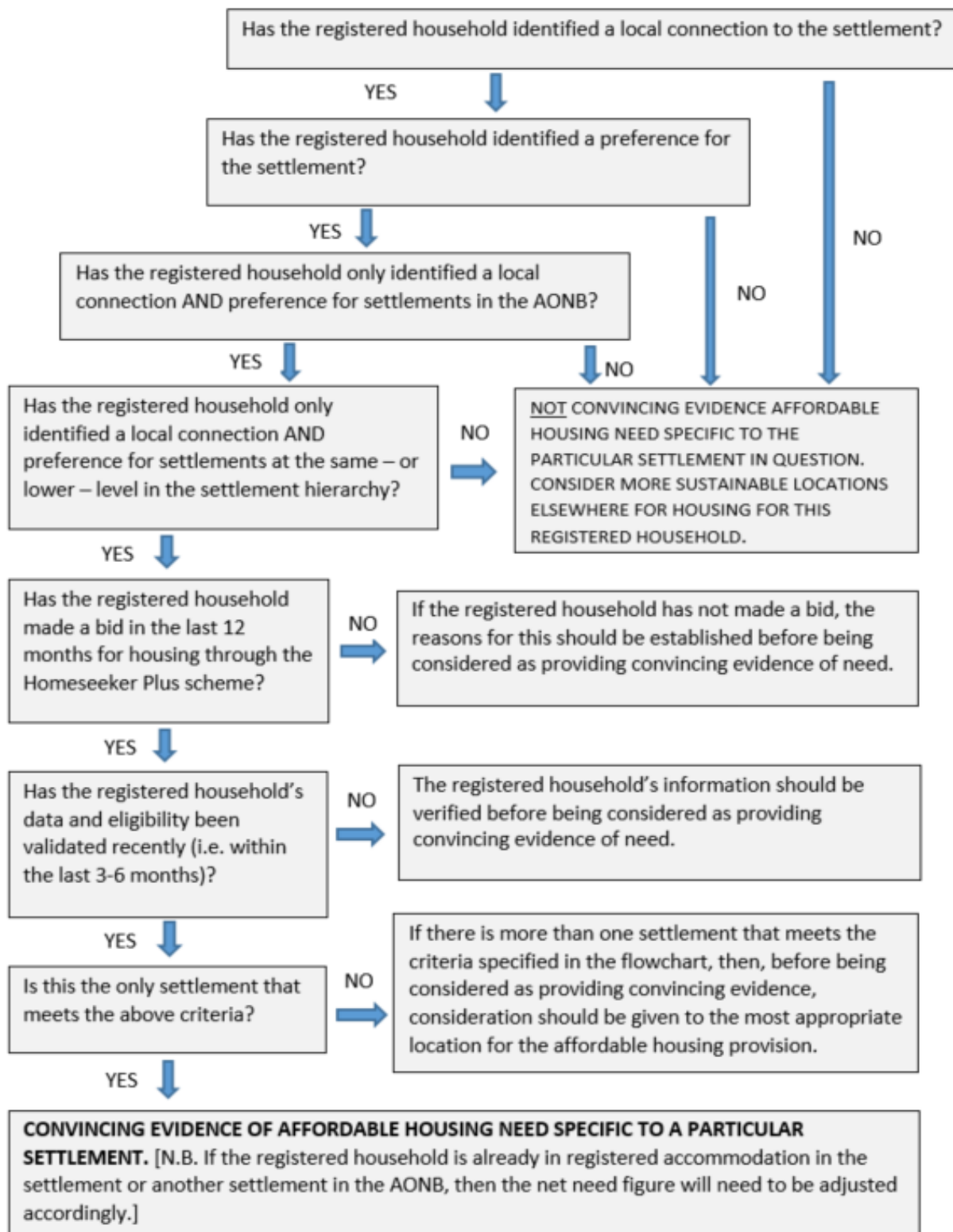
nonetheless indicates how the principles of such schemes can be formalised into local strategies for development alternatives through statutory documents such as Neighbourhood Development Plans.

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APPENDIX 3. FLOWCHART ILLUSTRATING THE EXTENT TO WHICH CHOICE-BASED LETTINGS DATA CAN EQUATE TO CONVINCING EVIDENCE OF HOUSING NEED WITHIN A SPECIFIC SETTLEMENT¹⁰

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¹⁰ This flowchart was developed by the Cotswolds National Landscape Board following the Board's involvement in the Stonesfield planning appeal in West Oxfordshire (APP/D3125/W/18/3209551). It illustrates some of the issues associated with the scope to which choice based lettings systems can provide evidence of affordable housing need using *Homeseeker Plus* as an example scheme. Similar flowcharts for *Home Point* and *Housing for You* could differ slightly from this due to differences in operation between the Schemes, but the same principles would apply.



APPENDIX 4 - PUBLICLY AVAILABLE EVIDENCE BASE PROVIDED BY NATURAL RESOURCES WALES (WALES ONLY)

In relation to development in Wales, Natural Resources Wales have advised the following publicly available evidence base to support applications, which includes:

- LANDMAP. [Natural Resources Wales / LANDMAP - the Welsh landscape baseline](#)
- Evidence on tranquillity and place: [Tranquillity and Place \(arcgis.com\)](#)
- Evidence on dark skies: [Wales Dark Skies \(arcgis.com\)](#)
- Evidence on visible settings of designated landscapes: [Natural Resources Wales / Considering the visible setting when choosing your development site](#)
- Evidence in relation to the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources within the State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales. [Natural Resources Wales / State of Natural Resources Report \(SoNaRR\) for Wales 2020](#)
- [Natural Resources Wales / Area Statements and Designated Landscapes](#)

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WYE VALLEY AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

POSITION STATEMENT: LANDSCAPE-LED DEVELOPMENT

1.0 CONTEXT

1.1 The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it¹. The statutory purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area².

1.2 The Wye Valley AONB is also a living and working landscape in which the social and economic well-being of local communities are important considerations. Maintaining vibrant and thriving local communities is essential to the long-term future of the AONB. As such, the AONB cannot be considered exempt from the need for new housing and other development. Indeed, the right development in the right place can potentially play a positive role in helping to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.

1.3 The Wye Valley AONB also needs to play a role in addressing the current ecological and climate emergencies, for example, through the implementation of appropriate measures to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

1.4 Achieving these aspirations needs to be delivered in a way that is compatible with – and positively contributes to – the statutory purpose of designation. To not do so would undermine:

- the statutory purpose of designation;
- the principle that safeguarding Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) is in the national interest;
- the aspirations and goals of the UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and Net Zero Wales, as outlaid by Welsh Government³;

¹ Section 82 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

² Defra (2019) *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: technical support scheme (England) 2019 to 2020 Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (2021) - Section 6.3.7*

³ The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan aspires for us to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. As part of this aspiration, it proposes to embed an 'environmental net gain' principle for development. In addition, it sets a goal that 'we will conserve and enhance the beauty of our natural environment ... by ... safeguarding and enhancing the beauty of our natural scenery and improving its environmental value while being sensitive to considerations of its heritage'.

Welsh Government's second emissions reduction plan for Carbon Budget 2 (2021 to 2025), sets the foundations to make Wales net zero by 2050.

- the proposals of the Government-commissioned Landscapes Review Final Report⁴;
- the vision, outcomes, ambitions and policies of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan;
- efforts to restore and enhance the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB;
- design codes, which define and deliver design quality, in addition to design guides, planning briefs, heritage characterisation studies, standards and masterplans as set out in the NPPF and planning practice guidance;
- the introduction of the 10% Biodiversity Net Gain requirement as proposed under the Environment Act 2021 for major development from January 2024, and smaller sites from April 2024⁵; and
- the Government's assertions that:
 - (i) meeting housing need is never a clear reason to cause unacceptable harm to protected landscapes⁶; and
 - (ii) our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) will be protected as the places, views and landscapes we cherish most and passed on to the next generation⁷; and
 - (iii) protecting and improving the environment and tackling climate change are central considerations in planning.

1.5 Planning policies and decision-taking can support this in 6 main ways:

- protecting important natural, landscape and heritage assets, whilst also incorporating nature, landscape and public space into development and its surroundings;
- supporting habitat creation and nature recovery in ways which benefit nature and people. For instance, nature-based solutions can store carbon, assist adaptation (e.g. by reducing water run-off rates) and protect and enhance ecology;
- promoting locational and design decisions that reduce exposure to pollution and hazards and respond to changing climate conditions, for example the risk of overheating, surface-water flooding, and water scarcity;
- enabling renewable and low carbon energy production and distribution, at both a commercial and domestic scale; and policies for regulating carbon-generating extraction and energy generation;
- promoting development locations, and designs and layouts, that contribute to healthier lifestyles, energy and resource efficiency consumption, for example by reducing the need to travel, increasing public transport connectivity and accessibility and promote active travel i.e. walking, wheeling and cycling; and

⁴ The 'Landscapes Review Final Report' sets out 27 proposals relating to our protected landscapes, including stronger purposes in law for our 'national landscapes' (proposal 23) and for AONBs to be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources (proposal 24).

⁵ <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/topics/environment/biodiversity-net-gain-local-authorities>

⁶ UK Government response to the local housing need proposals in 'Changes to the current planning system' – updated 16 December 2020

⁷ Statement by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when launching the consultation on the Planning White Paper in August 2020

- bringing together the spatial strategy for a place in a way which addresses these in a holistic way and reflects its unique characteristics, whilst also providing a clear framework for development and regeneration⁸.

1.6 Planning policies and guidance help address this issue by making clear that:

- great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, which, together with National Parks, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues;
- the scale and extent of development in AONBs should be limited;
- planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest;
- policies for protecting AONBs may mean that it is not possible to meet objectively assessed needs for housing and other development in full⁹;
- AONBs are unlikely to be suitable areas for accommodating unmet needs arising from adjoining, non-designated areas¹⁰; and that
- The need to protect and conserve heritage assets and their setting; heritage landscapes and associated heritage features etc.

2.0 PURPOSE OF THE POSITION STATEMENT

2.1 The primary purpose of position statements are to expand on relevant policies in the current Wye Valley AONB Management Plan. They provide further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to specific strategic objectives, policies and associated issues. They do not create new policies.

2.2 Position statements also intend to help plan-making bodies and other relevant stakeholders:

- have regard to – and positively contribute to – the purpose of AONB designation;
- to ensure that the purpose of AONB designation is not compromised by development and that the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB is conserved and enhanced;
- to fulfil the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework, Planning Policy Wales, Planning Practice Guidance (or, where relevant, National Policy Statements), and Technical Advice Notes, with regards to AONBs and the factors that contribute to their natural beauty;
- to take account of relevant case law;
- to have regard to and be consistent with the AONB Management Plan and guidance published by the Partnership;
- to emulate best practice in the Wye Valley AONB and other protected landscapes;

⁸ 22 December 2022 Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy consultation statement.

⁹ Planning Practice Guidance – Natural Environment: paragraph 41

¹⁰ Planning Practice Guidance – Natural Environment: paragraph 41

- to develop a consistent and coordinated approach to relevant issues across the whole of the Wye Valley AONB and its setting¹¹.

2.3 With regards to good practice, this Position Statement has been modelled significantly on the approaches adopted by several nationally designated Protected Landscapes, including the Cotswold National Landscape, the South Downs Local Plan, West Oxfordshire Local Plans, Arnside & Silverdale AONB Development Plan, and the New Forest National Park Local Plan. Appendix 1 of this position statement provides case studies of both these latter documents.

3.0 STATUS OF THE POSITION STATEMENT

3.1 Position statements are supplementary – and subsidiary – to the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan. For development proposals to be compatible with the AONB Management Plan, they should be compatible with the position statements.

3.2 The AONB Management Plan is a material consideration in planning decisions. However, it must be acknowledged that, in a plan-led planning system, it is the policies of the relevant adopted local authority development plan that have the greatest weight. As such, within this planning system, the hierarchy is as follows¹²:

The adopted development plan comprises the Local Planning Authority Development Plan, and any 'made' Neighbourhood Development Plan (in England only, when adopted), and Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (Wales only), in which decision-making is taken in accordance with, unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.
Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, like the National Planning Policy Framework or Technical Advice Notes, are all material planning considerations but do not form part of the adopted development plan.
Wye Valley AONB Position Statements and guidance documents supplement the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan.

4.0 ACHIEVING THE RIGHT BALANCE

4.1 The Wye Valley AONB Partnership recognises that there are a range of considerations that must be weighted in the planning balance, including the climate

¹¹ Three local authority areas overlap with the Wye Valley AONB, with each with local authority having its own development plan.

¹² In England, Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states: "If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise." The National Planning Policy Framework is itself a significant material consideration, although it is acknowledged regarding the presumption in favour of sustainable development under Paragraph 11, particularly in relation to plan-making and decision-making.

In Wales, national planning guidance prepared by the Welsh Government, is taken into account as a material planning consideration.

and ecological emergencies (see below), and meeting housing needs and economic growth.

4.2 However, 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 purpose of AONB designation.

4.3 It should be noted that, for ‘major development’ (in the context of paragraph 177 of the NPPF and 6.3.10 of PPW), it is not simply a case of weighing all material considerations in a balance¹³.

4.4 We hope this position statement will help to ensure that the right balance is achieved across the whole of the Wye Valley AONB.

5.0 CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES

5.1 Three local planning authorities are within the Wye Valley AONB – Herefordshire Council, Monmouthshire County Council and Forest of Dean District Council¹⁴, and have declared climate and/or ecological emergencies. Gloucestershire County Council is also within the Wye Valley AONB¹⁵.

5.2 In principle, the Partnership supports measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change and to halt and reverse declines in biodiversity. These aspirations are reflected in the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, and associated projects undertaken on behalf of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership.

5.3 It should be possible to deliver many of these measures in a way that is compatible with the purpose of AONB designation. However, where relevant development proposals or allocations come forward that have the potential to have a significant adverse impact on the purpose of AONB designation, they should be deemed to be major development, in the context of paragraph 177 of the NPPF, and 6.3.10 of PPW.

5.4 The priority given to these issues, through the declaration of the climate and ecological emergencies, would potentially make it easier to demonstrate ‘exceptional need’. However, as outlined below, exceptional need does not necessarily equate to exceptional circumstances. For example, there may be other, more suitable ways of

¹³ R (Mevagissey Parish Council) v Cornwall Council [2013] EHCW 3684 (Admin), paragraph 51: ‘The planning committee are required, not simply to weigh all material considerations in a balance, but to refuse an application unless they are satisfied that...’

¹⁴ Gloucestershire is a two-tier county, with the County Council (which is also within the Wye Valley AONB) responsible for planning applications related to mineral working and associated development, and the disposal of waste, whereas other planning applications are determined by Forest of Dean District Council.

¹⁵ Gloucestershire is a two-tier county, with the County Council responsible for planning applications related to mineral working and associated development, and the disposal of waste, whereas other planning applications are determined by Forest of Dean District Council.

mitigating the impacts of climate change or less harmful locations for the proposed development.

6.0 LANDSCAPE-LED APPROACH – CONTEXT

6.1 At its most basic level, a landscape-led approach to development is one in which development within the Wye Valley AONB and its setting¹⁶ is compatible with and, ideally, makes a positive contribution to, the statutory purpose of AONB designation, which is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. A landscape-led approach¹⁷, at this level, is promoted as part of the five main themes within the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 and numerous strategic objectives throughout the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026.

6.2 The first step in this process is to have regard to the purpose of AONB designation. ‘Relevant authorities’, including local authorities, have a statutory duty to have regard to the purpose of AONB designation in relation to any decisions or activities that may impact on an AONB¹⁸. Given that relevant authorities must have regard to the purpose of AONB designation in decision-making, it would make sense for those who are putting forward development proposals to be aware of and informed by this.

6.3 This ‘duty of regard’ applies from initial thinking through to more detailed planning and implementation, with the expectation that adverse impacts will be avoided, and mitigated where possible¹⁹. The duty of regard is addressed in the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026, as part of Theme 5. This clarifies that the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee have endorsed the Management Plan and relevant local authorities have formally adopted it; “*All relevant Local Development Plans now recognise the need for development proposals to be informed by [the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan]*”.

6.4 Full engagement with the AONB Partnership will enable public bodies to demonstrate that they are delivering part of their ‘duty of regard for the AONB’ and are

¹⁶ The setting of the Wye Valley AONB is defined in Section 4.5 of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026.

¹⁷ The ‘iterative’ approach to development and design is not a new concept - the benefits have been understood for many years, and the process is integral to many regulated areas such as EIA. What the landscape-led part of the approach helps to ensure is that the ‘right type of development’ is built ‘in the right place’, and that meaningful economic, social and environmental benefits are delivered. Guidance for carrying out landscape and visual assessments is contained in the Landscape Institute and IEMA’s publication Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (currently 3rd edition, commonly referred to as ‘GLVIA3’). GLVIA3 explains that the iterative process ‘has great strength because it links the analysis of environmental issues with steps to improve the siting, layout and design of a particular scheme... This approach can result in more successful and cost-effective developments and can reduce the time required to complete the assessment. Such an iterative approach is appropriate to any form of new development of whatever scale or type and applies equally to informal ‘appraisal’ of projects falling outside the EIA requirements’.

¹⁸ Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act - on Wednesday 13th September 2023, the Defra Secretary of State tabled a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) setting out a package of measures to support nature recovery in Protected Landscapes. The package includes a commitment to new legislation through an amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill at Third Reading which will enhance National Park and AONB Management Plans by placing a stronger requirement on partners to contribute to their delivery.

¹⁹ Natural England (2010) England’s statutory designated landscapes: a practical guide to your duty of regard. It is worth noting that fulfilling the duty of regard does not necessarily mean that decisions or activities will be compatible with the purpose of AONB designation. In Wales particularly, but not exclusively, proposals will also need to deliver benefits under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (WFG) seven goals.

in line with the WFG (Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015) (Wales only) legislation, as they will be working with the long term perspective; with approaches that take an integrated approach; planning to take action now in order to prevent problems occurring or getting worse in future; involving all parts of the community; and collaborating with other organisations in order to achieve these wider benefits.

6.5 However, even if relevant authorities fulfil the duty of regard, there is still a risk that the resulting decisions and actions will not be compatible with the purpose of AONB designation. Therefore, the guidance and recommendations are also intended to help stakeholders progress from this 'landscape-considered' approach to a 'landscape-led approach', in which development is designed, located and implemented in a way that positively contributes to the purpose of AONB designation.

6.6 Taking a landscape-led approach can be particularly important for major development²⁰, as this scale of development has the greatest potential to adversely affect the AONB designation. However, one of the biggest threats identified to the Wye Valley AONB comes also from the cumulative impact of numbers of small developments and even from the cumulative impact of minor building works that do not require an application for planning permission but which can proceed as 'permitted development'. Every change of appearance or use of property in the AONB has the potential to have either a positive or negative effect. For example, the replacement of a locally distinctive property boundary with ubiquitous close board fencing may not have a big impact in itself, but a number of such actions will erode local character over time.

6.7 In principle, the landscape-led approach is applicable to all development in the Wye Valley AONB and its setting, albeit to a degree that is proportionate to the nature, scale, setting and potential impact of the proposed development. However, the cumulative impact of even small-scale change and development should be considered. What the landscape-led part of the approach helps to ensure is that the 'right type of development' is built 'in the right place' and that meaningful economic, social and environmental benefits are delivered²¹.

²⁰ Major development, in this context, primarily relates to the definition of major development in footnote 60 of the NPPF (i.e. 'For the purposes of paragraphs 176 and 177, whether a proposal is 'major development' is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined") However, that status is only clarified once a planning application has been submitted and the case officer has assessed the application. That is too late a point in the process to apply the landscape-led approach outlined in this position statement. Therefore, we recommend that the landscape-led approach for major development should be applied to major development as defined in Article 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

In the case of Wales, we refer to Section 6.3.10 of Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (2021).

²¹ [The 'iterative' approach to development and design is not a new concept - the benefits have been understood for many years, and the process is integral to many regulated areas such as EIA. What the landscape-led part of the approach helps to ensure is that the 'right type of development' is built 'in the right place', and that meaningful economic, social and environmental benefits are delivered. Guidance for carrying out landscape and visual assessments is contained in the Landscape Institute and IEMA's publication Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment \(currently 3rd edition, commonly referred to as 'GLVIA3'\). GLVIA3 explains that the iterative process 'has great strength because it links the analysis of environmental issues with steps to improve the siting, layout and design of a particular scheme... This approach can result in more successful and cost-effective developments and can reduce the time required to](#)

6.8 Consideration of landscape character and visual effects and effects are obviously a key consideration when taking a landscape-led approach. However, a landscape-led approach should also consider all factors that contribute to the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB.

6.9 A number of documents are relevant to such considerations. These include the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan.

6.10 The role of heritage within the AONB is also important, particularly the need to protect, conserve and enhance heritage assets, historic landscapes and features²².

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS – LANDSCAPE-LED APPROACH

7.1 Landscape and Visual Sensitivity and Capacity

7.1.1 At plan-making stage (Local Plan and Neighbourhood Development Plan²³):

- A Landscape and Visual Sensitivity and Capacity study²⁴, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment²⁵ or Landscape and Visual Appraisal, should be undertaken for all relevant sites (or land cover parcels) in the Wye Valley AONB and its setting where the potential for development is being assessed as part of the development plan process²⁶.
- With regards to LSCAs and LVIAs, these studies should assess the sensitivity of these sites to types and scales of development being considered. The cumulative impact of development of the sites should also be assessed.
- Where the 'land cover parcels' that are used in the assessment are refined to smaller scale potential allocation sites, a further, site-specific iteration of the Landscape and Visual Sensitivity and Capacity Study should be undertaken.
- In order to maintain some landscape capacity for future development, not all sites that are considered to have landscape capacity for development should be allocated in one iteration of the development plan.

[complete the assessment. Such an iterative approach is appropriate to any form of new development of whatever scale or type and applies equally to informal 'appraisal' of projects falling outside the EIA requirements'.](#)

22 As outlined within Section 16 of the NPPF and Technical Advice Note (TAN) 24: The Historic Environment

²³ For Neighbourhood Development Plans, it may be possible to utilise relevant information from landscape and visual sensitivity and capacity assessments that have been undertaken as part of the Local Plan evidence base.

²⁴ Relevant guidance is provided in Natural England's 'An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management', although capacity is not dealt with, as there is currently no published guidance for that. In Wales, see Guidance Note 17 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment guidance for Wales, prepared by NRW.

²⁵ In reference to LVIAs, such assessments should be undertaken by a suitably qualified professional, in accordance with the 3rd Edition Guidelines on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3).

²⁶ For example, Landscape and Visual Sensitivity and Capacity Studies should be undertaken as part of the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Process and when identifying suitable areas for renewable energy. Such studies would then form part of the development plan evidence base, available on the relevant local authority website.

7.1.2 At the development management stage:

- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments should be undertaken for all development that requires an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)²⁷.
- Landscape and Visual Appraisals should be undertaken for other development in the Wye Valley AONB and its setting that have the potential to cause adverse landscape and visual effects²⁸. The nature of such appraisals should be proportionate to the likely potential for adverse effects²⁹.
- All LVIA and LVAs should be consistent with the guidance published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment (in relation to development in England), as well as Guidance Note 17 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment guidance for Wales, prepared by NRW (in relation to development in Wales only).
- The cumulative impact of the development proposals, in the context of previous development and small-scale changes, on the AONB should be assessed.
- A landscape-led vision, overarching design principles, scheme objectives and sub-objectives should be developed and agreed for major development proposals at an early stage in the process and applied in the design, budgeting, assessment and implementation of the scheme.

7.1.3 At both stages:

- The Wye Valley AONB should be accorded the highest 'value' possible in Landscape and Visual Sensitivity and Capacity Studies/Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment/Landscape and Visual Assessments, with consideration being given to the degree to which the criteria and factors used to support the case for AONB designation are represented in the specific study area³⁰.
- The area of landscape that needs to be covered in assessing landscape effects should include the site itself and the full extent of the wider landscape around it which the proposed development may influence in a significant manner³¹.

²⁷ LVIA's should comply with the requirements of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations and with the Landscape Institute's 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' 3rd Edition (GLVIA3 - 2013).

²⁸ The format of such an appraisal may not need to satisfy the formal requirements of an EIA but should, as a minimum set out any effects on the landscape and views, and proposed mitigation, in a rational way so that it can be fully considered through the planning process.
²⁹ It is acknowledged that one may not know adverse impacts until the assessment has been carried out.

³⁰ The Landscape Institute's 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' identify that 'landscapes that are nationally designated [including AONBs] will be accorded the highest value in the assessment' (paragraph 5.47), albeit that some consideration should be given to the 'degree the criteria and factors used to support the case for designation are represented in the specific study area' (paragraph 5.23). So, for example, if the value of the landscape receptor is classed as 'very high' (because of the AONB designation) and the susceptibility to the proposed change is classed as 'medium', then the overall sensitivity of the landscape receptor would be 'high'. The (very) high 'value' of the AONB designation means that the adverse effects of a development proposal within an AONB are likely to be more significant than an equivalent development proposal, in an equivalent landscape character area, outside the AONB.

³¹ This definition is provided in paragraph 20 of Appeal Decision APP/R3650/W/16/3165974 and re-iterated in paragraph 21 of the High Court decision for Monkhill Ltd v Secretary of State for Housing, Communities And Local Government [2019] EWHC 1993 (Admin)

- Great weight should be given to landscape and scenic beauty, in line with paragraph 176 of the NPPF and 6.3.7 of PPW³².
- The mandatory major development ‘tests’ specified in paragraph 177 of the NPPF and 6.3.10 of PPW should be rigorously applied for all allocations/development proposals that are deemed to be ‘major development’.
- It should be recognised that ‘exceptional need’ does not necessarily equate to ‘exceptional circumstances’.
- The requirement for all landscape assessments - whether undertaken in support of a specific planning application or an allocation at the plan making stage - should be based on evidence on landscape and visual matters. In practice this means judgements are supported by clear reasoning which is linked to evidence.

7.2 Natural Beauty³³

7.2.1 All factors that contribute to the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB should be fully considered and assessed at all stages of the process, including plan-making, and development management. These factors include, but not limited to:

- landscape quality / beauty;
- scenic quality / beauty;
- relative tranquillity (including ‘dark skies’) ;
- relative wildness;
- natural heritage (including ‘biodiversity’);
- cultural heritage (including ‘historic environment’)³⁴;
- the special qualities of the Wye Valley AONB

³² This applies to development within the Wye Valley AONB and to development outside the AONB that has the potential to adversely affect views to or from the AONB.

³³ A An explanation of ‘natural beauty’, the factors that contribute to it and its relationship with ‘landscape’ is provided in the Natural England publication ‘Guidance for assessing landscapes for designations as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England’. When consideration is given to the MH AONB in planning applications and planning decisions, this consideration tends to focus almost exclusively on landscape and visual impacts. However, the statutory duty to have regard to the purpose of AONB designation relates to all of the factors that contribute to the area’s natural beauty, including cultural heritage and natural heritage. As such, these issues should be addressed in the context of their contribution to the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB as well as in their own right, both individually and cumulatively. ‘Effects’ on the landscapes experiential qualities/people’s experiences of the landscape includes factors such as noise, odour, dust and other forms of pollution, and tranquillity, which includes factors such as sense of calm and safety. Further information can be sourced from relevant Landscape Institute Technical Information Notes.

³⁴ As per Section 16 of the NPPF and TAN 24, there is a need to protect and conserve heritage assets and their setting; heritage landscapes and associated heritage features etc and that the historic environment is part of the valuable landscape which needs protecting. The themes and approaches of Historic England Good Practice Advice Note 3: The setting of heritage assets may assist further.

7.2.2 These factors should be assessed:

- individually (i.e. in their own right, in the context of national planning policy and relevant best practice guidance);
- collectively (i.e. in terms of their contribution to the AONB designation); and
- cumulatively (i.e. in terms of the increasing level of significance associated with the presence of – or potential impacts on - multiple factors).

7.2.3 Development proposals should (be required to) make a positive contribution to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB, over and above the baseline condition (i.e. delivering a net-benefit for natural beauty)³⁵.

7.2.4 Measures to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB (to deliver a net-benefit for natural beauty) should be integrated into the planning, design, implementation and management of a proposed development from the development's inception.

7.3 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)³⁶

7.3.1 Development in the Wye Valley AONB that is listed in Schedule 1³⁷ of the EIA regulations should be classed as major development (see 'Major Development' above), as should Schedule 2³⁸ development that is deemed to require an EIA.

7.3.2 Screening for development listed in Schedule 2 of the EIA regulations should be rigorously applied. Given that the Wye Valley AONB should be considered a 'sensitive area', this should apply even for Schedule 2 development that is below the 'applicable thresholds and criteria'.

7.3.3 The process for screening of Schedule 2 development should be closely aligned with the process for screening major development.

7.3.4 Schedule 2 developments that are deemed to constitute 'major development', in

³⁵ The Landscape Institute's 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' (paragraph 4.35) explains that 'enhancement', in the context of individual development proposals, means improving 'the proposed development site and its wider setting, over and above its baseline condition' (N.B. Underlining added for emphasis). Some mitigating measures cannot be double counted as enhancement, such as planting to screen views.

³⁶ Appendix 4 provides a flowchart of how natural beauty, major development, EIA regulations, national planning policy and the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan should be addressed in relation to development proposals in the Wye Valley AONB and its setting.

³⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/571/schedule/1/made>

³⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/571/schedule/2/made>

the context of paragraph 177 of the NPPF and Paragraph 6.3.10 of PPW, are likely to merit an EIA.

8.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

This Position Statement is supported by three appendices (as a separate document), which provide:

- Case studies of good practice with regards to taking a landscape-led approach (Appendix 1).
- A flowchart of how natural beauty, major development, EIA, national planning policy, the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan and Partnership guidance should be addressed in development proposals and decision making (Appendix 2).
- Available Evidence Base Provided By Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for Wales only (Appendix 3).



WYE VALLEY AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE POSITION STATEMENT ON LANDSCAPE-LED DEVELOPMENT - APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. LANDSCAPE-LED CASE STUDIES

This appendix provides three case studies of where a landscape-led approach has been developed in protected landscapes:

1. South Downs Local Plan
2. Arnside & Silverdale AONB Development Plan Document
3. A417 'Missing Link' road scheme (Cotswolds National Landscape):
Landscape-led vision, design principles, objectives and sub-objectives

LANDSCAPE-LED CASE STUDY 1: SOUTH DOWNS LOCAL PLAN¹

The South Downs Local Plan is explicitly underpinned by a landscape-led approach. Key extracts from the Local Plan that articulate this landscape-led approach, are outlined below.

- **Foreword:** [The Local Plan] looks different from most other local plans, because at its heart is the requirement to conserve and enhance the nationally important landscapes of the South Downs.
- **Key Messages:**
 - This is a landscape led Local Plan ...looking at the South Downs as a whole with National Park purposes and our duty to the fore.
 - Allocations and policies are ... landscape capacity led, not target driven. This complies with the National Planning Policy Framework.
 - We have searched thoroughly and rigorously for suitable development sites; it is just that in carrying out this work landscape conservation takes the primary role.
 - We are ... determined to ensure the quality of new build reflects the landscape within which it sits and is of a standard befitting a National Park as an exemplar of rural planning.
- **Paragraph 1.16 (How have the Local Plan policies been prepared):** All the Local Plan policies have been formulated putting landscape first and then peoples' interaction with it. This is in line with the purposes of national parks ... The Local Plan and its policies require development proposed to conserve and enhance various aspects of natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage.

¹ South Downs National Park Authority (2019) *South Downs Local Plan 2014-2033*.

- **Paragraph 5.22 (A Landscape-Led Approach):** Development should enhance, respect and reinforce the landscape through a landscape-led design approach.
- **Paragraph 7.18 (Housing):** Provision of housing to meet local needs is crucial to ensure the sustainability and vitality of communities within the national Park ... However, the provision of housing should not be at the expense of a nationally protected landscape. The NPPF cites national parks as areas where development should be restricted and objectively assessed need not met.
- **Paragraph 7.121 (Employment):** A Local Plan objective ... is to protect and provide for local businesses that are broadly compatible with and relate to the landscapes and special qualities of the National Park.
- **Paragraph 7.215 (Infrastructure):** All infrastructure development proposals should reflect the nationally protected landscapes, be appropriately designed and consider carefully the impact upon the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.
- **Paragraphs 7.270 (Climate Change):** The use of renewable energy rather than fossil fuels will help to reduce carbon emissions and this reduce climate change ... However, the landscape character of the National Park is a finite and precious resource that the National Park is charged with conserving and enhancing. Development of renewable energy, therefore needs to be suitably constrained so as not to compromise the special qualities.
- **Paragraph 8.5 (Need for the Development):** There is a need for development to take place to meet growth needs, as far as it is compatible with the National Park purposes and the overarching ecosystem services led approach.

LANDSCAPE-LED CASE STUDY 2: ARNSIDE & SILVERDALE AONB DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT²

The Arnside & Silverdale AONB Development Plan Document (DPD) is the first DPD for an AONB in the country. Like the South Downs Local Plan, it sets out a landscape-led approach to development in the protected landscape. As stated in the DPD itself, *'it is a pioneering and innovative approach and has been followed closely by AONB Partnerships up and down the country as an example of how an AONB Partnership, councils and communities can work together to produce the best outcomes for an AONB'* (paragraph 1.2.6).

- **Foreword:** The AONB DPD complements the Management Plan for the AONB, for which the underlying principle is to work collaboratively to help conserve and enhance the landscape of the area. The AONB DPD places the landscape at the heart of shaping development over the next 15 years.
- **Paragraph 2.1.2 (Vision):** Within the Arnside & Silverdale AONB, housing, employment, services, infrastructure and other development is managed to

² South Lakeland District Council and Lancaster City Council (2019) *Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Development Plan Document (DPD) – Adopted Version, 28 March 2019*. ([Link](#)).

contribute towards meeting the needs of those who live in, work in and visit the area in a way that:

- conserves and enhances the landscape, the natural beauty, and the Special Qualities of the AONB; and
 - creates vibrant, diverse and sustainable communities with a strong sense of place; and
 - maintains a thriving local economy.
- **Policy AS01 (Development Strategy):** A landscape capacity-led approach to development will be taken in the AONB ... All development in the ... AONB should be sustainable, consistent with the primary purpose of AONB designation and support the Special Qualities of the AONB as set out in the AONB Management Plan.
 - **Paragraph 3.1.2:** The primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the landscape and natural beauty of the area. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the Development Strategy identifies a landscape-capacity led and criteria-based approach to development, consistent with this primary purpose and the AONB's Special Qualities. A strategy that did not put the conservation and enhancement of the landscape central to the approach to development would compromise the primary purpose and undermine the national designation and the value of the AONB in the national interest. Where a development proposal would create conflict between the primary purpose of the AONB and other uses of the AONB, greater weight will be attached to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the landscape and natural beauty of the AONB.
 - **Paragraph 3.1.4:** In the AONB, the priority should be to meet identified affordable and other local housing needs within the capacity of the landscape.
 - **Paragraph 3.1.7:** The Development Strategy ensures that only development that can be accommodated without harm to the AONB's primary purpose will be permitted, whilst maintaining a positive approach, recognising that appropriately located and designed development can contribute to conserving and enhancing the landscape and settlement character, including where opportunities for regeneration and redevelopment can be delivered.
 - **Policy AS02 (Landscape):** Within the Arnside & Silverdale AONB, development proposals will be required to demonstrate how they conserve and enhance the landscape and natural beauty of the area. Proposals will not be permitted where they would have an adverse effect upon the landscape character or visual amenity of the AONB.
 - **Paragraph 3.1.22:** All development within the AONB should conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area and must reflect the capacity of the landscape to accommodate it without harm to key features and characteristics and without compromise to the statutory purpose.

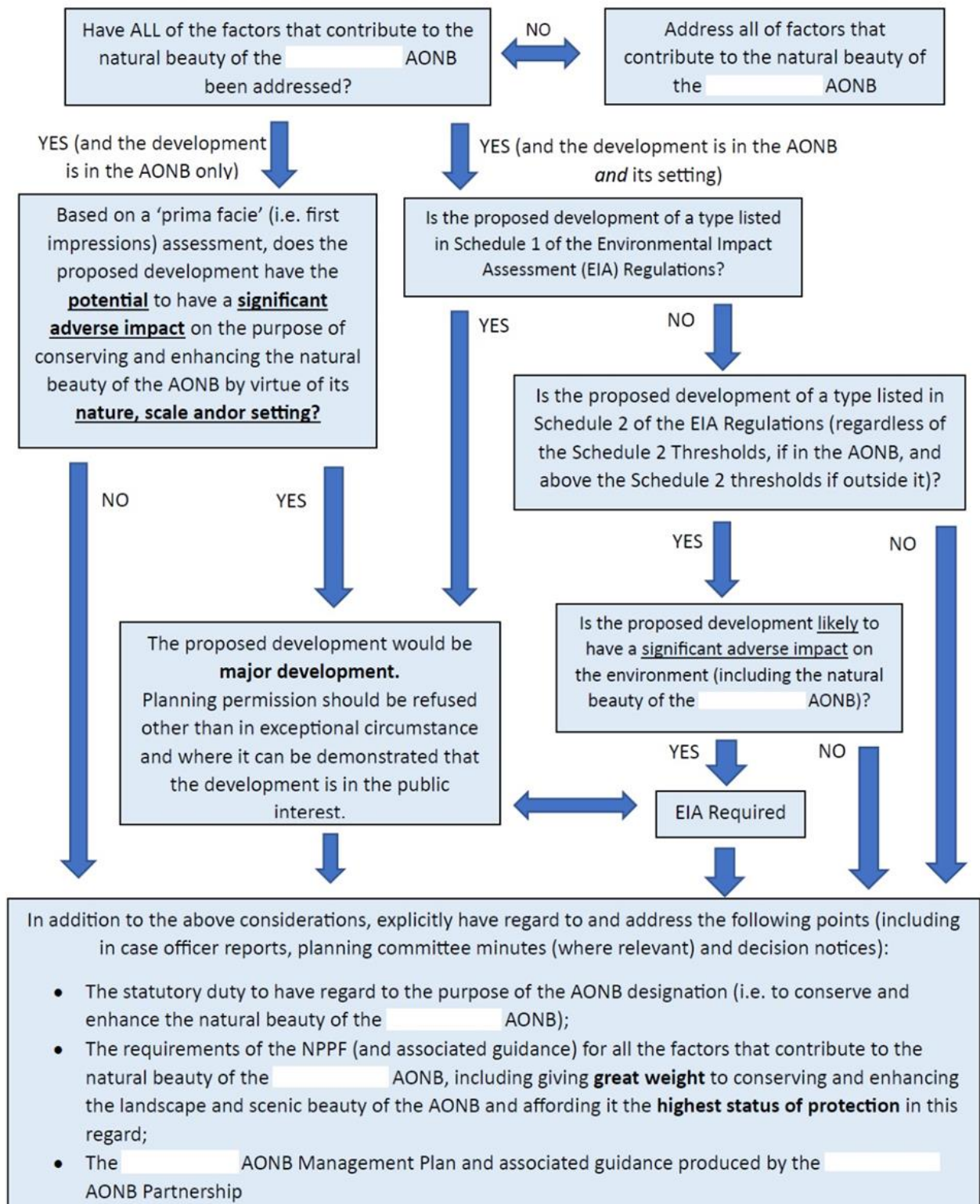
LANDSCAPE-LED CASE STUDY 3: A417 MISSING LINK ROAD SCHEME

The A417 Missing Link road scheme is the most significant infrastructure scheme that is currently being proposed in the Cotswolds National Landscape. In recognition of its

location in this sensitive and nationally important landscape, Highways England, the Cotswolds Conservation Board and other stakeholders developed and agreed a landscape-led vision, design principles and objectives for the scheme in 2017. The vision and design principles, together with the objectives and sub-objectives that relate specifically to landscape and / or natural beauty, are outlined below.

- **Vision:** A landscape-led highways improvement scheme that will deliver a safe and resilient free-flowing road whilst conserving and enhancing the special character of the Cotswolds AONB; reconnecting landscape and ecology; bringing about landscape, wildlife and heritage benefits, including enhanced visitors' enjoyment of the area; improving local communities' quality of life; and contributing to the health of the economy and local businesses.
- **Design Principles:**
 - Any solution involving a new road must ensure that the scheme is designed to meet the character of the landscape, not the other way round.
 - Any scheme should bring about substantial benefits for the Cotswolds landscape and environment as well as people's enjoyment of the area.
 - Any scheme must have substantially more benefits than negative impacts for the Cotswolds AONB.
- **Objectives:** Improving the natural environment and heritage; to maximise opportunities for landscape, historic and natural environment enhancement within the Cotswolds AONB and to minimise negative impacts of the scheme on the surrounding environment.
- **Sub-Objectives**
 - The Scheme will have an identity which reflects, conserves and enhances the character of the local landscape.
 - The Scheme will improve landscape and ecological connectivity through landscape and habitat restoration and creation.
 - The horizontal and vertical alignments of the Scheme will pay due regard to the nature of the local landform.
 - The siting and form of structures, cuttings, embankments and landscape mounding will reflect local topography and landform.
 - The design of structures will be of lasting architectural quality.
 - The Scheme will avoid significant interruption to groundwater flows or negative impacts on the aquifer, springs and watercourses.
 - The Scheme will avoid or, where absolutely necessary, minimise the direct loss of National Trust land, other areas owned and managed for conservation, open access land and country parks and at the same time minimise intrusion upon such land.
 - The Scheme will enable enhanced preservation of heritage assets and their settings and adopt designs that reflect and enhance the historic character of the area.
 - The Scheme will minimise road noise by applying sensitive noise mitigation measures where required.
 - The Scheme will minimise light pollution through sensitive structural, junction, and lighting design and sign illumination.

APPENDIX 2. FLOWCHART OF CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE WYE VALLEY AONB AND ITS SETTING³



³ This flowchart has been adapted from the flowchart developed by the Cotswolds Conservation Board.

APPENDIX 3 - PUBLICLY AVAILABLE EVIDENCE BASE PROVIDED BY NATURAL RESOURCES WALES (WALES ONLY)

In relation to development in Wales, Natural Resources Wales have advised the following publicly available evidence base to support applications, which includes:

- LANDMAP. [Natural Resources Wales / LANDMAP - the Welsh landscape baseline](#)
- Evidence on tranquillity and place: [Tranquillity and Place \(arcgis.com\)](#)
- Evidence on dark skies: [Wales Dark Skies \(arcgis.com\)](#)
- Evidence on visible settings of designated landscapes: [Natural Resources Wales / Considering the visible setting when choosing your development site](#)
- Evidence in relation to the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources within the State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales. [Natural Resources Wales / State of Natural Resources Report \(SoNaRR\) for Wales 2020](#)
- [Natural Resources Wales / Area Statements and Designated Landscapes](#)

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AONB MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING 2024 - 2027

Purpose

To note progress with the AONB Memorandum of Understanding between the four local authorities for 2024 – 2027.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. encourage the constituent local authorities to finalise and agree the AONB Memorandum of Understanding for 2024 – 2027
- B. Welcomes the provisional allocations of funding until March 2027 from Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

Key Issues

- 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) have 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 22/23 brought in £21.80 for every £1 of Local Authority contribution.

Reasons

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides a framework for the delivery of duties and obligations in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) arising from Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (as amended) including the operation and management of the AONB Partnership and the AONB Unit. The MoU is intended to give medium term security to the AONB Partnership and sets out a shared vision for, and

commitment to, AONB management by the funding local authority partners. The MoU outlines the functions of the AONB Unit and the expectations on all parties to achieve the shared vision, which includes the understanding that:

- AONB management structures should be strongly supported by partners and relevant authorities.
- the statutory requirement to produce a Management Plan provides an important opportunity to strengthen partnerships and achieve better outcomes.
- security of funding and flexibility of funding for the AONB will deliver better outcomes.
- there should be a “can do” culture which is not risk-averse but where lessons from novel approaches are encouraged and learnt from, in both success and failure.
- monitoring of environmental outcomes is essential and needs to be undertaken to develop a sound, spatially-relevant evidence base.
- opportunities should be taken to maximise the synergies between the outcomes of the Management Plan with the plans of other Parties, and of the wider network of nationally designated Protected Landscapes.

The MoU complements the JAC Agreement, which constitutes the JAC, signed between the four local authorities. The current DEFRA Grant Funding Agreement references the current MoU and it is anticipated that the new DEFRA Grant Funding Agreement will do likewise.

Implications

The anticipated grant funding in both England and Wales has increased over recent years in response to the Reviews of National Parks and AONBs in England and Wales. Future grant funding levels are currently under review by both DEFRA and Welsh Government in preparation for new allocations and agreements in 2025. Meanwhile Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have offered provisional Strategic Allocated Funding until March 2027 of £49,000 per annum at 75% towards AONB projects that deliver the AONB Management Plan and Well-being Objectives in the NRW Corporate Plan to 2030.

The amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill increase the responsibility of relevant authorities in England, who “must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty” of the AONB. The Secretary of State may also make provision to require relevant authorities in England “to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review” of an AONB Management Plan. Relevant authorities in Wales retain the ‘duty of regard’ to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty and the requirement to produce an AONB Management Plan, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

The Wye Valley AONB Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is the framework to help the local authorities deliver their duties and obligations arising from legislation and to ensure medium term security and commitment to the AONB Partnership. The contributions from the local authorities are used to make up the 25% match-funding for core AONB initiatives from DEFRA and Welsh Government.

The AONB Unit operational turnover in 2022/23 was £1,107,021 with core costs of £345,465 and the budget for 2023/24 is £1,106,060 with core costs of £368,890. A considerable amount of the AONB Unit’s core and project work (planning / promotion / advice / preparation & delivery of the Management Plan etc.) goes towards supporting each Local Authority in fulfilling its duties and responsibilities to the AONB. Through project delivery the AONB Unit also supports the Local Authorities’ Statutory Duty for biodiversity, under the Environment Act 2021 and Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The following Local Authority partner contributions are requested for each year in the 2024-27 MoU. They are based on an established historical formula aligned with the land area in the AONB. The MoU states that the local authorities retain the discretion to increase contributions, if or when appropriate. However the request is to carry forward the same contributions at a flat rate mirroring successive recent years.

	Annual contribution	
Funding Partner	2021-24	2024-27
Herefordshire Council	£23,860	£23,860
Monmouthshire County Council	£15,716	£15,716
Forest of Dean District Council	£5,826	£5,826
Gloucestershire County Council	£3,600	£3,600
Total LA contributions	£49,002	£49,002

Beyond the AONB Unit core costs, the remainder of the Wye Valley AONB budget is made up from managing externally funded partnership and initiatives projects with a value in excess of £750,000. These include the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme from DEFRA, the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme and Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) from Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Strategic Allocated Funding, Wye Valley Walk Partnership, AONB Youth Rangers etc. These externally funded projects extend the work of the AONB Unit and allow project investment as well as some elements of cost recovery. The leverage of the AONB Partnership in 2022/23 meant that for every £1 of local authority contribution, the AONB Unit brought in nearly £22.

The AONB Unit is constantly reviewing the structure and delivery of services in the AONB alongside income streams. The AONB Steering Group, made up from officers of the 4 local authorities and Natural England, on behalf of DEFRA, and NRW on behalf of Welsh Government, ensures that staff and resources are maximised and operational structures are fit for the future in the face of the budgetary uncertainties.

Background

The local authorities established the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and commissioned the AONB Partnership to operate as a cross-border co-ordinating body, engaging with local communities and other partners to collaboratively develop and deliver both localised projects and AONB wide initiatives. The AONB Unit staff report to the JAC and are employed through the local authorities and work on behalf of the AONB Partnership to carry out the preparation and review of the statutory AONB Management Plan, to advocate its policies and work in partnership to deliver a range of actions defined in the agreed annual Work Programme.

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TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
6th November 2023

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES (FIPL) SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND (SDF) AND HEREFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (HCF) WYE VALLEY AONB FUND

Purpose

To update members on 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).

Recommendation

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

Key Issues

- 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.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)

The Secretary of State reconfirmed, in her announcement in September, that the Government have extended the Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) programme until March 2025. Wye Valley AONB allocations of FiPL for 23/24 and 24/25 are £339,063 in 23/24 and £362,384 in 24/25. This includes an allowance for the employment of the FiPL Officer,

further Advice & Guidance and overhead & administration costs. If these Advice & Admin allocations are not fully required they can be transferred to the FiPL grant budget.

The FiPL Assessment Panel is delegated with deciding on each application over £5,000. Application under £5,000 are determined by the AONB Manager. FiPL applications approved to date in 2023/4 are as follows:

Code	Applicant	Project	year	Grant £
WV003	Wye & Usk Foundation	Farm Natural Capital Assessments	3 of 3	19,125.00
WV012	Wye & Usk Foundation	INNS control	2 of 2	11,569.60
WV013	Brampton Orchard	Restoration planting	2 of 2	2,843.40
WV014	AONB Unit	Noble chafer project	2 of 2	2,655.00
WV016	The Dingle, Checkley	Hedge planting	2 of 2	4,069.21
WV018	Tump Farm	Access and Species rich grassland restoration	2 of 2	5,271.21
WV020	Bicknor Court Farm	Hedge & Tree planting, pond restoration	2 of 2	14,384.70
WV021	LEAF education	Farm education training	2 of 2	13,500.00
WV022	Ballingham Court Farm	Pond restoration	2 of 2	659.24
WV024	Grazing Management Ltd	Conservation grazing animal handling	2 of 2	804.20
WV027	Benhall Farm	Meadow restoration	2 of 2	3,223.26
WV029	Dryslade Farm	Grassland & Access enhancements	2 of 2	4,221.22
WV031	Haynes Farm	Meadow restoration	1 of 1	1,516.52
WV032	Dryslade Farm	Grassland enhancement	1 of 1	975.19
WV033	Caradoc Estate	Hedges. Rotational grazing. Enhancing soils	1 of 1	5,695.08
WV034	Lower Witherstone	Hedges, parkland trees, wood pasture	1 of 1	24,706.78
WV035	Townsend Farm	BOKASHI composting. Aerobic compost-teas	1 of 1	9,279.22
WV036	Fownhope PC	Access enhancement	1 of 1	4,502.82
WV037	Kilforge Farm	Maize undersowing	1 of 1	395.20
WV038	Lower Penalt Farm	Maize undersowing	1 of 1	490.00
WV039	Bearse Farm	Access improvements	1 of 1	1,584.00
WV041	Townsend Farm	Heritage grain milling/pasta making	1 of 1	10,430.79
WV042	Lower Penalt Farm	Orchard planting	1 of 1	14,447.50
WV043	Shepherd's Rough	meadow restoration	1 of 1	2,787.00
WV044	Pasture for Profit in Protected Landscapes	farmer led mentoring, also in Malvern Hills and Shropshire Hills AONBs	1 of 2	16,843.20
WV045	Plantlife Joan's Hill Reserve	Orchard access, planting & management	1 of 1	5,656.48
WV046	Townsend Farm Windmill Restoration	water pump windmill repair	1 of 1	8,833.34
WV047	Bearse Farm Educational Visits	Education facilities & meadow restoration	1 of 1	4,989.84

WV048	Caradoc Estate Whole Farm Water Plan	system design	1 of 1	668.00
WV049	Overbury Farm	Flower-rich margins	1 of 1	2,200.71
WV050	Flanesford	Riverside Winter cover crops	1 of 1	4,847.82
WV051	Wye Organic	Enhanced livestock handling facilities	1 of 1	6,564.75
WV052	WV AONB LEI Facilitation	advice and support for National Grid LEI bid	1 of 1	7,700.00
WV054	HWT Nature Reserves	meadow gateway & ditch repairs	1 of 1	3,778.20
WV055	Severn Treescapes Orchards	Training events & workshops through the seasons	1 of 2	2,801.28
		Grant sub-total		224,019.76
		Advice/Guidance /Admin budget		79,656
		Total eligible expenditure		303,675.76
		<i>Total FiPL allocation</i>		<i>339,063.00</i>
		Currently remaining		35,387.24

DEFRA have confirmed that the FiPL programme will not be extended beyond March 2025, when the full Environmental Land Management (ELM) agri-environment scheme becomes active. However, the Government does recognise the positive feedback and outcomes delivered by the FiPL programme.

For further advice or to discuss any project ideas, please contact Anna Stankiewicz, FiPL Officer on farming@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk.

Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

Welsh Government have allocated £100,000 of SDF each year for 2023/24 and 2024/25. This enables the SDF to continue to provide an exceptional opportunity for organisations, individuals and community groups to apply for grant aid for innovative, sustainable, environmental projects, which benefit the Welsh part of the AONB.

The SDF Assessment Panel is delegated with deciding on each application over £3,000. Application under £3,000 are determined by the AONB Manager. The list of approved grants during 202/24, totalling £82,961 is in the table below.

Code	Applicant	Project Title	years		Total Project value	SDF Grant
			This	Total		
WV00 YR23W	Wye Valley AONB Unit	Admin 10%	1	1	NA	10,000.00
WV01 YR23W	ACE Monmouth	Climate Festival	1	2	£7,605	£2,885.00
WV02 YR23W	Coed Lleol-Small Woods	Nature-based Wellbeing in the Wye Valley	1	1	£20,000	£14,665.00
WV03 YR23W	Diverse Artists Network	Walk out West	1	2	£6,130	£3,000.00

WV04 YR23W	Wye Coppice CIC	Coppice Training & Community Outreach Programme	1	2	£37,397	£16,860.90
WV05 YR23W	Gwent Wildlife Trust	Restoring The Wern	1	1	£11,961	£8,172.50
WV07 YR23W	Wye Valley Community Council	Tintern Village Hall Retaining Wall	1	1	£12,800	£6,400.00
WV08 YR23W	Wye Valley Community Council	The Pound Wall	1	1	£2,150	£1,125.00
WV09 YR23W	ACE Monmouth	Regen Farming Monitoring project	1	2	£20,000	£4,853.10
WV10 YR23W	Wye Valley River Festival CIC	Ground Beneath Our Feet 2024 Festival	1	2	£230,360	£15,000.00
		TOTALS (to date)			£334,403	£82,961.50
						<i>Remaining from £100,000</i>
						<i>Returned grant</i>
					Remaining grant	£32,038.50

Lucinda James, AONB Community Links Officer, assists applicants with projects and application development for presented to the Assessment Panel. If you are interested in applying please contact Lucinda on community@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk.

Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF)

The Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) was established with a £50,000 Endowment Fund. Project grants are awarded from the interest and any growth or donations above that base Fund. There is currently £10,000 also donated specifically for the Youth Rangers.

The HCF Wye Valley AONB Fund had a balance of £60,972.27 as of the last statement dated 30th September 2023. There are currently insufficient funds to award grants. Consequently opportunities need to be sought to grow the AONB Fund further. When funds allow, the AONB Unit &/or SDF Assessment Panel, as appropriate, reviews and comments on applications to the AONB Fund to advise HCF on grant funding.

Background

For more details on grants and the application process see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/grants/>.

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
6th November 2023

AONB PARTNERSHIP STUDY TOUR AND WINTER SEMINAR

Purpose

To feedback on the success of the AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour and propose the theme for a Winter Seminar of Planning in a National Landscape.

Recommendation

That the JAC:

- A. welcomes the positive feedback on the AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour
- B. endorses a late Winter Seminar on the theme of Planning in a National Landscape

Key Issues

- A total of 37 people attended the annual AONB Partnership Tour on 22nd September.
- There was a good spread of representation from throughout the AONB even though the Tour was focused around 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, 2 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 is greatly appreciated.
- It is proposed that a Winter Seminar is held, probably in February or March, 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.

Reasons

The AONB Partnership Tour continues to be popular and inspiring event, visiting interesting places with expert speakers. The AONB Winter Seminar is a similar opportunity to provide in-depth expert information on specific topics and issues. Both are key tools in the transfer of information to the wider partners and interested parties in the AONB, particularly to local Ward members, key officers and the Town, Parish/ Community Councils.

Implications

Of the 37 attendees on the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour, 7 came from Herefordshire, 14 from Monmouthshire and 8 from Gloucestershire. There were 8 JAC members, 15 Town/Parish/Community Council members, 15 officers, including 6 AONB staff. Feedback from attendees was very positive.

Sites and issues visited, and hosts or speakers were:-

- Tintern Wireworks car park: Tintern Visitor Experience - Matthew Lewis [Environment & Culture Manager MonLife]
- Dôl-Wen One Planet Development: Matt & Freyja [smallholders]
- Old Station Tintern: Decarbonisation and Sustainable Tourism initiatives SLSP funded - Jenny Henshaw [Site Lead, MonLife]
- Llandogo Village Hall: Decarbonisation initiatives Lottery & SLSP funded - Andrew Spencer [Village Hall Committee]
- Pentwyn Farm Reserve: Conservation Grazing - Joe Ryder [Gwent Wildlife Trust]
- Jamie's Farm: Dan Smith [Farm Manager]

As always the contribution of the speakers and hosts was much appreciated.

Earlier in the year the AONB Unit hosted a late-Winter Seminar, on 'Enhancing water catchment through innovative land management'. For this winter, there is the opportunity to focus on Planning issues, with Josh Bailey, AONB Planning Officer now settled in post. The scope of the seminar could include the implications of the changes to AONBs in terms of new powers for 'relevant authorities' (assuming the enactment of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill) and the National Landscapes branding. The event may be of particular interest to Town, Parish and Community Council Councillors as well as members of Local Authority Planning Committees. A suitable date and venue will be arranged as soon as possible.

Background

The annual AONB Partnership Tour is traditionally held on one of the last Fridays in September. Tours were not held in 2020 nor 2021 due the coronavirus restrictions. The 2022 Tour visited a range of sites associated land-use and land management around various AONB projects and initiatives along with regenerative farming and recreation, including variously football, fishing and hostel accommodation in and around Ross-on-Wye, Brampton Abbots, Lydbrook & Welsh Bicknor in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire parts of the AONB

AONB UNIT & PARTNER REPORTS

Purpose

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

FOR INFORMATION

Below are update reports on the following AONB Unit & partner initiatives: -

- a. NAAONB Conference & Wye Valley Field trip
- b. River Wye update & Wye Catchment Partnership & collaborations
 - i) Wyescapes: food, nature, water ELMS Landscape Recovery 2 bid
 - ii) Wye Adapt to Climate Change project
- c. Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project
- d. Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails strategy & consultation
- e. Green Blue Infrastructure – Herefordshire Council Mapping and Strategy

a. NAAONB Conference & Wye Valley Field trip

The annual AONB Conference was held 5th - 7th September at Bath University. The theme of the conference was 'Invested and Investing in Landscape – who, why, how'. Speakers, workshops and field visits took places along with glorious sunshine. The conference explored what it takes in terms of investment of time, energy, and funding to secure the conservation, restoration and enhancement of the nation's finest landscapes. Keynote speakers included Andy Middleton, North Star Transition; Guy Singh-Watson, Riverford Organic Farmers; Tony Juniper, Natural England; Polly Martin, National Trails UK and Julian Glover, National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The Wye Valley was one of the 6 co-hosting AONBs along with the Cotswolds, Cranborne Chase, Mendip Hills, North Wessex Downs, and Quantock Hills.

The AONB Unit hosted a fieldtrip to the lower Wye Valley on 6th September, which explored the investment in the outstanding landscape of the lower Wye Valley, around Chepstow and Tintern, from both a contemporary and historic perspective.

b. River Wye update & Wye Catchment Partnership & collaborations

i) Wyescapes: food, nature, water ELMS Landscape Recovery 2 bid

The Wye Valley AONB Unit worked with Herefordshire Rural Hub and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust on the preparation of a Landscape Recovery 2 bid, submitted by the Rural Hub in mid-September. The bid covered 36 farms along the Wye and Lugg floodplain. The result of the submission and next stages should be heard early in the New Year.

ii) Wye Adapt to Climate Change project

The Wye Valley AONB team are a partner in the 3 year Wye Adapt to Climate Change project, with Herefordshire and Radnorshire Wildlife Trusts. The Herefordshire Wildlife Trust led project

received confirmation of funding from the National Lottery Community Fund over the summer. The project covers the Wye Catchment across Radnorshire, Herefordshire and the Wye Valley AONB. Three Programme Officers will be employed, one based with each project partner, to deliver a suite of farm advice and community enabling work focused on Nature Based Solutions to help mitigate the impact of Climate Change across the Wye Catchment.

Holly Williams has recently started with the AONB team, employed by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and based in the AONB Office, covering the whole AONB. Holly and the other Programme Officers will be working to identify opportunities on farmland and signposting and helping farmers secure funding to deliver Nature Based Solutions. Elements of the SLSP, SDF and FiPL may be applicable to some of these landscape enhancements.

c. Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project

This Lottery funded partnership project between the AONB Unit, Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust was completed in September 2023. The project commenced receiving National Lottery Heritage Funding towards the end of 2021. Work by the project partners has been completed which enhances the condition of 7 SSSIs and 5 additional Nature Reserves in the Lower Wye Valley. Funding has enabled woodland and grassland site management, including through conservation grazing, Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) Control and monitoring & surveying activity to increase understanding. Orchards and woodlands have also been planted. Funding has augmented INNS work through the WISP project and included management of Cherry Laurel in Cleddon Shoots SSSI. Farm Advice was provided by The Environment Partnership on 10 farms, focusing on habitat enhancement and connectivity. Work was carried out on 9 landholdings, creating and restoring hedgerows, woodland and wetland habitats. In total the project injected £268,630 into SSSIs work and connectivity between sites, both capital work and enabling organisations to continue management into the future. Match funding of £12,900 was contributed by the Woodland Trust and landowners delivering capital enhancements.

d. Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails strategy & consultation

The Wye Valley AONB Unit along with Monmouthshire County Council, NRW and other stakeholders are working together to develop an Integrated Recreational Access Strategy and action plan for the Lower Wye Tracks & Trails. A public consultation is about to commence enabling local communities, users, landowners and interest groups can help shape the strategy. A Frequently Asked Questions sheet is appended and further information is available on the AONB website. The strategy & consultation is one of the initiative funded through the Welsh Government Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme.

e. Green Blue Infrastructure – Herefordshire Council Mapping and Strategy

Herefordshire Council's new People, Place & Nature themed Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy (including updated Landscape Character Assessment and Open Space Assessment) is now available on the council's website as part of the Core Strategy evidence base <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/local-plan-1/local-plan-evidence-base/2>. The Natural Environment Team have also worked with LUC (Land Use Consultants) to make this information available alongside a fully searchable and interactive mapping facility. The link to this 'Natural environment map' can be found at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/conservation-1>

Lower Wye Tracks & Trails

Working Together to create an Action Plan for Recreational Access in Monmouthshire's Wye Valley

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who is involved?
2. What area will the strategy cover?
3. Is this a wise use of funding?
4. Why is this voluntary consultation being carried out?
5. What will be included in the scope of the strategy?
6. Why do we need to take a strategic view?
7. Why is this consultation happening at this stage in the process?
8. Who is helping us with the consultation?
9. What happens next?

1. Who is involved in the strategy?

The project is being led by the Wye Valley AONB Unit and is supported by Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales.

2. What area will the Strategy cover?

The Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)¹, being the area that is in Wales and **not** the part that is in England, in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. This is due to the work being funded by Welsh Government through the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places programme. However, the track and trail links into England will be recognised and partners, communities and visitors from across the border are also invited to engage and respond.

3. Is this a wise use of funding? Why don't you spend the money on sorting out one of the routes?

The Welsh Government funding could be used to cherry-pick one track or trail and spend the money on sorting out a part of that - it might cover the cost of a footbridge, a low-key natural drainage scheme and re-surfacing a few metres of trail - but that would only resolve one issue amongst a wide range of issues across the network. So, we are taking a step back, looking at the network as a whole and listening to our local communities, partners and visitors as to what they think are the priorities. Also, crucially, the strategy and action plan will strengthen our case when applying for future large grants from funders such as the Heritage Lottery and others.



Map 1: The project area
(Monmouthshire's Wye Valley AONB)

¹ Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are protected by law because of their special landscape qualities, wildlife, geology and geography, AONBs have more protection than other areas under the planning process. In terms of landscape and scenery, they are equal to National Parks. Going forward AONBs will be known as National Landscapes. For further information visit:

<https://naturalresources.wales/types-of-protected-areas-of-land-and-sea>
<https://landscapesforlife.org.uk>

4. Why is this voluntary consultation being carried out?

A few reasons:

- There is known to be community concern and the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan identified a range of recreational activities, pressures and impacts. The 2022 public consultation for the 'Wye Valley Villages Study' further documented the value the public places on these routes and concerns over maintenance and access for people of all ages and abilities²
- Over the last 4 years some progress has been made to better understand the issues and explore potential solutions for some routes. Also, the 2021 pilot scheme for Tintern's Chapel Hill Road is providing valuable information about low-cost, nature-based solutions to managing run-off³.
- There is some acknowledged user conflict, that may increase if no positive action is taken.

It is therefore essential that the views of the local community and user groups are sought and taken into consideration as the strategy is developed.

5. What will be included within the scope of the Strategy?

The Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB is home to an extensive recreational access network, which includes Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and forestry tracks, unpaved Unclassified County Roads (UCRs), permissive paths and the popular regional trail, the Wye Valley Walk. The strategy will look at current use in order to create a vision for the future.

It will not review claims around historic routes, cover the river (navigation) nor the paved road network.

6. Why do we need to take a strategic view?

There are three aspects to consider, that do not always complement each other:

- Public Access for diverse purposes** - These tracks and trails provide unrivalled public access in and around the AONB. The network provides vital off-main road links between farms, hamlets, villages, towns and other sites and features. It provides exceptional recreation opportunities for a diversity of users, including both local residents and visitors and it is used by a wide range of people including walkers, runners, cyclists, horse riders and motor vehicles.
- A unique landscape** -The Wye Valley AONB is one of the most naturally beautiful and historically rich landscapes in the UK. Both the network and the individual routes themselves are irreplaceable heritage features, including their miles of drystone walls, nearby heritage structures, lines of veteran trees and hedges that form wildlife corridors for rare, protected and declining species.
- A threatened environment** -The future of a number of these historic routes is threatened by high rates of erosion, to a point where:
 - They are funnelling high levels of water runoff from the surrounding ground, leading to further erosion and increasing localised flood risk, with associated socio-economic costs. A threat that is being exacerbated by climate change and the increase in the number and ferocity of storms.
 - They are sometimes difficult to use safely by those who have the legal right to use them.
 - The cost of desired repairs to routes is a challenge, with reduced local authority budgets and many different calls being made on those resources.
 - Treasured landscape and heritage features alongside routes may be lost or pose a risk to health, safety and future access, if not restored or protected.

² <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/the-wye-valley-villages-project>

³ <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/green-infrastructure-improvements>

By taking a strategic view we can consider these different aspects together to bring the greatest benefits.

7. Why is the consultation happening at this stage in the process?

There are many different ways the challenges facing the Wye Valley AONB's tracks and trails could be addressed. Before any decisions are made, and funding sought, the public are being asked to help shape the strategy. We'd like you to tell us what the issues are locally and around the Public Rights of Way and Unclassified County Road network, and how they could potentially be resolved, taking into account the needs of all the different users of the tracks and trails.

8. Who is helping us with the consultation?

An Invitation to Tender was developed by the Wye Valley AONB, working with Herefordshire Council Procurement team, for the development of the Integrated Recreation Access Strategy for the Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB. As a result of that tender process, Tomorrow's Tourism⁴ have been appointed. The Tomorrow's Tourism team, supported by XV Insight⁵ bring experience of tourism, recreation and effective consultation.

9. What happens next?

Once the consultation is completed all the feedback will be reviewed and taken into consideration in the development of the strategy. All responses will be considered, whether submitted online, in writing or in person.

Not everything suggested through the consultation can be accommodated or implemented. It is very likely that compromises will need to be made, particularly where wishes conflict between different user and/or interest groups. Other limiting factors may include legislative requirements and budget limitations.

A strategy, and action plan to deliver that strategy, will be developed and published. The resulting action plan will not include solutions or improvements in England, but views of everyone are welcome and some solutions may be transferrable.

⁴ <https://tomorrowstourism.com>

⁵ <https://xvinsight.com>

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