

# Public Document Pack



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Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023

## Notice of meeting:

### Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Monday, 3rd July, 2023 at 2.00 pm  
The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High  
Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG

## AGENDA

Item No	Item	Pages
1.	Election of Chair.	
2.	Appointment of Vice-Chair.	
3.	Apologies for Absence, Introductions & New Members.	
4.	Declarations of Interest.	
5.	Public Questions.	
6.	To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting dated 6th March 2023.	1 - 8
6.1.	item 4 - Vacant positions.	
7.	River Wye update.	9 - 12
8.	Planning Guidance & AONB Position Statements:	
8.1.	Planning Guidance & AONB Position Statements Report.	13 - 16
8.2.	Housing Position Statement & Appendices.	17 - 44
8.3.	Landscape led development Position Statement & Appendices.	45 - 62
9.	National Association for AONBs & National Landscapes re-branding.	63 - 66
10.	Grants update - FiPL, SDF & HCF AONB Fund.	67 - 70

<b>11.</b>	<b>AONB Partnership Study Tour 2023 - Lower Wye Nature Networks project.</b>	<b>71 - 72</b>
<b>12.</b>	<b>Review of Designated Landscapes in England &amp; Wales.</b>	<b>73 - 76</b>
<b>13.</b>	<b>Partner and AONB Unit progress reports and updates (verbal update).</b>	<b>77 - 90</b>
<b>14.</b>	<b>Date of next meeting: Monday 6th November 2023 at 2.00pm - Forest of Dean District Council Offices.</b>	

**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  
Vacancy

**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  
R. Gething – 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

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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.



## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 6th March, 2023 at 2.00 pm**

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

**Elected Members (with voting powers)**

**Monmouthshire County Council**

County Councillors: S. Garratt and D. Rooke

**Gloucestershire County Council**

County Councillors: G. Morgan and T. Hale

**Herefordshire Council**

Councillor Y. Watson

**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 – Miss R. Edwards

**Co-opted Members (with voting powers)**

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

**Co-opted Members (without voting powers)**

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

River Wye Preservation Trust – Mr. R. Hesketh

Local Tourism Sector – Ms. R. Clay

**Technical Advice Officers:**

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

Wye Valley AONB Planning Officer - Mr. J. Bailey

**Others present:** Ms. E. Whitehouse – Environment Agency  
Ms. M. Getgood – Coleford Town Council

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### **APOLOGIES:**

Councillors: B. Durkin, J. Hardwick and P. Symonds  
Mr. B. Nash, Mr. M. Price, D. Price, Mr. R. Niblett and Mr. M. Quine

### **1. Introductions & New Members**

On behalf of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee, the Chair welcomed Rebecca Clay, Head of Tourism - Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Tourism, to her first meeting.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Yolande Watson declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 8 – Farming in Protected Landscapes Update as she and her partner’s business had received a Farming in Protected Landscapes grant for the year ending 31st March 2023. She left the meeting taking no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

### **3. Public Questions**

None received.

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

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The Forest of Dean District Council does not currently have the facility to hold hybrid meetings from its Council Chamber. The Council will be considering this matter after the local elections in May 2023. Therefore, for the time being, meetings of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee will continue to be held in person in the Council Chamber at the Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.
- A vacancy exists for the Gloucestershire County Voluntary Conservation Sector serving on the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee. The AONB Manager informed the Committee that he was in the process of preparing for recruiting a new member.

### **5. AONB (shared) Planning Officer**

We received a verbal report by the AONB Manager regarding the appointment of a shared AONB Planning Officer. Josh Bailey had been appointed as the Wye Valley



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AONB Unit Planning Officer, shared with Malvern Hills AONB Unit. Josh had been in post for one month and it had been acknowledged that the appointment was already proving to be beneficial to the AONB Unit.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The AONB Manager informed the Joint Advisory Committee that training events were being arranged for local authority planning officers and members later in the year regarding planning issues relating to the Wye Valley AONB and its setting.
- The AONB Manager would inform the local parish and community Councils of the appointment of the AONB Planning Officer.
- The AONB Manager would liaise with the AONB Planning Officer with a view to whether the AONB website could hold details of applications within the AONB that are being looked at by the AONB Planning Officer.

We noted the verbal update.

#### **6. AONB Unit 2023/24 Work Programme**

We received a report regarding the AONB Unit Work Programme 2023/2024.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- During the year it is expected that the AONB Unit will remain with 8.4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts, although a partnership project with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust may enable the secondment of a Farm Advisor to work with the AONB Unit.
- Priorities include the on-going development of the AONB Nature Recovery Plan and Species Action Plans; promotion and delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme (in England); the distribution and administration of grants through the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Herefordshire Community Foundation AONB Fund; the conclusion of the Lower Wye Nature Networks Fund project; the delivery of the second year of projects funded through the 3-year tranche of Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme; including ongoing control of Invasive Non-Native Species, support for Village Halls and enhancements to the Wye Valley Walk; being a co-host for the National AONB Conference and continuing a range of existing activities and projects; while retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.
- The AONB Unit core budget for 2023/4 presented to the AONB Steering Group is £361,000 with additional funding programmes, grants and match funding anticipated to exceed £710,000 levered into the AONB during the year.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

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- In response to a question raised regarding the use of KPI's to monitor scrutiny of the activities and outcomes arising from the work programme, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that the outcomes are identified in the management plan based on NAAONB metrics. However, this information is not systematically reported back to the Joint Advisory Committee. The AONB annual report will be presented to the Joint Advisory Committee at the next meeting with further information on this matter.
- National Gird Landscape Enhancement Initiative - funding had been applied for two years ago but had been unsuccessful.
- The AONB Unit continues to put forward proposals for undergrounding low voltage power lines.
- 13km of powerlines within the AONB have already been undergrounded.
- The Strategic Objectives relate to the AONB Management Plan with implementation delivered through the AONB Business Plan which gradually evolves over a period of time.

We resolved to endorse the AONB Unit Work Programme for 2023/2024.

#### **7. Designated Landscapes Review in England and Wales**

We received a report regarding the Review of Designated Landscapes in England and Wales.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- DEFRA has published Government's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 as the first revision of the 25 Year Environment Plan (2018).
- Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2023 focuses on 10 goals including "Thriving plants and wildlife", "Clean and plentiful water", "Mitigating and adapting to climate change" and "Enhanced beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment".
- Under the 'enhanced beauty' goal the Government will "invest in a new national landscapes partnership for National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and National Trails" and "extend the delivery of our Farming in Protected Landscapes programme".
- The Welsh National Designated Landscapes Partnership, Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW), is hosting a seminar on the role of Designated Landscapes in the nature emergency, on 9th-10th March 2023 in Gower, Swansea.

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- Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) has three new seconded staff taking strategic leads for the AONBs and National Parks. Andrew Blake, Wye Valley AONB Manager, has been appointed vice-chair of TCLW for 2023-25.
- 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.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- It was considered that the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2023 has not delivered appropriate improvements.
- In response to questions raised, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that more is being asked of the AONB Unit. Some additional resources have become available, however, not to the levels of resources and staff as proposed in the Glover Report.
- The rebranding of AONBs as 'National Landscapes' is a concern for many AONBs across the UK due to the removal of 'Natural Beauty' from the title. The AONB Manager will shortly receive a briefing on the proposed re-branding.
- In response to questions raised regarding the cleanliness of the River Wye, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that he sits on various steering groups regarding this matter and it was noted that there has been significant political engagement and activity in recent years with a view to rectifying the problem.
- It is anticipated that it will take up to 10 years for the River Wye to return to a pristine condition.
- County and District Councils located within the AONB are aware of the condition of their rivers and are adding their influence to aid in improvements to river quality.
- Concern was expressed that the wildlife within the AONB will be severely impacted before the river Wye is returned to a pristine condition. Significant improvements are required now to improve the cleanliness of the River Wye.
- The AONB Partnership Seminar will be discussing the enhancement of water catchment through innovative land management. The seminar will be held at Goodrich Village Hall on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023 between 10.00am and 3.00pm. Experts in soil and land management, agroforestry and natural flood management will be presenting.

We resolved:

- (i) to note the report;

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- (ii) that the AONB Manager presents a briefing report to the next meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee regarding an update on the condition of the river Wye.

### **8. Farming in Protected Landscapes update**

We received a report regarding progress of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Each AONB and National Park in England has an allocation from DEFRA to provide grants through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme for farmers and land managers to provide benefits for nature, climate, people, and places.
- The original FiPL programme was for the period 2021/22 to 2023/24. The programme has now been extended for a further year to March 2025.
- The Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer can assist farmers and land managers applying to the programme.
- The Local Assessment Panel meets regularly to determine applications for Farming in Protected Landscapes grants and has approved the full allocation of funds for 2022/23.

We welcomed the extension of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and endorsed the allocations of the Local Assessment Panel.

### **9. Sustainable Development Fund & HCF AONB Fund allocations**

We received a report regarding the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) currently has £54,453 allocated from the £100,000 offered by Welsh Government for 2022/23, with £45,547 remaining.
- At least two more applications are expected to be appraised imminently, with a combined value of about £35,000.
- The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) had previously endorsed the principle of allocating remaining SDF at end of year to specific projects such as the Wye Valley River Festival.
- The National Association for AONBs has commissioned an independent evaluation of the SDF for Welsh Government.

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- Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) hosts the Wye Valley AONB Fund for which the 2022/23 Quarter Three balance was £65,399.70. This included a £10,000 donation to the Endowment Fund from Bad Wolf Productions.
- Applications are welcome for both sets of funding for 2023/24.

We endorsed the allocations of the SDF for 2022/23, including allocation of any remaining funds to the Wye Valley River Festival.

#### 10. National Association for AONBs

We received a report regarding an update in respect of the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The National AONB Conference will be held on 5th - 7th September 2023, with the focus on 'Investing in Landscape'.
- The Conference will be held 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.
- The NAAONB is organising a staff development programme in the AONBs in Wales.

We resolved to:

- (i) welcome the opportunity to co-host the National AONB Conference on 5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and provide a fieldtrip to the Wye Valley AONB;
- (ii) encourage AONB partners to attend the AONB Conference at Bath University;
- (iii) support the AONB staff development programme in Wales.

#### 11. Partner and AONB Unit progress reports and updates

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

- AONB Partnership Seminar - 16th March 2023.
- Cleddon Bog SSSI & NRW Peatland funding.
- AONB Species Action Plans.
- Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project.
- Integrated Recreational Access Strategy - Monmouthshire.

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- Wye Valley Villages signage (Monmouthshire) & Delivery Group.
- Wye Valley River Festival.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Joint Advisory Committee Members were saddened to hear of the death of Jon Beedell, one of the founding Artistic Directors of the Wye Valley River Festival. He will be sorely missed.
- The securing of funding to undertake the proposed works at Cleddon Bog was welcomed.
- Integrated Recreational Access Strategy – This relates to a complex network of public rights of way with a view to accommodating all types of users.
- Newland Parish Council is looking at establishing a green lane whereby motorcyclists have indicated that they would be willing to maintain it. It was noted that similar projects are being looked at on the Welsh side of the border. It was considered that there needs to be a strategic view undertaken of the whole area. Consultants will be contracted to prepare a briefing document to be presented for public consultation before being finalised.

We noted the report.

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

- Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023.
- Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

The meetings will be held in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford and will commence at 2.00pm.

It had been acknowledged that there would be local elections in England in May 2023 for some local authorities. Therefore, the Chair thanked the members of the Committee for their service on the Joint Advisory Committee who will be standing for election in May.

**The meeting ended at 3.54 pm.**

## RIVER WYE UPDATE

### ***Purpose***

To advise members of the latest activities and proposals to improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients and help restore the River Wye.

### ***Recommendations***

That the JAC

- A. Supports a proposed Landscape Recovery bid for the River Wye by the Wye Catchment Partnership
- B. Welcomes the PhD placement with the AONB Unit on 'Water as a contested space - Improving the quality of our rivers'

### ***Key Issues***

- Natural England recently updated the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition assessment for the River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) from '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 the Welsh Government Members in Hereford in late May to discuss actions to improve the state of the River Wye.
- The Wye Catchment Partnership is meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> July 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 5 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.

## **Reasons**

The River Wye Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) was downgraded from 'unfavourable recovering' to 'unfavourable declining' by Natural England in May 2023 due to a decline in certain types of key wildlife: particularly Atlantic salmon, macrophytes and native white-clawed crayfish.

Phosphate originates from various sources, but the main sources in the Wye Catchment, as reported by the Environment Agency, are:

- Legacy phosphates stored in the soils that have built up over the decades
- Diffuse agricultural pollution, principally from livestock manure and nutrients washing into the river during rainfall events, accounting for approximately 72-74% of phosphates entering rivers
- Discharges from regulated sewage treatment works, accounting for approximately 21-23% of phosphates entering rivers
- Storm overflows that account for 1-2% of phosphates entering rivers
- Other sources, such as septic tanks and urban runoff, that account for 3-5% of phosphates entering rivers.

It is widely recognised that coordinated work needs to progress urgently on the restoration of the River Wye and River Lugg to conserve and enhance the catchment's biodiversity, natural beauty and to enable future sustainable development, in the context of the climate and environment emergency and pollution pressures.

DEFRA's Landscape Recovery scheme funds long-term, large-scale, bespoke projects designed to enhance the natural environment and deliver significant environmental benefits.

## **Implications**

Environment Secretary Thérèse Coffey hosted a roundtable meeting of local farmers, councillors, environmental groups, MPs and the Welsh government in Hereford on Tuesday 30 May. Discussions focused on local concerns and ongoing implementation of actions to address the status of the river, particularly in light of its impact on wildlife, farming and development (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/environment-secretary-holds-local-roundtable-to-drive-forward-improvements-in-river-wye>)

The second round of Landscape Recovery has recently been opened by DEFRA with a focus on projects where farmers and landowners come together across at least 500 hectares to target protected sites, wildlife-rich habitats and net zero. The Wye Catchment Partnership will be investigating the opportunity to collaborate on and co-ordinate a Landscape Recovery application for the River Wye. However the application will need to be specifically tailored to the Landscape Recovery criteria. Land in the Welsh part of the Wye Catchment will not be eligible, therefore other initiatives will continue to be developed across the wider Wye Catchment.

The Wye Valley AONB Partnership and other partners are working together to address the causes and impacts of high phosphate levels, through a combination of advice and guidance, regulation and the delivery of projects to reduce phosphate inputs. For example, the AONB



Unit has been collaborating on a Climate Action Fund bid with Herefordshire and Radnorshire Wildlife Trusts, entitled 'Wye Adapt to Climate Change'. If successful the project will help mitigate climate change, improve habitats and biodiversity, increase wildlife connectivity and ultimately help in the creation of nature recovery networks across the Wye Catchment. Meanwhile the AONB Unit continues to work closely with the Wye & Usk Foundation, Farm Herefordshire and Natural England particularly on the advocacy of farm advisors and the promotion and delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

The Environment Agency (EA) are deploying a total of 10 sondes and 4 autosamplers across the Wye Catchment to provide continuous water quality monitoring throughout the summer months. There are currently 4 sondes deployed in the Wye. The EA publishes and updates information and data via the River Wye Water Quality webpages <https://engageenvironmentagency.uk.engagementhq.com/hub-page/river-wye-water-quality-2>. This includes the River Wye Management Catchment Integrated Data Analysis Report (see <https://engageenvironmentagency.uk.engagementhq.com/integrated-data-analysis-reports> ).

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has launched its corporate plan to 2030 'Nature and People Thriving Together', focusing on three objectives: By 2030 in Wales, nature is recovering; communities are resilient to climate change; and pollution is minimised. As public interest in the state of our waters intensifies, it demonstrates how NRW will prioritise its actions to ensure nature and people will be protected from the impacts of pollution by working with partners to clean up our rivers and seas, regulating business robustly and minimising waste.

A wide range of individuals, groups and organisations continue to lobby for and highlight the condition of the River Wye. Such action has helped maintain a high level of political and media coverage nationally, regionally and locally; including the 'Save the Wye' events Riversong@Redbrook on 25<sup>th</sup> June and the 'Wye July' event in Monmouth on 9<sup>th</sup> July.

A PhD student, from the Hillary Rodham Clinton School of Law at Swansea University, will be undertaking a 5 week placement with the Wye Valley AONB Unit from late August. Their thesis is on 'Water as a contested space - Improving the quality of our rivers' which will be supervised by Associate Professor Dr Victoria Jenkins. The PhD student will be treated as an AONB volunteer but they will have a small bursary from the UK Environmental Law Association (UKELA) for expenses to spend time "with an environmental organisation". The placement will not be focused on law but will be an opportunity to gain knowledge and insight of the concerns around river pollution and the institutional responses to this significant issue.

### **Background**

The Wye Valley AONB covers the lower reaches of the Wye, downstream from the confluence with the Lugg. The AONB covers about one fifth of the Wye Catchment and contains about one third of the River Wye in length. The River Wye and its tributaries are an AONB Special Quality as identified in the statutory Wye Valley AONB Management Plan. Most of the phosphates and contributing conditions for the algal blooms originate upstream of the AONB.

The Wye Valley AONB Partnership is committed to doing everything within its powers, purposes and resources to work with all individuals, groups and organisations to improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients and help restore the Wye Catchment, by convening, enabling and delivering on the restoration, conservation and enhancement of the River Wye, which is so central to the Wye Valley AONB.

The UK Environmental Law Association (UKELA) is the leading membership organisation for anyone interested in environmental law.

## PLANNING GUIDANCE AND POSITION STATEMENTS

### **Purpose**

To endorse draft Position Statements for wider public consultation, which intend 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.

To be made aware of upcoming Planning guidance which seeks 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) Discuss, amend (if necessary) and endorse the 'Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting' Position Statement, and its associated Appendices, as a consultation draft;
- b) Discuss, amend (if necessary) and endorse the 'Landscape-led Development' Position Statement, and its associated Appendices, as a consultation draft;
- c) 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 JAC for further consideration and final approval;
- d) Agree a formal review date of both Position Statements to take place every five years unless otherwise amended.

### **For Information**

That the JAC be made aware that guidance and associated Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies intends to be presented at a future JAC meeting.

## **Key Issues**

- 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 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 JAC for further consideration/final sign off.
- It is intended that guidance and associated Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies be presented at a future JAC meeting. The guidance documents 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. The Position Statements provide further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to the specific Management Plan Strategic Objectives and associated issues. They are not creating new policies. Adoption of Position Statements has become increasingly commonplace across Nationally Protected Landscapes, including the Cotswolds AONB and Malvern Hills AONB.

## **Implications**

It is intended that both draft Position Statements be published for wider consultation with relevant stakeholders and interested parties.

The consultation period will be eight-weeks to commence as soon as reasonably possible should both draft Position Statements (and their Appendixes) be endorsed. All local authorities have been made aware of these draft Position Statements prior to this meeting.

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.

In effect, the recommendations should 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 will particularly apply when accommodating unmet needs, affordable housing, local connection, rural housing need surveys, choice based letting systems and second homes. Location & Design are also considered, particularly 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 draft 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 and in relation to Major, 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 guidance and associated Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies intends to be presented at a future JAC meeting. The purpose of the guidance documents intend to promote good practice and to assist anyone who is proposing new

development in the AONB and its setting. Specifically, the guidance will outline how development can make a positive contribution to conserving the AONB landscape and its natural beauty, 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. As such, within the planning system, the hierarchy is as follows:

- Local Planning Authority development plan and Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026.
- Position Statements and Guidance.

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



## WYE VALLEY AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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

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#### 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 it<sup>1</sup>. The statutory purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area<sup>2</sup>.

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. Providing housing that meets the needs of the local communities within the Wye Valley AONB plays an important role in achieving these aspirations.

1.3 However, as outlined in the Wye Valley AONB Position Statement on Landscape-led Development, 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 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 82 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

<sup>2</sup> 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, provision of affordable housing that meets the needs of local communities, including provision of 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 Wye Valley AONB Partnership's Position Statement on Landscape-Led Development. As such, 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 best practice, this Position Statement has been modelled significantly on the approaches adopted by several nationally designated Protected Landscapes, including the Cotswold National Landscape's Housing Position Statement and also the South Downs Local Plan, West Oxfordshire Local Plans, Arnside & Silverdale AONB Development Plan, and the New Forest National Park Local Plan. The Appendix document to this Position Statement provides relevant case studies of these.

## **2.0 PURPOSE OF THE POSITION STATEMENT**

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

2.2 The Wye Valley AONB Partnership's Position Statements are also intended to help local authorities, developers and other relevant stakeholders:

- to have regard to – and positively contribute to - the purpose of the 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 (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;
- 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;
- to develop a consistent and coordinated approach to relevant issues across the whole of the Wye Valley AONB and its setting<sup>3</sup>.

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 and subsidiary to the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan. For development proposals to be compatible with the AONB Management Plan, they should also be compatible with the relevant position statements.

3.2 The AONB Management Plan is a material consideration in planning decision-making. However, we acknowledge 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 of development plans, AONB Management Plan and position statements is as follows:

- Local authority development plan.
- AONB Management Plan.
- Position statements.

### **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.

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

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

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

4.4 However, we hope this position statement will help to ensure that the right balance is achieved across the Wye Valley AONB, with an appropriate quantum and type of housing being delivered in a way that is compatible with the purpose of AONB designation and which 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 circumstances<sup>4</sup>. 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 circumstances<sup>5</sup>.

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 area<sup>6</sup>. In contrast, establishing the 'housing requirement' for an area requires consideration of 'constraints'<sup>7</sup>, including the AONB designation.

5.1.3 There is clear distinction between 'housing need' and 'housing requirement'.

5.1.4 AONBs face a challenge nevertheless, as the standard method figure is based on the local authority area as a whole rather than on the AONB area. Development plan consultation documents give the impression that the local authority area must accommodate the housing need figure identified through the standard method (i.e. that this figure is a 'target'). Efforts to accommodate this housing need figure potentially risk harming the outstanding natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB.

5.1.5 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

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<sup>4</sup> Paragraph 61 of the NPPF 2021

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> <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

<sup>7</sup> <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)

that objectively assessed needs cannot be met in full through the plan making process’.

5.1.6 The recommendations outlined in the Wye Valley AONB Partnership’s Landscape-led Development Position Statement are an important consideration in this process<sup>8</sup>.

#### 5.1.7 Recommendations

- The housing need figure identified using the UK Government and Welsh Government ‘standard method’ should not be presented as a ‘target’ for housing provision.
- Recommendations outlined in the Wye Valley AONB Partnership’s 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 that 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. 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 plan examination<sup>9</sup>.

#### 5.2.2 Recommendation

- If AONB-related constraints mean that objectively assessed needs cannot be met in full, local authorities should seek to identify how these needs might be met in neighbouring authority areas.

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

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#landscape>. Paragraph 041

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>. Paragraph 025. Paragraph 4.2.9 of Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (2021)

5.3.1 Three local planning authorities overlap the Wye Valley AONB – Herefordshire Council, Monmouthshire County Council and the Forest of Dean District Council.<sup>10</sup> As well as meeting their own housing needs, all three local authority areas are required (through the duty to cooperate and statements of common ground) to accommodate unmet needs arising in adjoining local authorities areas. This adds to the overall pressure for more housing within the local authority area, including within the section of the local planning authority area that overlaps with the Wye Valley AONB.

5.3.2 Within the local planning authority areas that overlap with 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, Government guidance makes it clear that AONBs '*are unlikely to be suitable areas for accommodating unmet needs arising from adjoining (non-designated) areas*'<sup>11</sup>.

5.3.4 As such, the Wye Valley AONB is unlikely to be a suitable area for accommodating unmet needs from local planning authority areas that do not overlap with the AONB even if the overlapping local authorities do 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 of 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 overlaps 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. \*
- 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. \*

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<sup>10</sup> Gloucestershire County Council is the fourth local planning authority covering the Wye Valley AONB. Gloucestershire is a two-tier county, the County Council is responsible for planning applications related to mineral working and associated development, and the disposal of waste, whereas domestic planning applications are determined by Forest of Dean District Council.

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

\* Except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that it would be in the public interest to do so.

## 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 AONB 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 that National Parks, at least, '*are not suitable locations for unrestricted housing*'<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, the UK Government's Planning White Paper (2020) states that '*the whole purpose of National Parks would be undermined by multiple large scale housing developments*'<sup>13</sup>. Instead, 'the expectation [in National Parks] is that new housing will be focussed on meeting affordable housing requirements, supporting local employment opportunities and key services'<sup>14</sup>.

5.4.4 AONBs have the same level of protection as National Parks, with regards to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty. The scale and extent of development in AONBs (as with National Parks) should be limited<sup>15</sup>. As such, it is 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 also addressed in the proposals of the UK Government-commissioned Landscape Review Final Report (commonly referred to as the Glover Review / Report)<sup>16</sup>.

### 5.4.6 Recommendation

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

<sup>12</sup> Defra (2010) English National Parks and the Broads – UK Government Vision and Circular 2010. Para 78.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (2020) White Paper: Planning for the Future. Para 2.25.

<sup>14</sup> Defra (2010) *English National Parks and the Broads – UK Government Vision and Circular 2010*. Para 78.

<sup>15</sup> Paragraph 176 of the NPPF 2021

<sup>16</sup> 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 not<sup>17</sup>.

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 term<sup>18</sup>’. 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<sup>19</sup>’. 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.

5.5.3 As explained in the ‘Affordable Housing’ section, above, given 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 a scenario 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 of which are affordable in perpetuity. We also 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.

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<sup>17</sup> 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>

<sup>18</sup> 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)

<sup>19</sup> 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, Homeseeker Plus in the Forest of Dean district and Homesearch in Monmouthshire.

5.6.2 All three schemes operating within the Wye Valley AONB include some condition for local connection (usually to the local authority area)<sup>20</sup>. 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 Partnership’s 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;

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<sup>20</sup> 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)<sup>21</sup>;
- provision of affordable housing is sought for residential developments of 5 units or fewer<sup>22</sup>.

5.7.3 Appendix 2 provides examples of what we would consider to be ‘best practice’ case studies. In some Protected Landscapes, such as the Arnside & Silverdale AONB, 50% affordable housing is required for developments of two or more dwellings<sup>23</sup>.

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 need<sup>24</sup>. This, in turn, would help to ensure that the scale and extent of development in the AONB is limited, as required in 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 also 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’<sup>25</sup>.

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, when reviewing local and/or neighbourhood plans, the plan-making body should give consideration to setting policies for affordable housing provision in the Wye Valley AONB that require:
  - At least 50% affordable housing in market housing developments;

<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> For example, the affordable housing need identified in rural housing need surveys.

<sup>25</sup> Defra (2019) Landscapes Review Final Report. Proposal 18: A new National Landscapes Housing Association to build affordable homes.



- 100% affordable housing on Rural Exception Sites, with a lower percentage only being permitted in exceptional circumstances and the absolute minimum being 75%;
- On-site affordable housing provision for housing developments of five units or fewer.

## 5.8 Evidence Of Local Need Arising Within The Wye Valley AONB

5.8.1 As outlined earlier in this position statement, we acknowledge 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, then 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 even individual settlements.

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 the parish where housing is being considered<sup>26</sup>;
- 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

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<sup>26</sup> 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.

considered within the Wye Valley AONB, and which extends beyond a particular settlement, it therefore remains limited to the relevant local planning authority.

#### 5.8.5 Recommendations

- 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 that the provision of affordable housing that meets local needs is a key priority in the Wye Valley AONB, 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, settlement higher up the settlement hierarchy) and/or, where there is strong developer interest in new residential development. Ideally, this should be done 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 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, they 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 and 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' housing<sup>27</sup>.

#### 5.11.2 Recommendation

- When plan-making bodies are reviewing their development plans, they should give consideration to setting policies that ensure that new market housing is used as a 'principle residence' rather than as a second home or holiday home.

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<sup>27</sup> [https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0027/257751/Part-6-Achieving-a-Thriving-Community.pdf](https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0027/257751/Part-6-Achieving-a-Thriving-Community.pdf). Page 153.

## 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'<sup>28</sup>. 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'<sup>29</sup>. Development that is "good enough to approve" should demonstrate convincing evidence of local need, prioritise affordable housing and follow the Welsh Government's 'Design' Technical Advice Note (TAN) 12 (2016).

### 6.2 Location

6.2.1 As outlined in the Wye Valley AONB Partnership's Landscape-led Development Position Statement, a key consideration in locating new development is to avoid allocating or permitting development on sites (or land parcels) that have been identified as having high or medium-high landscape sensitivity to the type and scale of development being proposed.

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'.

#### 6.2.3 Recommendations

- New residential development should not be located in areas that have been identified, in landscape and visual sensitivity studies, as having high or high-medium sensitivity to the scale of residential development being proposed.
- 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 dependency on car use.

### 6.3 DESIGN

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#landscape>. Paragraph 041.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#landscape>. Paragraph 042.

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 therefore the responsibility of all potential developers to ensure that each development adds value to the Wye Valley AONB landscape through good design. This contributes to the enhancement of the natural beauty and sense of place. Several of the Features and Special Qualities<sup>30</sup> 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 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 the area’s natural beauty, it is important to ensure that 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 is the design guides / guidance published by the local planning authorities, sometimes as part of the local authority development plan. There is not, currently, one over-arching design guide for the whole of the Wye Valley AONB.

6.3.6 An increasingly important consideration will be the extent to which new residential development incorporates energy conservation and renewable energy measures, such as solar panels and air source heat pump, as part of the overall objective of mitigating the impacts of climate change. Ideally, this should be done in a

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<sup>30</sup> 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.

way that is compatible with the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB.

### 6.3.7 Recommendations

- New residential developments in the Wye Valley AONB should:
  - Respect the locally distinctive characteristics of the existing settlement;
  - Respect the relevant Special Qualities of the Wye Valley AONB;
  - Be consistent with relevant policies of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan;
  - Facilitate opportunities for people to travel and access services by a range of transport modes, reducing dependency on car use.
- 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.

## 7.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

7.1 In addition to the 'end notes' provided below, this Position Statement is supported by a number of 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 best-practice (Appendix 2).
- A flowchart illustrating the extent to which CBL data equates to convincing evidence of need within a specific settlement (Appendix 3).



## WYE VALLEY AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### 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-area<sup>1</sup> for the 2015-31 plan period. However, the planning inspector, in his report on the examination of the Local Plan<sup>2</sup>, 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.*<sup>3</sup>
- *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.*<sup>4</sup>

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*

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

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

<sup>3</sup> As above – paragraph 218.

<sup>4</sup> As above – paragraph 219.

*further new housing in the Burford – Charlbury sub-areas would necessarily be inappropriate.*<sup>5</sup>

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.*<sup>6</sup> (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

<sup>5</sup> As above – paragraph 220.

<sup>6</sup> West Oxfordshire District Council (2018) *West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031* . Paragraph 5.39.

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 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 PLAN<sup>7</sup>

**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:

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

<sup>7</sup> 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 DOCUMENT<sup>8</sup>**

**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.

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<sup>8</sup> 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 PLAN<sup>9</sup>**

##### **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).

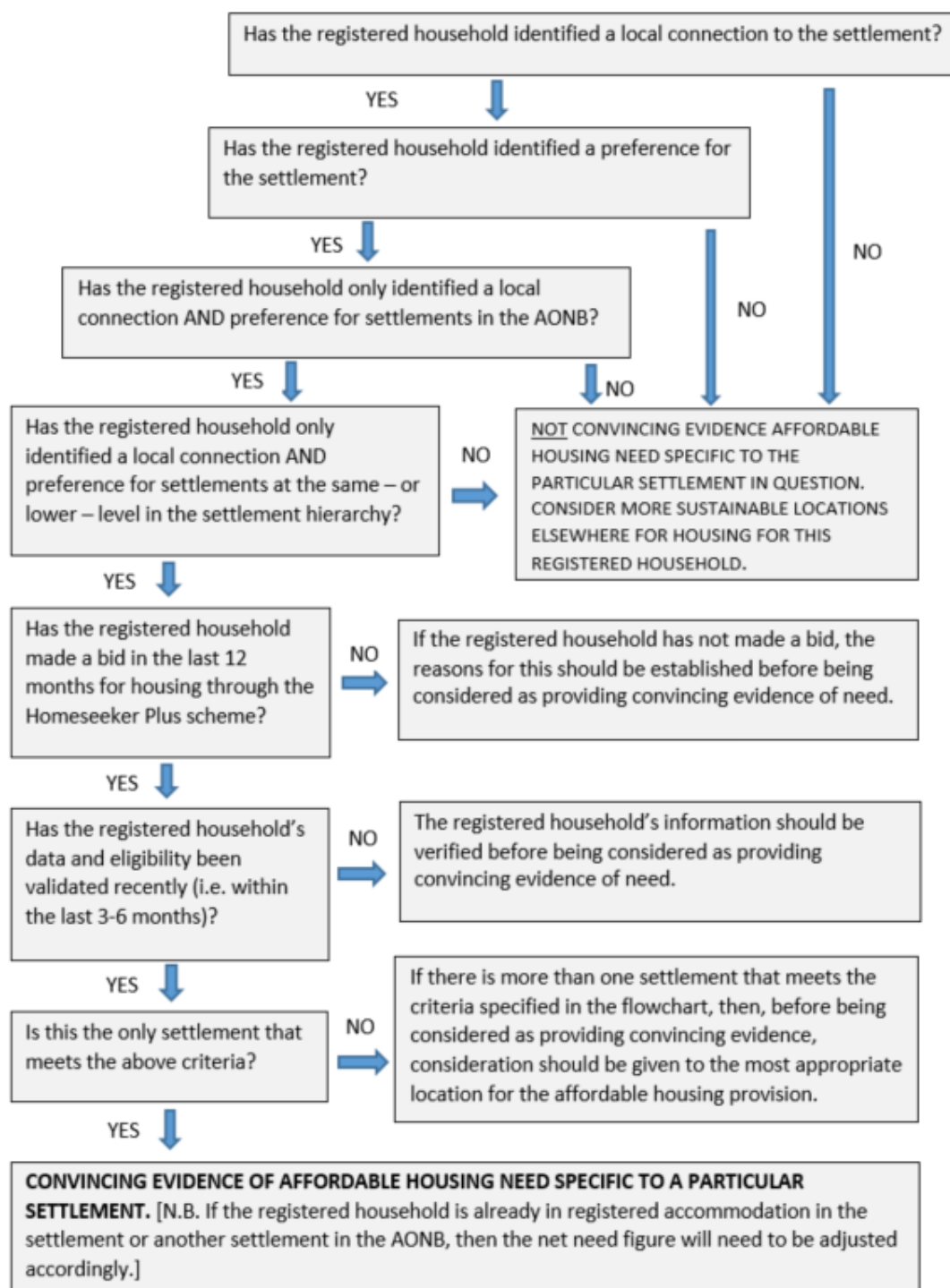
100% of the housing on rural exception sites will be affordable.

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



**APPENDIX 3. FLOWCHART ILLUSTRATING THE EXTENT TO WHICH CHOICE-BASED LETTINGS DATA CAN EQUATE TO CONVINCING EVIDENCE OF HOUSING NEED WITHIN A SPECIFIC SETTLEMENT<sup>10</sup>**



<sup>10</sup> 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.

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## WYE VALLEY AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### POSITION STATEMENT: LANDSCAPE-LED DEVELOPMENT

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#### 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 it<sup>1</sup>. The statutory purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area<sup>2</sup>.

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 However, 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 outlined by Welsh Government<sup>3</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> Section 82 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

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

<sup>3</sup> 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

- the proposals of the Government-commissioned Landscapes Review Final Report<sup>4</sup>;
- 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;
- the Government’s assertions that:
  - (i) meeting housing need is never a clear reason to cause unacceptable harm to protected landscapes<sup>5</sup>; 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 generation<sup>6</sup> ; and
  - (iii) protecting and improving the environment and tackling climate change are central considerations in planning.

1.5 In principle, 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 household 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 promoting active travel i.e. walking, wheeling and cycling; and bringing together the spatial strategy for a place in a way which addresses these in a holistic way and reflects its

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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.

<sup>4</sup> 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).

<sup>5</sup> UK Government response to the local housing need proposals in ‘Changes to the current planning system’ – updated 16 December 2020

<sup>6</sup> Statement by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when launching the consultation on the Planning White Paper in August 2020

unique characteristics, whilst also providing a clear framework for development and regeneration<sup>7</sup>.

1.6 Planning policies and guidance helps to address this issue by making it 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 full<sup>8</sup>;
- AONBs are unlikely to be suitable areas for accommodating unmet needs arising from adjoining, non-designated areas<sup>9</sup>.

## **2.0 PURPOSE OF THE POSITION STATEMENT**

2.1 The primary purpose of the 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 policies and associated issues. They are not intended to create new policies.

2.2 The Partnership's position statements are also intended to help plan-making bodies (such as local authorities and neighbourhood plan groups), developers and other relevant stakeholders:

- The Wye Valley AONB Partnership's position statements are also intended to help local authorities, developers and other relevant stakeholders:
  - to 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;

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<sup>7</sup> 22 December 2022 Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy consultation statement.

<sup>8</sup> Planning Practice Guidance – Natural Environment: paragraph 41

<sup>9</sup> Planning Practice Guidance – Natural Environment: paragraph 41

- 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;
- to develop a consistent and coordinated approach to relevant issues across the whole of the Wye Valley AONB and its setting<sup>10</sup>.

2.3 With regards to best practice, this Position Statement has been modelled significantly on the approaches adopted by several nationally designated Protected Landscapes, including the Cotswold National Landscape's Housing Position Statement and also 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 The Partnership's 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 also be compatible with the relevant position statements.

3.2 The AONB Management Plan may be a material consideration in planning decisions. However, we acknowledge 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 of development plans, AONB Management Plan and position statements is as follows:

- Local authority development plan.
- AONB Management Plan.
- Position statements.

### **4.0 ACHIEVING THE RIGHT BALANCE**

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

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<sup>10</sup> Three local authority areas overlap with the Wye Valley AONB, with each with local authority having its own development plan.

for and permitting new development. As outlined above, 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 balance<sup>11</sup>.

4.4 We hope that 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 All three local authorities that overlap with the Wye Valley AONB area have declared climate and / or ecological emergencies.

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 2021-2026, 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 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 setting<sup>12</sup> 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

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<sup>11</sup> R (Mevagissey Parish Council) v Cornwall Council [2013] EHC 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...'

<sup>12</sup> The setting of the Wye Valley AONB is defined in Section 4.5 of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026.

landscape-led approach, 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 AONB<sup>13</sup>. Given that relevant authorities must have regard to the purpose of AONB designation in their decision-making, it would make sense for stakeholders who are putting forward development proposals to also have regard to this statutory purpose.

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 (i) avoided and (ii) mitigated where possible<sup>14</sup>. 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 in line with the WFG 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.

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<sup>13</sup> Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act

<sup>14</sup> 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.



6.6 Taking a landscape-led approach can be particularly important for major development<sup>15</sup>, as this scale of development has the greatest potential to adversely affect the purpose of 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 even minor building works that do not require an application for planning permission but which 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 therefore 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 also be considered.

6.8 Consideration of landscape and visual impacts and effects are obviously a key consideration when taking a landscape-led approach. However, a landscape-led approach should also consider all of the 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.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS – LANDSCAPE-LED APPROACH**

### **7.1 Landscape and Visual Sensitivity and Capacity**

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<sup>15</sup> 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).

### 7.1.1 At the planning policy stage (Local Plans and Neighbourhood Development Plans<sup>16</sup>):

- A landscape and visual sensitivity and capacity study (LSCA)<sup>17</sup> and/or Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (as appropriate) 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 process<sup>18</sup>.
- This study should assess the sensitivity of these sites to types and scales of development being considered. The cumulative impact of development of the sites should be considered.
- Where such studies identify that the sensitivity of the landscape to specific types and scales of development is high, or medium-high (and where any development impacts could not be fully mitigated), the development should be deemed to exceed the capacity of the landscape to accommodate that development<sup>19</sup>.
- Where the identified landscape sensitivity is below these thresholds, assessments should be made of the specific quantum of development that could theoretically be accommodated on these sites, based on appropriate assumptions (for example, assumptions relating to design, density, layout, etc.).
- 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 of the sites that are considered to have landscape capacity for development should be allocated in one iteration of the development plan.

### 7.1.2 At the development management stage:

- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) should be undertaken for all development that requires an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> Relevant guidance is provided in Natural England's 'An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management'

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> This approach is applied in the South Downs National Park, as outlined in paragraph 4.19 of the Landscape Background Paper for the South Downs Local Plan: '*A site assessed as having high landscape sensitivity, or medium-high landscape sensitivity where any development impact could not be fully mitigated, were generally found unsuitable for housing development*'.

<sup>20</sup> LVIAs 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).

- Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVAs) should be undertaken for other development in the Wye Valley AONB and its setting that have the potential to cause adverse landscape and visual impacts<sup>21</sup>. The nature of such appraisals should be proportionate to the likely potential for adverse impact.
- All LVIA and LVAs should be consistent with the guidance published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment.
- The cumulative impact of the development proposals, in the context of previous development and small scale changes, on the AONB should be considered.
- Where a LVIA or LVA identifies that a development in the Wye Valley AONB would have 'significant' or 'moderate-significant' effects, such development should be deemed to constitute 'major development' and national planning policy (paragraph 177 of NPPF/Paragraph 6.3.10 of PPW) should apply.
- 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' in the Landscape and Visual Sensitivity and Capacity Studies and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment / Landscape and Visual Assessments, albeit with some 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 area<sup>22</sup>.
- 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 manner<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> 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 PPW<sup>24</sup>.
- 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’.

## 7.2 Natural Beauty<sup>25</sup>

7.2.1 All of the factors that contribute to the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB should be fully considered and assessed at all stages of the development process, including planning policy and development management. These factors are:

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

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)<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> 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 [natural beauty] of

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)<sup>27</sup>**

7.3.1 Development in the MH AONB that is listed in Schedule 1<sup>28</sup> of the EIA regulations should be classed as major development (see 'Major Development' above), as should Schedule 2<sup>29</sup> 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. Within the 'sensitive area' of the Wye Valley AONB, 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 the context of paragraph 177 of the NPPF and 6.3.10 of PPW, are likely to merit an EIA.

## **8.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

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

- Case studies of best-practice with regards 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).

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the proposed development site and its wider setting, over and above its baseline condition' (N.B. Underlining added for emphasis).

<sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/571/schedule/1/made>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/571/schedule/2/made>

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# 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 PLAN<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 DOCUMENT<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

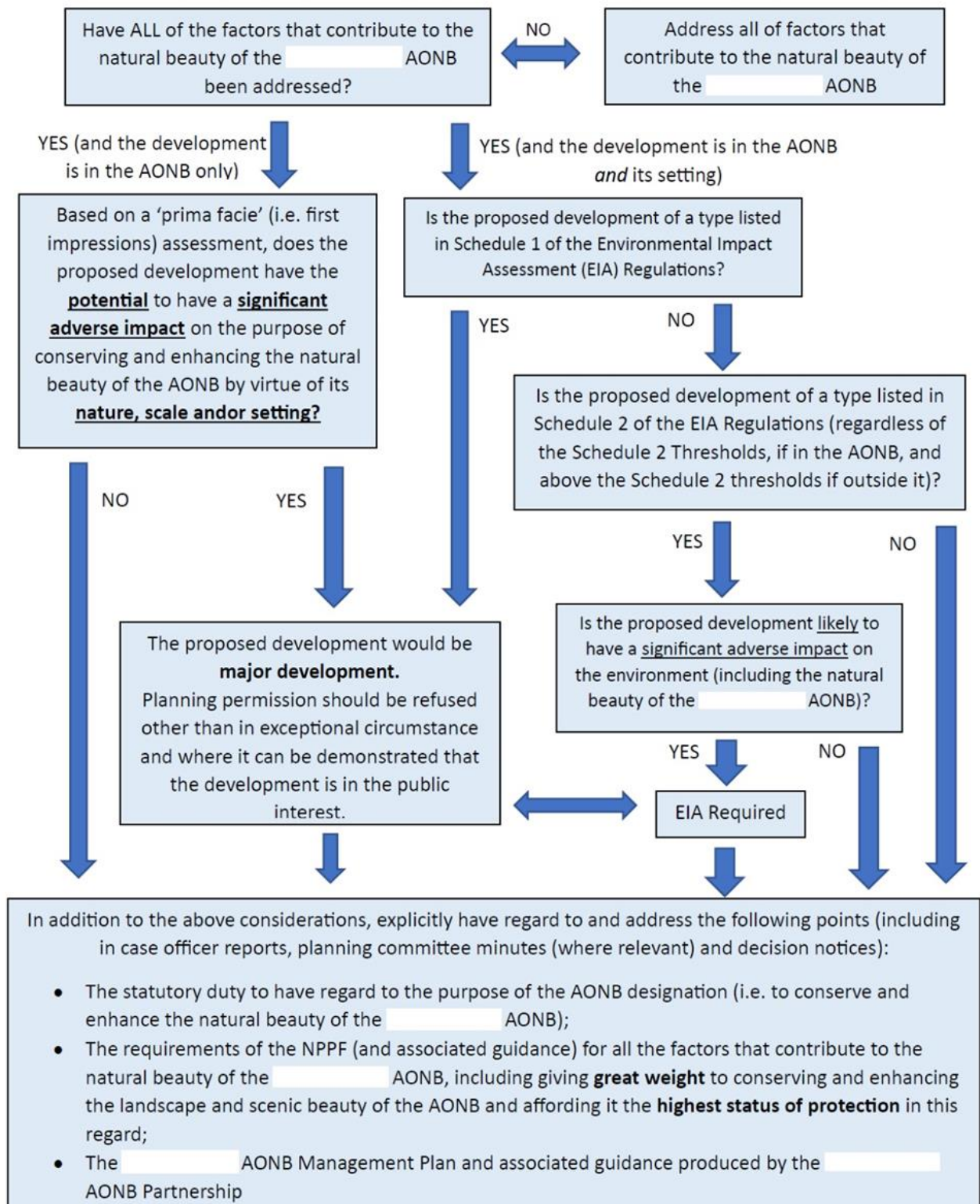
### LANDSCAPE-LED CASE STUDY 3: A417 MISSING LINK ROAD SCHEME

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 SETTING<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> This flowchart has been adapted from the flowchart developed by the Cotswolds Conservation Board.

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TECHNICAL OFFICERS'  
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB  
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023

## NAAONB UPDATE

### ***Purpose***

To advise members of activity through 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.

### ***Recommendation***

That the JAC

- A. Endorses the proposal to rebrand Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be known as National Landscapes.
- B. encourages AONB partners to attend the National AONB Conference at Bath University on 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> September 2023

### ***Key Issues***

- 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 JAC, in November, for adoption.
- The National AONB Conference will be on 5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> September.

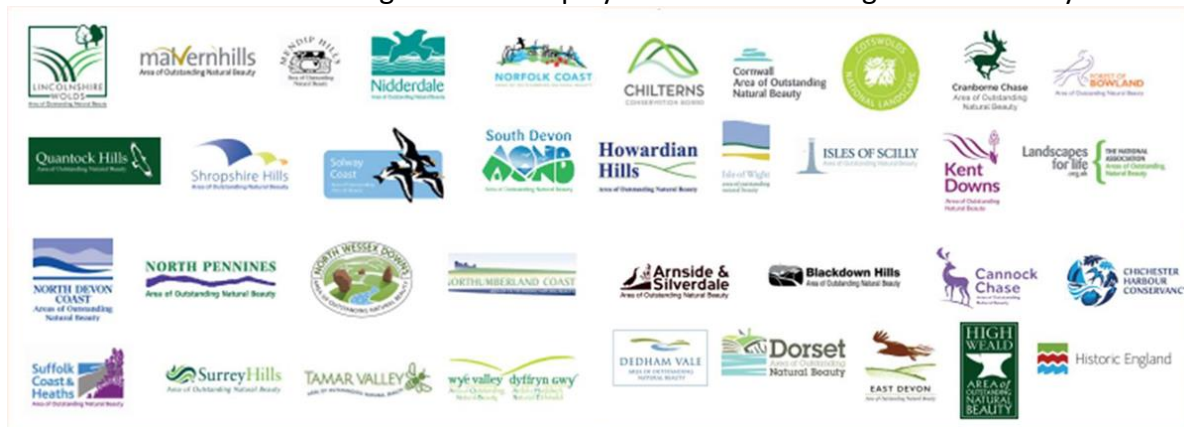
### **National Landscape rebrand**

After nearly two years of steady work behind the scenes, the NAAONB are almost ready to launch the rebrand of AONBs to National Landscapes, with the support of DEFRA. A group of

AONB and NAAONB staff have been steering the creative agency Nice & Serious on designing and implementing the new branding. The work developing this new, united personality for the AONB network has been conducted with the input and insight of AONB teams along with representatives from groups not traditionally engaged with, members of the general public and existing stakeholders from partner organisations, landowners, local businesses and Welsh and English government.

The vision is for a national landscape designation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that is recognisable across the country and that contain naturally beautiful, thriving landscapes which everyone feels part of. By creating a more unified identity across the AONB family, the aspiration is to better show the collective size, ambition and the potential impact of the AONB/National Landscapes network. Clearly changing a brand name cannot do this by itself. However, it can signal a step-change, a threshold in how we do things as a family to ensure that individually and collectively more is done to ensure that everyone feels welcome and that all voices are heard in how the landscapes continue to evolve, particularly in the context of the climate and ecological emergencies.

The current suite of AONB logos do not display a coherent or recognisable identity



The suite of new National Landscape logos have yet to be finalised and will be presented to the JAC at the next meeting in November. Meanwhile some AONBs, such as the Cotswolds, are already self-identifying as National Landscapes, with their teams and partnerships recognising the power of this change to enhance the status of the designation in their area. However, the adoption of the new branding does not negate the existing designation, which can be retained as a descriptor or strapline: “Wye Valley National Landscape – an area of outstanding natural beauty”. The strength of the national AONB designation is that it 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.

Creating a more unified identity across the AONB family will better show the collective size, ambition and impact of the National Landscapes, and generate greater recognition, both on the ground for residents and visitors, and more widely in the national consciousness. The more people build a connection with the landscape, the more invested they become in shaping its future.

The NAAONB is in discussions with DEFRA about funding for the implementation phase. The main focus of this work will be on a PR campaign designed to 'reach people where they are' which will be developed with the input of the working group and two way communication with the rest of the AONB network.

Welsh Government have yet to form a view on the rebranding, although the National Landscapes name was first proposed in the 2015 Marsden Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales. The Welsh AONB Lead Officers are meeting shortly with Welsh Government officials to discuss the options, opportunities and challenges to rebranding as National Landscapes, Tirwedd Cenedlaethol.

Depending on the differences between England and Wales, for the Wye Valley AONB, it would not seem to make practical sense to retain both AONB branding alongside the use of the National Landscape name, apart from as the descriptor/strapline. However, there may have to be a managed compromise or graduated process, as befits such frontier territory.

The National Association will trademark each of the new brand identities ensuring that each marque is protected in an appropriate way and giving each National Landscape Partnership free use of the brand. DEFRA funding will be available to assist each National Landscape in England to begin the process of changing their brand identity.

The NAAONB anticipate formally announcing the rebrand of the National Association at the national conference in September, with AONBs following in waves according to their readiness.

### **National AONB Conference 2023**

The annual AONB Conference this year will be held 5th - 7th September at Bath University. The theme of the conference is 'Invested and Investing in Landscape – who, why, how'. Speaker, workshops and field visits will look at what goes into conserving and enhancing the nation's finest landscapes, in terms of investment of time, energy, and funding. The conference will explore what it takes to secure these investments, through volunteering, campaigning, and navigating the complexities of the new world of green finance. Keynote speakers include: Andy Middleton, North Star Transition; Guy Singh-Watson, Riverford Organic Farmers; Tony Juniper, Natural England; Polly Martin, National Trails UK; plus speakers from the Heritage Lottery Fund and WWF-UK

The 6 co-hosting AONBs are the Cotswolds, Cranborne Chase, Mendip Hills, North Wessex Downs, Quantock Hills and Wye Valley. The programme is available through the NAAONB website here: <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/events/landscapes-life-conference/landscapes-life-conference2023>

The AONB Unit is hosting a fieldtrip to the lower Wye Valley for 6<sup>th</sup> September, which will explore the investment in the outstanding landscape of the lower Wye Valley, around Chepstow and Tintern, from both a contemporary and historic perspective.

It is hope that there will be good representation from AONB partners at the conference in Bath.

### ***Background***

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](http://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). The Glover Review concluded too that AONBs & their partnerships are undervalued. Covering 15% of the land area of England, AONBs are twice the size of the National Parks, yet receive one tenth of the funding. The Review recommended amongst other things that a simpler name, less likely to be shortened to an acronym (often mispronounced) should be introduced to help drive up recognition.



## **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 and encourages the sound uptake of the remaining funds.

### ***Key Issues***

- 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) host 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.

### ***Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)***

The Government's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 announced the extension of the delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme, following the success of the first 2 years of the programme. DEFRA have subsequently increased the overall allocated funding for FiPL and made some other minor changes to the programme.

Wye Valley AONB budgets for 23/24 and 24/25 are confirmed, with a significant uplift in FiPL budgets to £339,063 in 23/24 and £362,384 in 24/25. This includes an allocation for Advice & Guidance/Administration, including the employment of the FiPL Officer and overhead & administration costs. If these Advice & Admin allocations are not fully required they can be transferred to the FiPL grant budget. DEFRA have also confirmed that the programme will not be extended beyond March 2025, when the full Environmental Land Management (ELM) agri-environment scheme becomes active.

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	8,024.33
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	6,309.78
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	8,009.33
WV036	Fownhope PC	Access enhancement	1 of 1	4,742.46
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	1,320.00
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
		<b>Grant sub-total</b>		<b>159,896.57</b>
		Advice/Guidance /Admin budget		79,656
		<b>Total eligible expenditure</b>		<b>239,552.57</b>
		<i>Total FiPL allocation</i>		<i>339,063.00</i>
		Currently remaining		99,510.43

DEFRA have also amended and increased in the level of FiPL grants that can be approved by the AONB team, from £5,000 to £10,000. The Wye Valley AONB team's opinion is that whilst this is a sensible move for Protected Landscapes with much larger budgets, here it would have a significant impact on the number of applications being considered by the Local Assessment Panel. It was therefore proposed that the Panel would continue to receive applications over £5,000 for consideration. However, the Panel gave the AONB team discretion to make decisions on applications between £5k and £10k if it was the most appropriate and expedient course of action to take.

For further advice or to discuss any project ideas, please contact Anna Stankiewicz, FiPL Officer on [farming@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk](mailto: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 £63,108.40 is in the table below.

Code	Applicant	Project Title	years		Total Cost	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	£7,605.00	£2,885.00	
WV02 YR23W	Coed Lleol-Small Woods	Nature-based Wellbeing in the Wye Valley	1	1	£30,000.00	£14,665.00	
WV03 YR23W	Diverse Artists Network	Walk out West	1	2	£6,130.00	£3,000.00	
WV04 YR23W	Wye Coppice CIC	Coppice Training & Community Outreach Programme	1	2	£57,397.00	£16,860.90	
WV05 YR23W	Gwent Wildlife Trust	Restoring The Wern	1	1	£17,961.00	£8,172.50	
WV07 YR23W	Wye Valley Community Council	Tintern Village Hall Retaining Wall	1	1	£12,800	£6,400	
WV08 YR23W	Wye Valley Community Council	The Pound Wall	1	1	£2,150.00	£1,125.00	
		<b>TOTALS (to date)</b>			<b>£134,043.00</b>	<b>£63,108.40</b>	
		<i>Remaining from £100,000</i>					<i>£36,891.60</i>

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](mailto: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. The most recent donation was of £10,000 from South Wales TV production company Bad Wolf. Opportunities are always being sought to grow the AONB Fund further.

The HCF Wye Valley AONB Fund had a balance of £66,501.97 as of the last statement dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. Since then one award has been made for £2,000. 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/>.

The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme allows farmers and other land managers in England to apply for DEFRA funding via the AONB Unit to improve public access and deliver bigger and better outcomes for the environment, for people and for places. Applications need to demonstrate that proposed projects help deliver the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan against at least one of the four key themes of Climate, Nature, People and Place.

The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) supports living and working more sustainably in association with enhancing natural beauty, wildlife, culture, landscape, land use and community within the context of the Wales sustainable development goals and principles in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. The Wye Valley AONB Unit administer the fund on behalf of Welsh Government.

The Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) host and manage the Wye Valley AONB Fund on behalf of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership.

## AONB PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL STUDY TOUR

### ***Purpose***

To endorse the date and outline programme for the Annual AONB Partnership Study Tour.

### ***Recommendations***

That the JAC

A. Note the date of Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2023 for the Study Tour and encourage a good attendance.

B. Invite representatives from our neighbouring Shropshire Hills and Malvern Hills AONB Partnerships and the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority and other appropriate partners.

### ***Key Issues***

- This year the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour will be held on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> September.
- 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 sent out shortly.
- 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.

### ***Reasons***

The Annual Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour is hosted by the JAC and has always had a good reputation as both an information exchange and a networking opportunity, with good attendance from across the wider AONB Partnership. The invitation to attend the Tour is extended to all members of the Joint Advisory Committee, to senior officers and County and District Councillors whose wards fall within the Wye Valley AONB and all Town/Parish/Community Councils that cover the AONB. It is thus a key tool in the transfer of information to the wider partners and interested parties in and around the AONB. The annual AONB Partnership Tour is traditionally held on one of the last Fridays in September.

## ***Implications***

The date of 22<sup>nd</sup> September is proposed for the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour because there appears to be minimal conflict with council meetings in the four constituent local authorities. In the interests of wider collaboration invitations will be made to other appropriate partner organisations and neighbouring Designated Landscapes; including the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, the Malvern Hills AONB and Shropshire Hills AONB Partnerships, the National Association for AONBs, Welsh Government's Climate Change and Rural Affairs Group and DEFRA's Landscape & Access Unit. In most recent years the Tour comprised of 2 mini-buses, driven by AONB staff, and there is the capacity to provide a 3<sup>rd</sup> mini-bus.

The programme for the Tour is still being finalised, but will include visiting various sites that have benefited from Lottery funding through the Lower Wye Nature Networks Project, an AONB initiative in collaboration with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust in the Monmouthshire part of the AONB. As the programme is finalised there may be other issues or projects in the vicinity that the Tour might visit, such as the Dôl-Wen One Planet Development.

The event reaches a wide audience of AONB partners and interested parties and always proves to be very popular and informative for those who attend. Lunch and transport will be included.

## ***Background***

The 2022 AONB Partnership Tour was attended by 33 people with a good spread of representation from throughout the AONB even though the Tour was focused around Ross-on-Wye, Brampton Abbots, Lydbrook & Welsh Bicknor in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire in the AONB. The Tour visited a range of sites looking at land-use and land management around various AONB projects and initiatives along with regenerative farming and recreation, including variously football, fishing and hostel accommodation.

Tours were not held in 2020 nor 2021 due to the coronavirus restrictions.

In 2019 the Tour focused predominantly on the Monmouthshire part of the AONB. The 2018 Tour looked at a selection of projects and issues in the Herefordshire part of the AONB north of Ross-on-Wye. The 2017 Tour also looked at a number of projects and issues between Ross and Lydbrook. The 2016 Tour visited sites in and around Tintern.

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'  
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB  
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023

## REVIEW OF DESIGNATED LANDSCAPES IN ENGLAND AND WALES

### ***Purpose***

To advise members of progress with the respective Reviews of Designated Landscapes England and Wales.

### **FOR INFORMATION**

### ***Key Issues***

- DEFRA have 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.
- 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.

### ***Reasons***

The 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) was published in 2018. One of the outcomes was the 'Glover' Landscapes Review of National Parks and AONBs in England, produced in 2019 with 27 Proposals for Government. Proposal 24 stated that "AONBs should be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, and renamed as National Landscapes." Proposal 25 suggested "A new National Landscapes Service bringing our 44 national landscapes together to achieve more than the sum of their parts". A subsequent consultation process followed in and the formal response is awaited.

Welsh Government have been working with AONB and National Park lead officers, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the NAAONB through Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) and the Biodiversity Deep Dive Designated Landscapes Subgroup to advance a range of collaborative initiatives.

## ***Implications***

### England

Government's response to Glover's "National Landscape Service" proposal has settled on the creation of a formal partnership in England intended to create a more collaborative way of working that amplifies and scales up the impact and influence of the National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Trails in England. Initially known as the National Landscapes, Parks and Trails Partnership, it is now being called the Protected Landscapes Partnership. The terms of reference for the Partnership are in development and DEFRA is allocating a budget up to March 2025 that will enable investment in the National Parks, AONBs and National Trails to collaborate more closely on three national priorities;

- **Recovering nature & tackling climate change:** contributing towards 30 by30 and relevant Environment Act & Environment IP targets
- Promoting **equity, diversity and inclusion** of people living, visiting, volunteering, working in and governing these special areas and improving access for all
- Increasing the understanding, capability and capacity of the partners to attract **private investment** into nature recovery

The Partnership will be governed by a Partnership Board, supported by a recently recruited Partnership Manager hosted by Natural England. DEFRA will provide the secretariat. The chair is not a regulated public appointment but the decision will be made by ministers.

It is hoped that the new Partnership, with its budget and priorities, will be able to support:-

- landscape scale delivery projects, including the Big Chalk initiative which stretches across southern England and may extend to cover species-rich grassland in parts of the Wye Valley AONB.
- delivery of the NAAONB's Art in the Landscape strategy and strengthen the application to Arts Council England for wider support using the arts as a tool to engage new audiences with AONBs.
- a programme of training on equity, diversity and inclusion for staff and leaders in Protected Landscapes

DEFRA are also supporting the forthcoming NAAONB rebrand of AONBs to National Landscapes. This is intended to reflect renewed values and boost understanding of the national significance of AONBs with more diverse communities, including residents, partners and visitors. However, currently any proposals to strengthen AONBs with new purposes and powers are held up in possible amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which is about to enter its 3<sup>rd</sup> reading in the Lords.

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme has also been extended with increased funding until March 2025, in recognition of the positive feedback and outcomes delivered by FiPL. This continues to support the important role that Protected Landscapes play in delivering for nature, climate, people and place. It is anticipated that the best aspects of FiPL will be integrated within future environmental land management schemes within Protected Landscapes.

### Wales

Welsh Government (WG) Ministerial Responsibility for AONBs has moved (back) from the Rural Affairs to the Climate Change portfolio, under Julie James MS. However, the Designation of a new National Park in North East Wales will remain with Lesley Griffiths MS,



Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd. Meanwhile work continues on the Recommendations of the Biodiversity Deep Dive.

Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) is the partnership of the Designated Landscapes in Wales: three National Parks and five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), along with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the NAAONB, who are working together to address key shared challenges, including action on the climate change and nature emergencies. A TCLW working group is also liaising with WG on the forthcoming Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS).

The lead officers from the 5 AONB Partnerships along with the NAAONB are involved in a series of meetings with WG and NRW on future funding for AONBs, as the current NRW funding offer ends in March 2024 and WG funding runs until March 2025.

TCLW and WG are developing a training programme for members of AONB JACs and National Park Authorities, taking into account the priorities of the Minister for Climate Change. Initially two areas have been identified for training later in the year:

- Tackling the Nature and Climate Emergencies, to be delivered by NRW, and
- Introduction to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), delivered by Anna Jones, TCLW Strategic Lead on EDI and Governance.

NRW, as the designating authority for Designated Landscapes in Wales on behalf of WG, are currently evaluating the case for the first new national park in Wales in almost 70 years. The area being considered for national park status centres on the existing Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB in the northeast of the country. NRW has established a team to lead on the designation, with their work including data and evidence gathering, and engagement with the local communities and other key stakeholders. A decision on the park's designation is expected within the next three years.

There is a statutory process to follow which was last completed in the 1950s and took around a decade. This time NRW also need to take account of new information and new legislation, such as incorporating principles of Sustainable Management of Natural Resources into the procedure. With government funding, a dedicated team and new technology, NRW hope to complete the process within the existing Senedd term, by 2026. Once this is done, and if the evidence supports a designation, then a Designation Order will be submitted to the Welsh Government. This would remove the largest AONB in Wales if the area becomes a National Park. The implications for the remaining 4 AONBs in Wales is unclear.

### ***Background***

In 2018 the [25 Year Environment Plan \(25YEP\)](#) set out the Government's vision for a quarter-of-a-century of action to help the natural world regain and retain good health.

Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) was established following the commitment to create a National Designated Landscape Partnership in 'Valued and Resilient: The Welsh Government's Priorities for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks' (July 2018). The current chair of TCLW is Emyr Williams, Chief Executive Eryri NPA, and Andrew Blake is vice-chair for a two year term.

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TECHNICAL OFFICERS'  
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB  
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023

## AONB UNIT & PARTNER REPORTS

### ***Purpose***

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

FOR INFORMATION

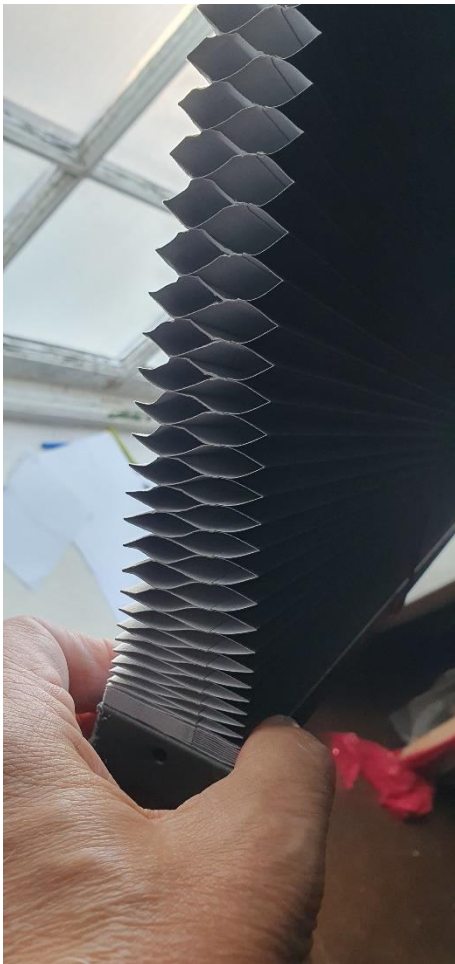
Below are update reports on the following AONB Unit & partner initiatives: -

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

### **a. Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects**

#### **Community Halls – *Lucinda James, AONB Community Links Officer***

We have supported 5 community halls to date through the Welsh Government SLSP funding to help helping them work towards decarbonisation and supporting sustainable tourism. 4 of the halls received a free energy audit from Andrew David, Southeast Energy Agency, who has pledged to offer free advice to all community facilities in Monmouthshire. Following his advice Pelham Hall, Penallt, replaced their electric showers and installed a cycle repair station. Llanishen Hall were able to install a new boiler and LED lighting to the hall and toilet area. Monmouth Sports Pavilion has also been able to replace their boiler and install roof insulation in their extension. The Drill Hall, Chepstow, purchased thermal blinds to keep the heat in during the winter and the heat out during the summer as more insulation for the roof. Llandogo Hall, who had already put in an application for a Lottery grant, received some match funding to install solar panels and a storage battery.



**Thermal Blind at Drill Hall**



**New Boiler at Llanishen Village Hall**

**Wye Valley Walk at Wyesham – Nickie Moore, Lower Wye Projects Officer**

A 600m section of the Wye Valley Walk at Wyesham, Monmouth is at risk of erosion and being lost. With Welsh Government SLSP funding, the AONB Unit has been working with consultants to identify solutions to stabilise the riverbank and improve the accessibility, whilst ensuring protected species are not impacted and the project results in a biodiversity net gain. A topographic survey, footpath infrastructure designs, protected species surveys have been produced and a habitat management plan will help to inform the next steps for this winter, which might include tree canopy reduction, willow spiling and tree planting. Any practical site works will be accompanied by well planned stakeholder engagement and communications.

**Piercefield – Andrew Blake, AONB Manager**

We are working with Gwent Wildlife Trust, the private landowner, Monmouthshire Right of Way team and contractors to carry out repairs and upgrades to the Permissive Path. New people counters will shortly be installed to measure use of this important section of the Wye Valley Walk.

The cliff below The Alcove viewpoint and the riverside meadows at Piercefield benefitted from a clean-up in with Gwent Wildlife Trust leading a partnership work task with volunteers from the AONB and Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA). Most of the rubbish collected was an accumulation over the years, with litter dropped from the viewpoint (and some relatively large items thrown over the cliff) and on the river meadows flotsam from the Wye river which gets deposited by high tides. With the reserve being a belt of SSSI Woodland along the cliffs between Chepstow School / Leisure Centre and Wyndcliffe, retrieving the rubbish from the bottom

riverside meadows posed a problem. Fortunately, the Beachley based Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) volunteers, piggybacking on one of their routine training exercises, retrieved the collected rubbish and took it out via boat on the Wye. Monmouthshire County Council then got involved by collecting and disposing of the waste at the boat's drop off point.

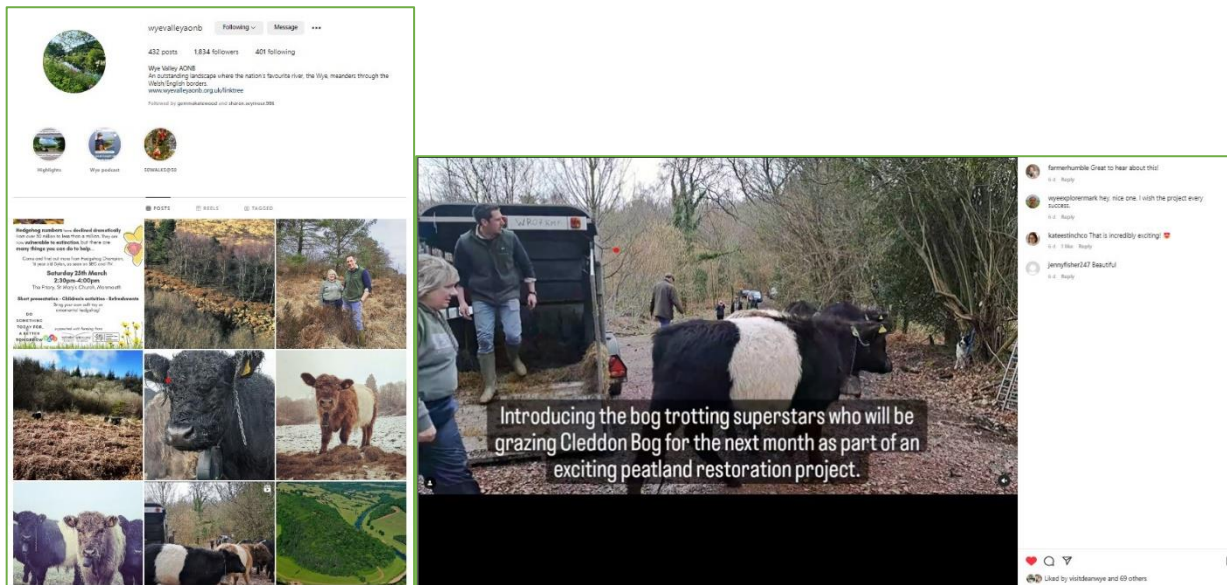
**b. Cleddon Bog & NRW Peatland funding – Nickie Moore, Lower Wye Projects Officer**



Photo: Cleddon Bog SSSI, Trellech.

With a small grant from NRW through to 2025, we have pulled together a programme of restoration work to start to reverse the decline of the 15ha lowland peatland at Cleddon Bog SSSI. We're working with NRW's SSSI team, Forestry and the National Peatlands Action Programme (NPAP), the local commoners, local communities and local contractors to deliver the following:

- **Stakeholder engagement and awareness raising** – ensuring the commoners, local community and users of the common are involved and kept up to date through social media, our website, press, site visits and work parties.
- **Sapling control** – trees and peatlands are not a good mix and the density and spread of saplings across the Bog's southern edge is a concern. This coming winter, we are planning to team up with a local contractor to replicate the successful 2022 winter work party, aiming to clear at least another ¼ acre.
- **Conservation grazing** – through March 2023 a grazing pilot with Brockweir-based Grazing Management Ltd. and their 4 Belted Galloways - Ginger, Oak, Penguin and Ringo – took place. We are currently following up the lessons learned from the pilot in readiness for the cattle's return to the Bog this autumn. The success of this element is dependent upon a group of 10 local volunteers who registered to qualify as a Livestock Checker (LANTRA certification). Each checker has signed up as an AONB Volunteer, received training in lone working and risk assessments and is covered under the AONB's volunteer insurance (through Monmouthshire County Council). The group ensures the cattle stay healthy and safe through daily visual checks, reporting observations via the lively WhatsApp group.
- **Monitoring** – We are monitoring the level of regrowth of the cleared birch, how the cleared areas are re-colonised and the impact of the grazing cattle using fixed point photography, aerial film and photos.



Images: Example social media updates provided throughout the conservation grazing pilot

**c. AONB Species Action Plans – Ellie Baggett, AONB Nature Recovery Officer**

**Noble Chafer (orchard species)**

After conducting pheromone lure trapping surveys in June 2022, a small meta-population of this rare beetle was discovered within the Woolhope Dome in Herefordshire. A successful application to FiPL resulted in a small grant to run a traditional orchards project in Herefordshire, planting 20 fruit trees at priority orchard sites, installing 12 beetle boxes, running 2 orchard management training events, producing leaflets, and securing a pheromone supply to run the survey again in June 23. Apart from the leaflet which is still being developed, all of these measures have now been implemented, with 48 landowners being engaged in the project so far, either through taking part in the pheromone survey or attending orchard training events. Partner organisations in this project so far have included People’s Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL), Plantlife, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, and Colwall Orchard Group. Pheromone surveys for 2023 will start this month with a much more targeted approach, surveying orchards in the Herefordshire part of the AONB only, to better assess the size of population here and identify priority sites species connectivity.



Dr Richard Comont (Bumblebee Conservation Trust) and Jilly Rosser (Colwall Orchard Group) running workshops on invertebrate ID and mistletoe management at the Orchard Management for Biodiversity training event.



Noble chafer beetle box installed in an orchard in Checkley and planting plum trees and building tree guards at Joan's Hill Farm with Reserve Manager Jonathan Stone from Plantlife.

**Hedgehog (engagement species)**

The Species Action Plan for Hedgehogs is in the final development phase. 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. In March, a joint event was hosted in Monmouth between the AONB Unit and Hedgehog Aware, which included presentations, stalls and children's activities on the theme of hedgehogs, threats they face, and actions that we

can all take to help support them. This was attended by over 50 people, including Malgwyn Davies, High Sheriff of Gwent, and resulted in the signing up of 5 new Hedgehog Champions for Monmouthshire.

The AONB Unit has also been able to support Dylan's hedgehog conservation efforts further through allocation of an SDF grant and by acting as a supporting organisation for a grant from GAVO. Dylan's long-term goal is to set up a volunteer hedgehog rescue centre in Monmouth, to address the gap in available help for poorly and injured hedgehogs after several local rescue centres closed down during the covid-19 pandemic. The AONB Unit is keen to support Dylan with this goal, and awarding of these grants has already allowed him to attend hedgehog 'first response' training and start purchasing resources and equipment to support hedgehog champions with their work. We will continue to work closely with Dylan and are hosting a joint talk for the North Gardening Group later this month.

Through our wider projects, we will continue to support rural hedgehog populations by advising farmers on nature-friendly farming practices, through programmes such as FiPL, and improving connectivity across the landscape through projects such as Nature Networks, which has so far enabled the creation of 503m of new hedgerow in Monmouthshire.



Hedgehog Aware and AONB joint event in Monmouth.

Ellie teaching children about the lifecycle of hedgehogs and the audience watching Dylan's presentation.



Ellie and Ruth (Wye Valley AONB) with Dylan Allman and High Sheriff of Gwent Malgwyn Davies. An example of hedgerow created through the Nature Networks project, improving connectivity for hedgehogs across the landscape.



**d. Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project – Nick Critchley, AONB Development Officer**

This is a Lottery funded partnership project between the AONB Unit, Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust. Delivery continues with a project extension until the end of September 2023. Seven SSSI sites have received valuable investment in habitat management, site infrastructure and equipment. Ten Farms have received advice and mapped opportunities for habitat connectivity; the AONB team are now working with nine landowners to deliver grant aided work on farm. On private farmland 500m of hedgerow have been created and 2,900 trees (provided by Woodland Trust) planted. To date £192,959 of the £279,366 grant has been spent and claimed.



Longhorn cattle and Kubota purchased through Lower Wye Nature Networks project to aid conservation grazing.



New orchard planting at Ty Mawr reserve

**e. Integrated Recreational Access Strategy - Monmouthshire – Nickie Moore, Lower Wye Projects Officer**

We previously reported on the issues around the use and condition of the countryside access network with the AONB. In particular, the unclassified county road (UCR) network remains a cause of community concern. The issues are complex and relate both to the condition of these routes, generally in very poor condition often linked to water erosion and run-off issues from surrounding land, and their use, including legal motorised use.

In December 2021 the Local Access Forum (LAF) resolved to support in principle the proposed approach to develop an inclusive user-strategy for all lower Wye UCRs and linked public rights of way, subject to receiving further details. Since then, conversations have continued between the AONB Unit and MCC Highways and Countryside Access and have reaffirmed that a strategic approach is desirable, rather than cherry-picking routes that could prove difficult to justify versus other routes, and/or not actually be what the local communities and users want or need.

It was agreed that the AONB Unit, with its strong multi-sector stakeholder connections, was best placed to lead this new strategy, which will incorporate MCC's statutory requirements as the Public Rights of Way and Highways Authority, but also consider the effects of climate change, nature recovery, heritage, tourism and active travel agendas, and the context of the AONB Management Plan.

We secured funding from the Welsh Government Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places programme to take this forward up to March 2025.

Working with Herefordshire Council's Procurement team, the Invitation to Tender process has been successful and we are just in the process of awarding the contract to lead on the consultation, consensus building and development of an Integrated Recreation Access Strategy and Action Plan. The programme will include detailed consultation with the LAF, AONB Partnership, local communities and user groups.

**f. INNS & WISP Glos CPRE Award – Nickie Moore, Lower Wye Projects Officer**

The aim of the Wye Invasive Species Project – WISP – (the umbrella for all the AONB Unit's Invasive Non-Native Species - INNS - work) is to support landowners and communities of the lower Wye Valley in controlling the spread of the worst offending INNS - Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, American skunk cabbage - helping to reverse the catastrophic decline in biodiversity and improving the resilience of our river catchments.

Since 2020, we've been actively working with partner organisations, landowners, community groups and contractors, working at scale across the Welsh and English side of the lower Wye Valley, in Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire. Working with nature, particularly of the invasive kind, WISP cannot be restrained by administrative boundaries, so we've had to be creative in bridging those boundaries to make sure communities on both sides of the River Wye receive the support they need.



In recognition of the scale, innovation, level of community engagement and achievements, WISP has been awarded the CPRE Gloucestershire Award, and we're very grateful to the award panel for considering our cross-border project. The WISP team in the AONB Unit, Nickie and Ellie, will be collecting the award at the CPRE award ceremony in November.

Highlights from this May's INNS Week include:

- Two days of American skunk cabbage control in the Cleddon, Whitebrook and Brockweir sub-catchments with local contractor. Unfortunately, this invasive plant is on the increase in 2 of the 3 sub-catchments where the source of seed is still proving elusive.
- A colourful social media campaign, including two new, short call-to-action films.
- Signposting to our online *Report it!* and *Landowner Consent* forms <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/our-projects/wisp/wisp-report-sightings/>.
- Launch of our Balsam Action Toolkit (B.A.T) in Welsh and English – providing all the support individuals and local communities might need in controlling the Himalayan balsam growing in their locality. Do visit our website to view the B.A.T and please help to promote this valuable resource widely: <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/our-projects/wisp/balsam-action-toolkit>



Photos: Bucket of 200+ skunk cabbage seedlings dug up by landowner at a new site in Brockweir; local contractor, Alan Martin showing the size these plants can grow to; skunk cabbage spreading from a bog garden along a tributary in Whitebrook.

**g. Access for All – Lucinda James, AONB Community Links Officer**

The DEFRA Access for all funding has enabled many great projects to develop over a short space of time. The funding was an uplift of £62,000 to our core budget for access improvements in late 2022/23. All of the funding was spent within the 5 months.

One of the main projects is to replace stile with more accessible gates, creating 'Miles without Stiles'. The Miles without Stiles project is a collaboration between the AONB Unit, Ross Walkers

are Welcome (WaW), Herefordshire Ramblers, Ross Town Council and Herefordshire Council PROW team. The WaW volunteers have surveys and identified 41 stiles to be replaced and liaised with the landowners for permission. The Herefordshire Ramblers ran a training session on how to properly install gates. The gates will be install over the next 12 months by volunteers from the Ramblers, the AONB and Envirobility and are being stored by kind permission of Ross Town Council. The AONB will also be hosting a 3 day challenge with the Army, who plan to install 7 of these gates in the Walford area during the first week of August.

In total we purchased 56 gates with Parish Councils requesting gates to improve access in their area. The Heritage loop walk at English Bicknor has also been improved and now barrier free.



**Training day with Herefordshire Ramblers & AONB Volunteers at Walford**



**Heritage Loop Walk- English Bicknor**



**Gate Training with the AONB, Herefordshire Ramblers and British Army at Hoarwithy**

The other main project that has come out of the Access for all funding is the development of a new fully accessible loop walk off the Wye Valley Walk- 'The Willow Walk', from Ross-on-Wye to Townsend Farm (RegenBen) at Brampton Abbots. The Willow Walk will be the only accessible walk that can be used by Trampler/off road buggies used by the 'Wheeler' community in English part of the AONB. The walk will include a picnic site being developed at Townsend farm, which will also be accessible from the Farm via a hard surfaced track enabling those using a standard wheelchair to access the picnic site alongside the river. A leaflet is being designed to accompany the walk which, will include the nature and heritage of the areas that the walk passes through. Other improvements include a new footbridge at Netherton, along a permissive section of path by the river between Ross-on-Wye and Townsend Farm.



**The old Footbridge at Netherton**



**New Footbridge at Netherton**



**Disabled Compost Toilet at Townsend Farm**

The next stage of the project is to replace the very narrow footbridge on the Public Right of Way by Ross-on-Wye Rowing club. A further phase is proposed to extend the Willow Walk beyond Townsend Farm to Foy Bridge (and eventually to Foy Church).

**h. Youth Rangers- Pilot Project – *Lucinda James, AONB Community Links Officer***

The Youth Rangers programme is currently being reviewed with the new programme hopefully being launch during the summer holidays. The new programme will see the age range change from 14-16 years to 11-16 years of age. It is also proposed that there will no longer be an application process nor 2-year cohorts. Monthly sessions will be promoted to young people of all abilities and backgrounds to try and reach out to those who may not normally get out into the countryside and learn new skills and knowledge around nature and conservation. The new programme will need a number of new volunteers to support Lucinda in running the events. Without volunteers the programme will not be able to start. A new volunteer role description is being written with the view to recruit during July.

The first session will be a taster, with activities put on by Wye Coppice CIC, Small Wood Charity and others with a BBQ at lunch time. A simple questionnaire will be available for the young people to fill out asking them what activities they would like to attend. The questionnaire will also be available on-line and promoted though our social media network, schools and MCC etc.

**i. *Offa's Dyke Collaboratory* - *Andrew Blake, AONB Manager***

Andrew joined Professor Keith Ray for half a day as one of 18 'co-walkers' on Keith's 'Encounters and Explanations' walk which involved 23 days' continuous walking covering 337km / 209 miles (without a day's break). It was designed to establish in the public eye that Offa's Dyke structure and monument and the long-distance National Path are not coterminous, as only around 50% of the length of the Dyke is followed directly by the Path. The walk was also part of ongoing

reconnaissance work being done, including in the Wye Valley, which indicates that Offa's Dyke might have originally run 'from sea to sea' and that Asser's late ninth-century statement to this effect was not mere hyperbole (Ray *et al.* 2021). As such, it was the first walk, ever, to follow the whole course of the designed and built linear earthwork. The walk will provide further material for Professor Ray's forthcoming guidebook *Offa's Dyke: Encounters and Explanations* which aims to complement walking guides by focusing on how to understand the linear earthwork. The walk, having 'traversed' the border landscapes, will inform the writing of an entirely new version of the 2016 book (Ray and Bapty 2016), provisionally re-titled *Offa's Dyke: Structures, Landscapes and Hegemony in 8<sup>th</sup>-Century Britain* to include fresh discoveries and insights. The walk was shared online via a series of videos & blog by Professor Ray, see [OffaProf \(@digitself4\) / Twitter](#)

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