

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee
held at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High Street,
Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 3rd March, 2025 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor C. McFarling (Chair) (Forest of Dean District Council)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors E. Bryn and D. Rooke

Gloucestershire County Council

County Councillor T. Hale

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillor D. Wheeler

Town / Parish Community Councils (with voting powers)

Gloucestershire Association of Parish / Town Councils – Mr. C Evers
One Voice Wales – Councillor L. Parker

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire – Mr. B. Nash
National Farmers Union - Mr. M. Price

Technical Advice Officers

National Landscape Manager – Mr. A. Blake
Monmouthshire County Council - Mr. R. Williams
Gloucestershire County Council – Mr. A. Deb

Others present:

Councillor R. Hatton (Monmouth Town Council)
Councillor S. Cox (Coleford Town Council)
Councillor A. McDermid (Forest of Dean District Council)

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: S. Garratt, A. Webb and G. Morgan

1. Declarations of Interest

None received.

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2. Public Question Time

None received.

3. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4th November 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. JAC Membership Review Report

We received a report regarding recommendations from the Task and Finish Group to review co-opted membership and vacancies on the Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- There are a number of vacancies that have emerged in the co-opted membership of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and some of the representative bodies have been dissolved.
- The Task and Finish Group established by the JAC to review co-opted membership recommends a number of changes to representation of co-opted members.
- Of the 8 Co-opted seats with voting powers, changes are proposed to the three Voluntary Conservation Sector representatives, moving from three 'county reps' to one with national experience and two local representatives for the English & Welsh sides respectively. These will be recruited through an open nomination recruitment process.
- Of the Co-opted Members without Voting Powers, changes are proposed to invite a new representative for the River Wye and replace one vacant seat with a new Arts sector representative. Recent non-attendance by both Tourism and Recreation representatives will also be addressed. These will all be recruited through an open nomination recruitment process.
- Future JAC meetings could be managed as hybrid meetings which may encourage a broader attendance, as the Forest of Dean District Council Chamber has that facility.
- The Management Plan Review was identified as good opportunity to enable wider engagement with different sectors and communities that should have an interest in the National Landscape, such as young people and visitors from a diversity of backgrounds.

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- The Task & Finish Group did not identify any changes that necessitated amendment of the 'Agreement as to the establishment and functions of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee'.
- The Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP) has also reviewed its Terms of Reference.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- As part of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) Membership review, the National Landscapes Manager would explore bringing students onto the JAC in a non-voting capacity.
- Future hybrid meetings of the JAC will likely improve attendance allowing Committee members to join the meeting either in person or remotely. The timing of JAC meetings could also be investigated as a means of improving attendance.
- Farming Wildlife Groups within the Herefordshire, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire regions will be approached with a view to joining the JAC.

We resolved:

- (i) to adopt the recommendations from the Task and Finish Group to amend the current co-opted membership and seek to fill vacancies on the Joint Advisory Committee.
- (ii) to agree to host future meetings of the Joint Advisory Committee at the Forest of Dean District Council Chamber as hybrid meetings to facilitate broader attendance.

5. Wye Valley National Landscape DRAFT Work Programme 2025-26

We received a report regarding the proposed outline work plan for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team during the forthcoming financial year, subject to confirmation of funding with Defra, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The proposed Work Programme for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team for 2025/2026 is presented in draft form as budgets for the National Landscape have yet to be confirmed. The Programme is ambitious but dependent on adequate funding and resources being available.
- A new National Landscape Core Funding agreement is awaited from Defra with allocations currently unconfirmed, part from continuation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Officer post.

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- Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have confirmed provisional National Landscape allocations for 2025/26 and 2026/27 subject to the final approval of the Welsh Government Budget in late March 2025.
- Consequently, only a draft Work Programme can be presented.
- Priorities include: the potential expansion of the farming support role, with the continuation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Officer post and the Wye Adapt to Climate Change? Programme, potentially augmented by a similar role on the Welsh side; on-going Planning advice shared jointly with the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership; the focus on Nature & Climate outcomes through the promotion and administration of Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme and Sustainable Development Fund (SDF); the on-going activities and achievements of the Volunteers and Young Adventurers led by the Community Links Officer; the development of Nature Recovery Plan and publication of the remaining Species Action Plans by the Development Officer and Nature Recovery Officer; the delivery of the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects; the review of the AONB Management Plan and publication of the Public Consultation Draft Plan; the celebratory activities for the Wye Valley Walk's 50th anniversary; and continuing a range of existing activities and projects, including continuation of the control of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and advancing the Lower Wye Tracks & Trails Action Plan, led by the Projects Officer; while retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.
- The draft Wye Valley National Landscape Team core budget for 2025/26 as presented to the Steering Group is £504,028 and additional funding programmes, grants and match funding is anticipated to exceed £1,000,000 levered into the National Landscape during the year.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Outcomes arising from decisions made by the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) will be monitored and presented in future reports to the JAC outlining achievements.
- A running conversation will be maintained with Ministers regarding our position within the upcoming Local Government Reorganisation, which is anticipated to commence in the coming years.
- With regard to the Position Statements on Tranquillity, Setting and Cultural Capital, the National Landscape Manager will identify timescales and aim to present a draft report to the JAC at the November 2025 meeting.

We resolved to endorse the draft Wye Valley National Landscape Team Work Programme for 2025/2026.

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6. Grants update report

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

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Defra has not advised whether the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme in England will be renewed for 2025/26, therefore this is currently the last year of FiPL grant allocation.
- The FiPL Assessment Panel had previously approved grants utilising the full amount available. However, due to a number of project variations and unspent grants returned some additional applications have been accepted before the end of the financial year.
- The Welsh Government Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) has fully committed the £100,000 available for 2024/25.
- Welsh Government has provisionally allocated £95,000 for the SDF in 2025/6 and 2026/7, subject to the Spending Review and Budget settlement.
- The SDF Guidance has been updated requiring 60% of funds to be allocated towards nature and climate outcomes. The membership of the SDF Panel therefore needs to be modified accordingly.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Fund hosted by the Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) remains closed for applications while opportunities to grow the Fund are sought. HCF has revised its administration fees.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question regarding Cleddon Bog, it was noted that grazing on the site is helping to improve its condition.

We resolved:

- (i) to endorse the recent allocations of grants under the FiPL programme, SDF and HCF National Landscape Fund.
- (ii) to note the revised Guidelines for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) from Welsh Government and the necessity to amend the membership of the SDF Assessment Panel in line with the new Guidance.

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7. England Land Use Consultation

We received a report regarding the Government's 12 week consultation on a Land Use Framework for England.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Defra has published a 12 week consultation on a Land Use Framework until 25th April 2025.
- The consultation invites stakeholders to give their views on 24 questions covering the type and scale of land use change needed to deliver on food production, nature recovery, climate resilience, the rural economy and housing.
- Question 10 specifically references Protected Landscapes, primarily in the context of 'making space for nature'.
- Members and respective organisations are encouraged to engage in the Consultation.
- The National Landscape Manager will collate a response on behalf of the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership and will welcome input, debate and collaboration on the consultation.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) members were asked to submit their ideas to the National Landscape Manager who will incorporate them into the response from the Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee.

We noted the report.

8. National Landscapes & National Parks update

We received a report regarding activity nationally relating to National Landscapes in England and Wales.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Defra has published 'Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes'. The National Landscapes Association has also produced 'Guidance for Local Planning Authorities' on applying the strengthened duty.
- Defra has yet to confirm the funding allocations for National Landscapes, apart from continuation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) officer posts.

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- Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have confirmed provisional National Landscape allocations for 2025/26 and 2026/27 subject to final approval of Welsh Government Budget in late March 2025.
- Welsh Government has published 'Good Practice Guidance: Planning for the Conservation and Enhancement of Dark Skies'. This also launched Wales Dark Skies Week.
- Plans are progressing for Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales Seminar at Caer Llan, Lydart on 30th April and 1st May 2025.
- The National Landscapes Association published its Five Year Strategy.
- The National Landscapes Association hosted a Lead Officers Meeting in Birmingham in mid-February 2025, focusing on the top policy and advocacy priorities for 2025/26.
- The National Landscapes Annual Conference will be 8th – 10th July 2025 at Winchester University, on the topic of 'Are National Landscapes "Fit for the Future?"'

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- A recent Planning Appeal ruling in the Forest of Dean also referenced the strengthened duty, with the Planning Inspector stating "Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 as amended (the Act) requires that I seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB." Consequently, the appeal was dismissed due to harmful effects on the character and appearance of the area, including the Wye Valley National Landscape.
- Wales Dark skies week took place between 21st February and 2nd March 2025.
- Investment in dark skies monitors was being undertaken for use by local groups.

We noted the report.

9. River Wye update

We received a report regarding the latest activities to improve water quality, reduce excess nutrients and help restore the River Wye.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Lead partners from the Wye Catchment Partnership and Wye Nutrient Management Board met with Ministers from Defra and Welsh Government and local MPs in December 2024 to discuss the situation in the catchment.

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- The chairs of the Wye Catchment Partnership and Wye Nutrient Management Board subsequently wrote to the Ministers from which further cross-border discussion has been taking place.
- Monmouth MP Catherine Fookes opened a debate in Westminster Hall in January 2025 on 'water quality in rivers, lakes and seas'.
- Lancaster University continues to build on its RePhoKus research, with further studies on Phosphorus and wider nutrient loading in the Wye as one of four cross-border catchments in the joint Horizon Europe NEW-Harmonica project.
- Environment Agency (EA) is progressing with drafting the Wye Diffuse Water Pollution Plan (DWPP), as part of the Nutrient Management Plan for England and Welsh Government is contributing with funding for the evidence base for the Welsh Nutrient Management Plan.
- More farm-based and in-field research is needed to make technical advances and significant nutrient reductions in the catchment, and particularly in specific sub catchments.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Team continues to support the Wye Catchment Partnership and manage partnership projects and collaborative initiatives including through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme, Wye Adapt to Climate Change?, Landscape Enhancement Initiatives (LEI) projects and Wyescapes Landscape Recovery to support farmers and land-managers in and around the National Landscape.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Lancaster University has continued to build on its RePhoKus research, on Phosphorus loading in the Wye, through the joint Horizon Europe NEW Harmonica project. The project concludes at the end of the 2025, but preliminary findings indicate that massive reductions, and even cessations, of nutrient inputs are required to restore the Wye. Hence, this is not just a farming problem but a food system problem.
- Dr. Jane Pearce has developed an organic phosphate removal material that acts like a sponge and absorbs harmful chemicals from rivers.

We noted the report.

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

We received a report regarding the activity of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team and other partners relating to:

- Wye Bridge update.

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- Management Plan Review - Winter seminar, 19th March 2025 held in Symonds Yat.
- National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects/awards.
- Lower Wye Tracks & Trails Strategy & Steering Group.
- Wye Valley Walk – Route Guide launch, Ross-on-Wye, 2nd April 2025.
- Wye Adapt to Climate Change project:
 - Farm visits
 - CAN
- Marches Real Food & Farming Convergence, Monmouthshire 3rd-4th October 2025.
- Review of Natural Flood Management in Wales: Final Report.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Appropriate signage was required regarding the closure of Wye Bridge to ensure that heavy goods vehicles are warned well advance of the closure. The Chair stated that he would liaise with Gloucestershire County Council's Highways Department regarding this matter.
- Further monitoring of projects would be undertaken to establish progress being achieved.

We noted the report.

11. Next Meetings

Monday 7th July 2025 at 2.00pm.

Monday 3rd November 2025 at 2.00pm.

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

The meeting ended at 4.20 pm.