

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 & Hybrid on Microsoft Teams on Monday, 7th July, 2025 at 2.00 pm**

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

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors E. Bryn, S. Garratt, D. Rooke and A. Webb

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillor D. Wheeler

Town / Parish Community Councils (with voting powers)

One Voice Wales – Councillor L. Parker
HALC – Councillor B. Jones

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

M. Price

Technical Advice Officers

National Landscape Manager – Mr. A. Blake
Monmouthshire County Council - Mrs. W. Barnard
Gloucestershire County Council – Mr. A. Deb
Monmouthshire County Council – Ms. C. Bosley

Others present:

Councillor R. Hatton (Monmouth Town Council)
Councillor M. Getgood (Coleford Town Council)

APOLOGIES:

Councillors B. Durkin, A. Lee and M. Sweeney

1. Election of Chair.

Councillor Chris McFarling was elected as Chair (nominated by Councillor David Wheeler, seconded by County Councillor Emma Bryn).

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair.

County Councillor Ann Webb was appointed as Vice Chair (nominated by County Councillor Steven Garratt with multiple seconders).

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3. Declarations of Interest.

None received.

4. Public Questions:

A question was received from a member of the public, Jonty Pearce: *What measures is the Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee putting in place to ensure that the beauty and biodiversity of the National Landscape are not compromised?*

The following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee objected to the allocation of the site Dixon Rd (HA4 Leasbrook) in the deposit plan consultation draft in December 2024 and that was based on its setting being so close to the national landscape boundary.
- The review of the Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) is due to go to Monmouthshire County Council scrutiny in September followed by Full Council in October. If passed by full Council the deposit plan will be submitted to Welsh Government.
- Monmouthshire County Council is waiting for a new ecological report from the consultants, which forms part of the evidence of the for the Habitats Regulation Assessment. Examination in public would take place in the winter 2025 or spring 2026, when there will be further opportunity to comment and submit evidence.
- All Council local development plans have to increase the number of allocations for houses.
- Wye Valley National Landscape Team has a shared Planning Officer, who has been working in liaison with Officers in Monmouthshire County Council.
- In answer to a question about the extent of Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee's influence, it was noted that there is legislation and statements in Planning Policy Wales which relate to the protection of the National Landscape plus policies written within the LDP itself. Interpretation by Officers and the Committee helps remind the relevant authorities of those obligations and public policy.
- Regarding the variation in policy between England and Wales, a consistent approach should be applied both sides of the national boundary.

It was agreed it would be more appropriate to come back with a further, fuller report at the next meeting in November when the ecological reports have been received.

5. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting - 3rd March 2025.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 3rd March 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

5.1. Matters arising: JAC Membership Review - verbal update.

The two vacancies for representatives of Gloucestershire County Council remain unfilled.

There has been some progress in distributing requests for new members and to new organisations, but it is still necessary to initiate open public recruitment, the details for which are being finalised.

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It is hoped that the move to hybrid meetings will encourage and enable better attendance going forward.

6. Wye Valley National Landscape Annual Report 2024/25.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Annual Report for 2024/25 was received with thanks. The report included a comprehensive record of progress against the work programme. In doing so, we noted:

- The creation and development of the Ffermio Bro programme on the Welsh side and that FiPL, the Farming in Protected Landscapes funding on the English side, was in its fourth year.
- There was some turnover of staff, which created a little delay in some projects, but it has been possible to mitigate the impact and successfully recruit new staff.

Final budget figures will be presented at the next meeting in November.

Following presentation of the report, questions were invited from Committee Members:

- Referring to invasive species and the interventions to combat them, a Committee Member was disappointed to read that only 40% of sites showed a decrease in abundance of Japanese knotweed where glyphosate has been injected or sprayed and queried plans to tackle such species. It was responded that this monitoring outcomes is based on a subjective assessment by the contractors on site and more objective monitoring would be preferred. The team will be checking whether there are anomalies in the methodology and if different contractors are assessing it differently. Secondly, the team will be checking that the overall programme is effective enough. It was noted that the number of sites is increasing which may be skewing the statistics.
- An update on the collapse of the footpath on Wyesham side of the Wye Valley Walk and any repair plans was requested. It was responded that a contractor is being engaged to assess the previous work with a view to progressing repairs if feasible and in discussion with Monmouthshire Rights of Way Team. A further section at the bottom end of the showground is of concern which could involve major disruption and diversion. The consultant will consider this stretch too. Updates will be provided on both sections of the footpath. It was noted that a stile is broken and needs repair. Concern was also raised about the roadside section of the Wye Valley Walk between Redbrook and Monmouth.
- It was queried what the future options for Redbrook Bridge are. It was responded that ten years ago it was estimated that approximately £2M would be required to refurbish the bridge which could be inflated to as much as £5M at the current time. Gloucestershire County Council has been contacted and advised that there is some capital money this year to assist progressing the schemes. Restoration of the Wireworks Bridge involved major, costly engineering works so it is a question of securing adequate resources. Lydbrook Bridge also needs approximately £2M spent on it.
- A Committee Member queried the section of the report referring to *Audit and repair and/or replace Overlooking the Wye infrastructure &/or design & install new as appropriate*. It was confirmed that the audit was initiated and a proposal submitted to Swansea University as an undergraduate project to it, but no students came forward to deliver the project. This is still a job that needs to be completed.

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- A Committee Member was happy to note that 130 young people have engaged in activities and 60% of those children had special educational needs.

The Team was thanked for its work over the year.

7. Species Action Plan report.

The Species Action Plan was received. The purpose being to present members with the fourth of the 5 National Landscape Species Action Plans, for Woodland Butterfly Assemblage, under the Colchester Declaration.

It was noted that such action plans are a key focus of the team's work and at the office there is a mural on the storage container depicting the 5 species.

- A Member referred to muntjac deer and their effect on the woodland butterfly assemblage and questioned if there has been any action to tackle them in the Forest of Dean. It was explained that muntjac and other deer are culled. Muntjac deer, as an invasive species, don't have a closed season. Stalkers hunt them so are controlled to an extent, but they are small and difficult to shoot. The impact of their browsing includes a loss of understory, which affects the insect population and consequently insectivorous birds in the area such as nightingales, pied and spotted flycatchers, wood warblers etc. It was agreed that Forestry England and NRW should be requested to provide numbers of muntjac culled over the past 12 months.
- A Member suggested protecting patches of understory with fencing to provide a safe haven for insects.
- A Member asked if local records of butterfly sightings can be extracted from national records and queried where sightings can be logged. It was confirmed that there are apps available to record sightings, details to be provided. The Chair suggested participating in the Garden Butterfly Survey, organised by Butterfly Conservation. More in-depth surveying includes butterfly transects recording butterflies seen on a specific stretch on a fortnightly basis throughout the season.

The JAC endorsed the Woodland Butterfly Assemblage Species Action Plan and welcomed the on-going work on the preparation of the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan and the final Species Action Plan.

7.1. Woodland Butterfly Assemblage Action Plan.

8. Grant Funds and Panel updates.

We received an update on the 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.

- FiPL has been extended for another (5th) year. A member of staff left because of uncertainty about the continuation of the funding. The vacancy has been

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successfully filled and the first panel meeting has taken place at which £62,000 was allocated to various farming grants.

- The criteria for the Sustainable Development Fund have changed this year. The new panel met recently and allocated £46,000 of the £95,000 available. The new panel membership is listed in the report.
- The Ffermio Bro programme has started. A new officer has been recruited.
- The Herefordshire Community Foundation Fund is closed waiting for funds to grow. A Member queried how much interest is being made on £67,000 and was informed that it is managed through the Herefordshire Community Foundation, and interest is in the region of 3 or 4% from which management fees are taken. Any ideas on augmenting the funds are always welcomed.

The Joint Advisory Committee:

- Welcomed the new members and Local Assessment Panel for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Ffermio Bro programmes, and the new FiPL and Ffermio Bro Officers; and
- Endorsed the recent allocations of FiPL and SDF grants.

9. Partnership Study Tour.

We received the date and outline programme for the Annual National Landscape Partnership Study Tour. In doing so, it was noted:

- It is proposed to visit the middle section of the National Landscape, between Monmouth and Ross to focus on the new National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative project.
- The programme is still being developed but could incorporate sites such as Kerne Bridge to see canoeing, recreation and river issues; Goodrich Castle and café to look at the English Heritage site and management of the castle, and other projects in the area.
- Details will be distributed by e mail to all Members plus the clerks to town, parish and community councils.

The JAC:

- Noted the date of Friday 26th September 2025 for the Study Tour, with a focus on the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative and other projects between Ross and Monmouth: and
- Encouraged a good attendance and invited representatives from our neighbouring Shropshire Hills and Malvern Hills National Landscape Partnerships and the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority and other appropriate partners.

10. River Wye update.

The Joint Advisory Committee received a report for information to advise members of the latest activities to help restore the River Wye. In doing so the following points were noted:

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- There's £1m from the government following ministerial meetings. Details of the research brief to be managed by DEFRA and co-produced by local stakeholders including ourselves via the Wye Catchment Partnership.
- There is anecdotal evidence that Ranunculus is recovering, and a Big Ranunculus Watch has been launched to gather evidence on its progress. A drone survey may be commissioned to evaluate the presence and the abundance of Ranunculus.
- There has been an announcement from Defra about amendments to the farming rules for water to tighten up and consolidate the regulation and effective management of farming water management.
- The team is working with the Severn Vale Catchment Partnership (the part of the Forest of Dean that drains into the Severn) to draw up a strategy and action plan for the rivers and tributaries in the Forest of Dean that flow into the Wye. This work will be useful for future projects on the tributaries that flow into the Wye, such as a Lottery Landscapes Connection bid..
- Work continues with FiPL and Ffermio Bro and we continue to work in the National Landscape on collaborations in terms of water management and land use.

Members raised the following points:

- In the Herefordshire local plan, a case on the inclusion of animal by-products as controlled waste was heard by a judge and deemed to be sound. This means that chicken manure must be regarded as a controlled waste as a stricter means to protect the environment. Further clarity is needed to define what this means for the whole sector e.g. what animal byproducts are waste and not.
- Regarding the control of pollution regulation which looks at how farmers apply nutrients to the land, there is legislation and the Secretary of State's guidance which has changed. The Environment Agency enforces where appropriate in England. If nutrients are being applied, they should be based on the what the crops need and should be applied at the right time. Further guidance is awaited.
- We considered the state of the water table under the National Landscape the aquifers under the Forest of Dean during the current heat waves. Licences to abstract water could be withdrawn, particularly from the River Wye. The main reason for having a licenced abstraction is so that the River Wye can be maintained at a level where it, and the biodiversity in it, can survive. If the flow rate and volume goes down, it heats up and is prone to algal blooms and toxicity. The River is currently low and it was urged that abstraction licences should be monitored and withdrawn as needed.

11. National Updates.

We received a report for information to advise members of activity relating to National Landscapes in England and Wales. In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The Campaign for National Parks has been promoting a judicial review of a housing development application in relation to High Weald National Landscape. Further clarification will be sought on the outcome.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape hosted a very successful Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales Seminar at the end of April and beginning of May, held at the spectacular location of Caer Llan. The event was used for the ministerial launch of the Ffermio Bro.

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- DEFRA has called for evidence on green finance, and how to involve the business sector in funding more environmental work. The National Landscapes Association is gathering evidence accordingly. DEFRA had a cut made in the recent spending review and the implications on funding are being worked through.

12. Dark Skies.

We received a report for information to update members on current policies and projects relating to Dark Skies and light pollution. In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The Wales Dark Skies project influenced planning guidance published by Welsh Government which is generating some good outputs. There has also been a seminar on what makes a good external lighting plan. The project has another two years of funding to continue this work on the Welsh side and it is hoped to complement similar work in Herefordshire.
- A Member advocating that lighting is better considered asked what is being done to target housing within the AONB and to raise awareness of poor lighting choices. It was responded that it is difficult to intervene in time to tell people when their lighting choices could be improved. Following a light pollution survey of some commercial and farming properties in Wales, limited funding allowed retrofit lighting at Llandogo Village Hall and Trellech Primary School. It was agreed that the message, and opportunities, needs to be better communicated.
- The Green Infrastructure Manager commended the Welsh Government's *Dark skies: planning guidance* as an excellent document. Leaflets are available that can be targeted towards communities and others to follow. There are opportunities to work collaboratively to get the message out.

13. Partner and National Landscape Team progress reports and updates.

We received a report for information to advise members of activity of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team and other partners. The amount of work carried out was acknowledged. In receiving the report, the following points were noted:

- The Joint Advisory Committee was informed of the passing of Phil Cutter, former Chair of JAC for several years. He had previously been Chair of the Overlooking the Wye Landscape Partnership Scheme. The Committee remembered Phil with great fondness.
- Ruth Waycott, AONB Information Officer is leading walks down the whole length of the Wye Valley Walk in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary. The walks started at Plynlimon.
- The JAC was informed of a bid by Forest of Dean District Council to be designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve with a view to reconnect people with nature, wildlife and for sustainable development. The nomination form must be completed by September 2026. It was agreed to consider the application further at the next meeting in November.

14. Date of next meetings:

The meeting ended at 4.18 pm