

## **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, 3rd November, 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 A. Webb

#### **Gloucestershire County Council**

County Councillor B. Hoyland and G. Moseley

#### **Herefordshire Council**

Councillor S. Cole

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

Councillor D. Wheeler

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

Herefordshire of Local Councils – Councillor B. Jones

One Voice Wales – Councillor L. Parker

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

Local Wildlife Trusts – Dr. J. Hynes

Ms. H. O’Kane – Local Tourism Sector

### **Technical Advice Officers**

National Landscape Manager – Mr. A. Blake

National Landscape Team – Ms. C. Laidlaw

National Landscape Team – Mr. N. Critchley

National Landscape Team – Mr. C. Davies

Monmouthshire County Council - Mr. R. Williams

Gloucestershire County Council – Mr. A. Deb

Forest of Dean District Council – Alistair Chapman

### **Others present:**

Councillor R. Hatton (Monmouth Town Council)

Councillor M. Getgood (Coleford Town Council)

Mr. J. Pearce – Member of the Public

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### **APOLOGIES:**

Councillors: Dale Rooke, E. O'Driscoll, B. Durkin, M. Price and A. Lee, Mr. M. Price, Ms. C. Bosley, Mr. I. Williams, Mr. M. Quine

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

None received.

#### **2. Public Questions**

We received the following question from Jonty Pearce:

'Monmouthshire County Council has approved a controversial plan to build 270 houses at Dixon Road in Monmouth, within the setting of the Wye Valley National Landscape. The decision passed by the narrowest margin—23 votes for and 23 against—only succeeding due to the chairman's casting vote. The council had two choices to build houses in Monmouth but have chosen the most sensitive and ecologically damaging site, despite having alternative locations available.

The development poses two threats to the Wye Valley National Landscape. Firstly, it will be highly visible from iconic viewpoints such as the Kymin, Naval Temple, Little Doward Hill Fort, and parts of Offa's Dyke National Path, creating a significant visual intrusion for visitors. Secondly, it will destroy a vital foraging area used by 13 of the 15 bat species found in Wales, including the rare greater horseshoe bat. This site supports more bat species than the entire county of Pembrokeshire and lies close to Newton Court, a designated SSSI maternity roost.

Despite strong objections from the Wye Valley National Landscape Team, nearly 950 residents and organizations during the RLDP consultation, Monmouthshire County Council dismissed these concerns with a standard "no change needed" response. Notably, while the plan includes a green wedge for the Brecon Beacons National Park, no such protection was offered for the Wye Valley, even though both designations carry equal legal weight. Cadw also objected, citing the development's proximity to scheduled monuments and the Dixon Conservation Area, warning of unacceptable harm to these heritage assets.'

In response to the public question, the Joint Advisory Committee Chair confirmed that the Wye Valley National Landscape Team has opposed the allocation at every stage

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and will continue to do so during the upcoming public inquiry. However, writing to Welsh Ministers is unlikely to influence the outcome, as they typically refrain from intervening in formal planning processes. The National Landscape Team plans to participate actively in the examination by submitting hearing statements, attending hearings, and negotiating statements of common ground with Monmouthshire County Council to challenge the allocation.

### **3. Confirmation of Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

During the discussion on matters arising, concern was raised regarding the collapsed footpath on the Wyesham river side of the Wye Valley Walk and also the dangerous roadside section between Redbrook and Monmouth was highlighted. A question was asked if there had been any progress from Monmouthshire County Council in providing a proper footpath for that section of the Wye Valley Walk. The response confirmed that the issue remains unresolved. While communication lines with Monmouthshire County Council are open, officers are not currently aware of any plans to install a pavement for the footpath. It was agreed that this matter should be brought to the Council's attention again, given the significant safety risk to walkers. It was noted that the section is hazardous because fast-moving vehicles encounter walkers with no safe space to walk, creating a serious accident risk.

With regard to the Overlooking the Wye Valley infrastructure, it was confirmed that this work has not progressed and remains on the National Landscapes Team's schedule. Although a small budget is available and can be carried forward, the delay is due to a lack of officer time rather than funding. The audit will likely not happen in the current financial year but may be scheduled for the next. In the meantime, monitoring is taking place to ensure safety, particularly at high-risk sites such as the Wye Valley Walk through Piercefield, where a recent landslip near the Alcove viewpoint has been addressed. The team also acknowledged that some interpretation boards are now illegible after 15 years and will need replacing or redesigning as part of a larger maintenance project.

### **Dixon Housing proposed site response**

The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) discussed alternative sites to the Dixon Road development in Monmouth. It was noted that the Council's landscape sensitivity and capacity study rated Dixon Road as having medium to high sensitivity to development. While other potential sites were assessed, an alternative candidate site on Wonastow Road was identified. This site is adjacent to existing developments and it was considered that it could accommodate 175 houses plus two hectares of employment land and lies on a national cycle route. It is largely screened from the Wye Valley by natural landforms and is relatively flat, making visual mitigation easier. Bat surveys showed significant differences. Dixon Road recorded 206 greater horseshoe bat passes

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in two weeks, compared to just six at Wonastow Road, indicating a far less ecological impact on the SSSI.

However, it was noted that the Wonastow Road site poses flooding concerns, as it is accessed via Watery Lane or Wonastow Road which are both prone to flooding. This has worsened with recent housing developments. This highlights that all sites have trade-offs. The JAC agreed that these issues will be examined during the public inquiry, where the Inspector will weigh environmental, biodiversity, and practical considerations before making a decision.

#### **Joint Advisory Committee Review**

The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is currently reviewing several vacant seats and working to recruit new members. Efforts have been made to approach various organizations for nominees, but the response so far has been disappointing. Two organizations have been contacted: one attempted to find new members but was unsuccessful, and the other has yet to respond. Initially, these were considered the easier options, with plans to expand outreach to a broader range of organizations afterward. However, the process has proven more challenging than expected.

Despite these challenges, efforts will continue to be made to strengthen and expand the membership of the Joint Advisory Committee. Progress is unlikely before the next scheduled meeting in March 2026. Members were encouraged to suggest potential candidates or contacts who might be suitable for the vacant roles.

#### **4. Forest of Dean Biosphere Initiative**

We received a report seeking support for the application to have the Forest of Dean designated as a UNESCO Biosphere.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- A partnership led by the Forest of Dean District Council (FoDDC) and the Forest Economic Partnership is making an application to UNESCO for the Forest of Dean to be designated a UNESCO Biosphere.
- The proposal is for the designation to cover the FoDDC administrative area, including the Wye Valley National Landscape within the Forest of Dean District.
- The proposal to date has received candidate status from the UK Man and Biosphere Committee.
- Biospheres overlap or are integrated into a number of National Landscapes in the UK, for example, North Devon Coast, Isle of Wight, Brighton and the South Downs.

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- The draft application will be made in April 2026 with final submission to UNESCO in September 2026 and a letter of support is requested from the Wye Valley National Landscape to be included in the application submission.

The Forest of Dean District Council is preparing an application to UNESCO to designate the Forest of Dean as a Biosphere Reserve. This initiative aims to reconcile nature conservation with sustainable use, enhance biodiversity, promote education and research, and foster a cultural shift toward living harmoniously with nature. The UK is among the most nature-depleted countries globally, so this designation is seen as a significant step toward reversing that trend.

The biosphere designation will not introduce new legislation but will act as an umbrella framework to align existing efforts and plans. It will include three zones:

- **Core Zone:** Areas with statutory protection (e.g., SSSIs and SACs).
- **Care Zone:** Buffer areas supporting conservation and public access.
- **Transition Zone:** The wider Forest of Dean administrative area promoting sustainable development.

The application process involves submitting a formal bid by September next year, with preparatory work completed by April 2026. The Forest of Dean is already recognized as a candidate site and is supported by the UK Man and Biosphere Committee, with North Devon Biosphere acting as a critical friend. The initiative will complement, not replace, the Wye Valley National Landscape, and both will work in partnership.

It is anticipated that the Forest of Dean Biosphere will be established before Local Government Reorganisation takes place in England.

We resolved:

- (i) To formally endorse and support the Forest of Dean Biosphere initiative.
- (ii) To send a letter of support for a Forest of Dean Biosphere to the Forest of Dean District Council for inclusion in the UNESCO application.
- (iii) To nominate Andrew Blake, Wye Valley National Landscape Manager, to be the point of contact to act as the liaison between the Joint Advisory Committee and the Forest of Dean Biosphere initiative.

#### **5. Management Plan Review**

We received a report regarding the revised programme for the preparation and publication of the Wye Valley National Landscape / AONB Management Plan 2026-2031.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

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- The existing Wye Valley AONB Management Plan (2021-2026) needs to be reviewed, under the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act Section 89, by the end of 2026.
- The Management Plan review programme was endorsed in November 2024.
- There has been some slight slippage in the review programme but the deadline remains unchanged in the revised timetable.
- The proposed Vision for the new Wye Valley National Landscape / AONB Management Plan is outlined in the report and comments are welcome before consolidation into the Public Consultation Draft version.

The review of the Wye Valley National Landscape Management Plan is progressing, though there has been some slippage in the original timetable. A draft version is expected to go out for public consultation early in the new year. The proposed new 20-year vision for the area, intended for inclusion in the next five-year management plan, is outlined in the report with the previous vision from 2009 shown for comparison. The updated vision has been simplified without losing its core meaning, and feedback is welcomed before the consultation document is finalised.

The revised timetable for the review is detailed within the report. The next critical step is completing the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which depends on the draft management plan being ready for consultation. Despite delays, the Wye Valley National Landscape Team anticipates delivering the final management plan by this time next year. To ensure robust public engagement, the Joint Advisory Committee emphasized adherence to the Gunning Principles, which require consultation at a formative stage, provision of sufficient information, adequate time for responses, and conscientious consideration of feedback.

A winter seminar, likely to be held in late January or early February 2026, will coincide with the consultation period and serve as an open event for stakeholders to discuss the plan in depth. Additional public-facing activities are being considered as well as collaboration with local groups to maximize participation. The aim is to achieve broad engagement and avoid minimal turnout, ensuring the consultation process is meaningful and inclusive.

We resolved to endorse the revised programme for the review and publication of the AONB Management Plan 2026-2031.

#### **6. Annual report 2024/25 figures and future Local Authority contributions**

We received a report regarding the financial summary for 2024/25 to accompany the previously presented Wye Valley National Landscape Annual Report 2024/25 and request the existing contributions from the four constituent local authorities are

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continued and contained in the new Memorandum of Understanding between the four local authorities.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The summary financial report outlines the delivery of the Work Programme for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team during 2024/25.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is intended to give medium term security and commitment to the continued effective operation, management and governance of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team, with the next MoU proposed to run between 2026-2029.
- The contributions from the local authorities form the foundation to the Wye Valley National Landscape budgets which lever in and match-fund various allocations and grants.
- The National Landscape Team turnover in 2024/25 was £1,597,971 resulting in the leverage of over £32 for every £1 of local authority contribution.

The discussion centred on how funding is managed across different areas and projects. Multiple pots of money from various sources are pooled together, offering some flexibility in spending. However, there are restrictions. Funds allocated for England cannot be spent in Wales and vice versa. Each grant comes with its own criteria, making administration complex. Core contributions go toward revenue, while other funds are designated for capital projects. Staff salaries and operational costs are also covered from these funds.

A significant portion of expenditure relates to Farming and Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme which, accounted for nearly half of last year's spending. Differences between income and expenditure often arise because certain posts are funded from these allocations. Managing these funds requires considerable administrative effort due to the complexity of rules and processes.

Infrastructure projects, such as bridge repairs were noted. Support is being provided to Gloucestershire County Council with preliminary investigations for Redbrook and Lydbrook bridges, though securing funding remains challenging given the high costs involved. Other bridges, such as Foy Bridge, have recently closed due to structural issues, highlighting the urgency of maintenance.

Concerns were raised about stagnant core funding from local authorities, which has not increased for many years. A flat rate is proposed for the next three years, for example, Forest of Dean District Council will continue contributing £5,826 annually. It was suggested that a 5–10% increase in core funding be sought to strengthen this vital funding, which currently leverages 32 times its value in additional income. This increase would demonstrate a stronger commitment to sustaining essential projects and infrastructure.

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We resolved:

- (i) To welcome the Annual Report figures for 2024/25.
- (ii) To request the constituent local authorities commit to the agreed financial contributions and a renewed Memorandum of Understanding for 2026-2029.
- (iii) The Chair will write to the constituent local authorities asking for consideration to be given to increasing core funding by 5 - 10%.

#### **7. NLHF Landscape Connections Expression of Interest**

We received a report seeking members' support for the submission of an Expression of Interest to the National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Connections programme.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Landscape Connections is a competitive grant programme open to National Landscapes and National Parks provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).
- Projects can be up to 10 years (with 2 years development plus 8 years delivery) and up to a maximum of £10million.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Team intends to submit an Expression of Interest for a project that would work with farmers and landowners and local communities to deliver transformative change across (sub)catchments flowing directly into the Wye Valley National Landscape.
- The proposal has been discussed with various partners at the Wye Catchment Partnership, Farm Herefordshire, The Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence, Herefordshire Council Natural Environment Team, Woodland Trust, Wye & Usk Foundation and Wyescapes Project Board.
- If the Expression of Interest is successful the Development Phase would refine the project area and outputs.
- The project name of 'Ergyng Landscape Connections' is proposed, as the project area aligns with the ancient kingdom of Ergyng, covering most of the catchments in the lower Wye Valley.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team is preparing an expression of interest for the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Landscape Connections programme. This competitive scheme is open to National Parks and National Landscapes, with around 20 projects expected to be funded over the next decade. The Team's proposal focuses on improving the health of the River Wye by targeting its tributaries, farming practices, and land use, while also strengthening local community connections to these landscapes.



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Collaboration with partners such as the Wye and Usk Foundation, the Marches Food and Farming Convention, and the Herefordshire Rural Hub has shaped the proposal.

If accepted, the project will enter a two-year development phase followed by an eight-year delivery programme. The plan excludes the River Monnow catchment because of its size and location outside the designated landscape, though the Team intends to work closely with existing projects there to share best practices. The initiative will also complement other programmes like Wyescapes and avoid duplication of efforts.

This project could secure up to £10 million in funding and run until 2037.

The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) supported the submission of the expression of interest. The JAC also emphasized the importance of collaboration with groups addressing issues in the Monnow catchment, given its significant impact on the Wye's water quality.

We resolved to endorse the preparation and submission by the Wye Valley National Landscape Team of an Expression of Interest to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Landscape Connections programme.

#### **8. Grant Funds and Panels update**

We received a report updating members on the progress of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Ffermio Bro programmes, 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:

- The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Local Assessment Panel has recently approved grants totalling nearly £150,000 for 13 projects, with over £251,000 allocated so far in 2025/26 on behalf of DEFRA and 26% remaining.
- The Ffermio Bro Assessment Panel met for the first time and approved 4 grants for £33,262 on behalf of Rural Payments Wales, with 65% remaining.
- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Assessment Panel recently approved 3 projects giving a total of £67,210 granted to date on behalf of Welsh Government with 29% remaining.
- The Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley National Landscape Fund is currently closed for applications while opportunities to grow the Fund are sought.
- The continuation of FIPL grant allocation in 2026/27 is currently unknown and is dependent on the outcome of the Budget and subsequent DEFRA settlement.

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The Joint Advisory Committee discussed the administration of several delegated grant schemes aimed at supporting environmental and community projects. The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) program, funded by Defra, has a budget of £339,000 for the year, with approximately two-thirds already allocated. This scheme helps farmers and landowners meet criteria focused on nature, climate, people, and place, with applications assessed by an independent Local Assessment Panel and monitored for compliance. Similarly, the Welsh Government's Ffermio Bro scheme, in its first year, has a smaller budget of £95,000. So far, £46,000 has been approved, and further applications are under review, potentially bringing the spend to 74%. Both FiPL and Ffermio Bro operate on a reimbursement basis, paying grants after project completion and verification.

The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), also from Welsh Government, provides £95,000 for community and individual projects, with a strong emphasis on climate and nature initiatives. Around 30% of this fund remains available for allocation before the end of the financial year. The Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) fund is currently closed to allow consolidation, as its balance is too low for significant grants. Members emphasized the need for greater clarity and requested more detailed narratives on funded projects, including outputs and value for money. Examples such as hedgerow restoration were highlighted, with calls for data on the total length of hedging replanted. The team agreed to provide these details in future reports and annual summaries, noting that many projects serve as pilot schemes that inspire wider adoption beyond their immediate scope.

We resolved to endorse the recent allocations of FiPL, Ffermio Bro and SDF grants.

#### **9. River Wye update**

We received a report regarding the latest activities to help restore the River Wye.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Herefordshire Council has published the tender for the production of the Wye Catchment Management Plan. The Council has also taken up the secretariat of the Wye Catchment Partnership.
- At the recent Wye Catchment Partnership evidence was presented that the main drivers of algal blooms in the River Wye are Flow rates (water quantity) and water temperature (weather/climate change) with nutrients being lesser drivers, with nitrates more so than phosphates.
- The Wye & Usk Foundation is working with a range of partners and funders to develop Catchment Land & Ecosystem Approach for Resilience (CLEAR) to deliver systematic changes that will restore soils and water flows, reducing floods and helping the rural economy and ecology thrive.

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- Herefordshire Rural Hub has been piloting a Wye Nutrient Balance programme with Farm Herefordshire members, helping identify and reduce farm nutrient imports and exports, while feeding into further research, knowledge sharing and business support.
- Trials of Water Crowfoot drone filming along the Wye during August produced some good results, to be developed for a wider survey next year.
- Friends of the River Wye 'Big Ranunculus Watch' generated more than 90 responses since launching in July.
- DEFRA and Welsh Government are refining the £1million research programme for the Wye to be tendered early in 2026.
- 'Forest to Sea - A Vision and Strategic Action Plan for water in the Forest of Dean' is being finalised for public consultation by Severn Vale Catchment Partnership in collaboration with the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.
- The Wyescapes – food, nature, water - programme is reaching the final stages of preparation before submitting proposal to DEFRA early in 2026.
- The Diffuse Water Pollution Plan (DWPP) for England and the Welsh Evidence is due to be published shortly, to feed into the review of the Catchment Management Plan.
- In November Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Herefordshire Council and the Forest Forum are all hosting conferences on rivers and water quality.
- Possibly the largest legal claim over environmental pollution in the UK has been filed at the High Court challenging three companies over river pollution in the Wye and Usk catchments.

Recent scientific research has revealed that phosphates and nitrates, previously thought to be the main drivers of toxic algal blooms in the River Wye, are not the primary cause. Instead, climate change factors such as reduced summer river flows and rising water temperatures are now understood to be the key contributors to these ecological problems.

Legal actions, such as the Leigh Day case, are addressing historic pollution issues, but these cases do not necessarily help move forward with practical solutions. Companies like Avara and Welsh Water have acknowledged past problems and invested in improvements. Welsh Water is committing around £50 million to upgrade treatment plants. The emphasis now is on collaborative, forward-looking approaches. Many stakeholders, including the Wye and Usk Foundation, are working on catchment-based strategies to reduce flood peaks and improve water retention in upstream areas. This involves engaging landowners to adopt practices that make land more absorbent, thereby reducing runoff and mitigating flooding downstream.

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Future plans include installing monitoring systems on tributaries to identify problem areas and target interventions effectively. Additionally, there are discussions about managing water abstraction and negotiations over reservoir releases to maintain river levels and control temperature, which is critical for species like salmon. Overall, the focus is shifting toward integrated catchment management, climate adaptation, and partnership-driven solutions to restore the health of the River Wye.

We noted the report.

#### **10. National Updates**

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

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- DEFRA and Welsh Government officials maintain regular contact with National Landscape Lead Officers, both directly and through the National Landscapes Association and Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales.
- Andrew Blake, Wye Valley National Landscape Manager, holds the chair of Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales until June 2026.
- Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales hosted 3 events at the Royal Welsh Show, including a debate on Ffermio Bro in the NFU marquee with the Deputy First Minister.
- The National Landscapes Annual Conference was 7th – 10th July on the theme of ‘Landscapes for Tomorrow - Are National Landscapes “Fit for the Future?”’, with good attendance from the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.
- The National Landscapes Association and Campaign for National Parks recently led a campaign to protect the strengthened duty on relevant authorities in England who ‘must seek to further the purpose’ of Protected Landscapes, which the Westminster Government was considering repealing.
- A new All Party Parliamentary Group on National Parks and National Landscapes was launched in Westminster on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2025.
- The National Landscapes Association AGM and Chairs’ Conference is in London on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2025.
- The National Landscapes Association recently undertook a members’ satisfaction survey which identified high levels of overall satisfaction with membership.
- The next National Landscapes Lead Officers Meeting is in Birmingham in mid-February 2026.

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- Future funding allocations for National Landscapes from DEFRA will be determined following the Autumn Budget on 26th November 2025.

A key theme is the growing concern over continued funding cuts, which threaten the ability of National Landscapes and National Parks to maintain staff and deliver essential services. The National Landscapes Association, along with its partners, is actively negotiating with the government to sustain or increase funding, emphasizing the significant benefits these areas provide to the country.

Additionally, the Infrastructure and Planning Bill is currently progressing through Parliament. The bill, now in the House of Lords, has sparked widespread criticism because it could weaken protections for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special Areas of Conservation SACs. This change would make it easier for developers to build on ecologically sensitive land, posing a serious threat to wildlife and natural habitats. Environmental organizations have expressed strong opposition, urging stakeholders to submit objections and propose amendments before the bill reaches the House of Commons for a vote in the coming weeks. The urgency of this response reflects the UK's status as one of the most nature-depleted countries globally, underscoring the importance of safeguarding existing protections.

We noted the report.

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

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

- National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects.
- Annual Partnership Study Tour – 26th Sept 2025.
- Marches Food Convergence, Square Farm: 3rd & 4th October 2025.
- Lower Wye Track & Trails.
- Species Action Plans.
- Cleddon Bog SSSI.
- Wye Valley Walk 50th Anniversary events & walks.
- Wye Adapt to Climate Change project.
- Undergrounding.

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The Wye Valley National Landscapes Manager highlighted several ongoing initiatives within the Wye Valley National Landscape. The Landscape Enhancement Initiative is progressing well, with practical work underway such as species-rich meadow restoration, new hedgerow planting, and natural flood management measures. These efforts are part of a three-year program, ensuring continued activity over the coming years. The Annual Partnership Study Tour successfully showcased many of these projects, drawing strong attendance and engagement.

Another key event was the Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence at Square Farm, Mitchel Troy which focused on sustainable food systems and resilience. The Tracks and Trails project is advancing, with a steering group meeting scheduled to review a new report and plan next steps.

Further updates include species action plans work with hedgehogs conservation tasks at Cleddon Bog, and celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the Wye Valley Walk, which featured a series of guided walks from April to October. The Wye Adapt Climate Change Project is also making good progress, integrating with other initiatives to promote pond creation and flood management interventions, and hosting a successful Climate Action Day that included subsidized bus services to encourage sustainable travel.

Work continues on undergrounding low-voltage power lines in partnership with National Grid, aimed at reducing visual impact and improving landscape quality.

We noted the report.

#### **12. Provisional dates of meetings for 2026:**

Monday 2nd March 2026 at 2.00pm.

Monday 6th July 2026 at 2.00pm.

Monday 2nd November 2026 at 2.00pm.

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

**The meeting ended at 3.59 pm.**