

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Ann Webb (Chair) (Monmouthshire County Council)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillor E. Bryn
County Councillor Steven Garratt

Gloucestershire County Council

County Councillor B. Hoyland
County Councillor G. Moseley

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillor C. McFarling
Councillor D. Wheeler

Town / Parish Community Councils (with voting powers)

Herefordshire of Local Councils – Councillor B. Jones

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

National Farmers Union – Ms. C. Hinds

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Local Wildlife Trusts – Dr. J. Hynes
Friends of the River Wye – Mr. R. Howell

Technical Advice Officers

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

Others present:

Councillor R. Hatton – Monmouth Town Council
Mr. S. Herbert – Herefordshire Wildlife Trust
Mr. M. Quine – Environment Agency
Mr. M. Holland – Member of the Public

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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APOLOGIES:

Councillors Dale Rooke and Barry Durkin

John Evans and Ioan Williams

1. Election of Chair

We elected County Councillor Ann Webb as Chair.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

We appointed Councillor Chris McFarling as Vice-Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

None received.

4. Public Questions

None received.

5. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 2026 were confirmed as an accurate record.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

Concerns were raised regarding the condition of the Wye Valley footpath following a near miss which occurred recently. An elderly person had tripped on the uneven surface and fallen from the kerb into the path of an oncoming vehicle. The view expressed was that, unless improvements are made, there is a significant risk of a serious injury or fatality. It was also suggested that, if the issues are not addressed, there may be calls for the footpath to be closed.

It was noted that discussions have taken place with Monmouthshire Highways and support has been offered to arrange a site meeting to explore possible options. At present, there is no provision within the Highways Budget / Programme of Works to address this matter. Officers are therefore exploring what contribution could be made towards progressing preliminary designs and establishing potential costs before considering how the project might move forward.

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

An update meeting is being arranged, although it is likely that any substantive progress will not be made until September 2026. JAC Members will be kept informed, and it was suggested that a briefing be arranged for local ward members once more detailed proposals have been developed.

Further comments emphasised the urgency of the situation, arguing that the absence of funding should not outweigh public safety concerns. It was suggested that an interim measure, such as resurfacing the uneven sections of the path and reducing the height difference at the kerb with tarmac, could significantly improve safety. Concerns were highlighted about pedestrians having to navigate an uneven surface and passing close to fast-moving traffic, creating what was described as an unacceptable level of risk.

6. Management Plan Review

We received a report regarding the revised programme for the review of the Wye Valley National Landscape Management Plan.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- There has been further slippage in the Management Plan Review Programme and a consultant has now been commissioned to assist with process.
- The public consultation draft Management Plan is currently being finalised with previously agreed draft policies retained but the Special Qualities have been further condensed and combined down to ten.
- The proposed public consultation period for the new Plan will cover 6-8 weeks in the autumn.
- The current Wye Valley AONB Management Plan (2021-2026) will remain valid until the new National Landscape Management Plan is adopted in 2027.

The programme has continued to experience delays, and it was noted that delivery could not be achieved in-house as originally hoped. Following a small increase in core funding from Defra, the decision was made to appoint an external consultant to support the development of the Management Plan. The consultant has now been commissioned and is actively progressing the work. Despite the slippage, confidence remains high due to the consultant's extensive experience preparing management plans for other National Landscapes and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

As part of the review process, the consultant assessed the National Landscape's special qualities and recommended further consolidation. While it was already recognised that the existing list was too extensive, the revised work has successfully reduced the number from 27 in the current plan to 10. The revised list is considered to continue reflecting the distinctive characteristics of the National Landscape effectively.

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

An amended timetable has been included. The intention is to launch a public consultation during the autumn of 2026. The consultation is expected to run for approximately six to eight weeks. Following consultation, the responses will be used to refine the draft plan further, with the aim of presenting a revised version to the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) in March 2027 for endorsement before it is submitted for formal adoption.

The current programme anticipates that a finalised Management Plan will be presented to the JAC in July 2027, by which stage it is expected to have been fully adopted by all partner organisations. Stakeholders and Members will be kept informed throughout the process, including notification of consultation dates. As part of the consultation programme, three public meetings are also expected to be held to gather feedback and encourage engagement.

We endorsed the revised programme, supported the further refinement of the special qualities, and acknowledged the existing AONB Management Plan. During discussion, it was asked whether technical comments on the special qualities could still be submitted. It was confirmed that, as the document remains in draft form, any technical feedback would be welcomed and should be sent directly to the project lead.

We resolved:

- (i) To endorse the revised programme for the review and publication of the National Landscape Management Plan.
- (ii) To endorse the further refinement of the Special Qualities for inclusion in the Draft Management Plan.
- (iii) To recognise that the existing AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 remains valid until the new National Landscape Management Plan 2027-2032 is finalised and adopted.

7. Wye Valley National Landscape Annual Report 2025-26

We received a report regarding the annual reports for 2025/26 on the achievements of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- High levels of achievement were maintained across nature recovery, climate resilience, sustainable land management, community engagement and access.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Team was consolidated in 2025/26 with the new FIPL and Ffermio Bro Officers joining the Team.

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

- The Team worked well together to secure full spend of all available budgets, helping partners further the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the outstanding natural beauty of the National Landscape.
- The summary financial report will be presented at the November 2026 Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee.

The annual report presentation highlighted a significant year of achievement across the organisation, with a turnover of approximately £1.7 million during the previous year. While the final financial figures are not yet available, they will be presented at the November 2026 JAC meeting.

A new Geographic Information System (GIS) has been introduced to map and visualise the locations of projects and activities. The report includes a map showing the geographic spread of funded work, illustrating the wide distribution of activities across the area. It was noted that a small number of funded projects were located outside the National Landscape boundary.

JAC Members welcomed the Annual Report and praised the breadth and diversity of achievements delivered during the year. A JAC Member commented positively on the “Travel Lightly” public transport map and asked whether an interactive version might be developed in the future. It was confirmed that the map is already available on the website in a basic format and that options for creating a more interactive version are being explored, although this would require additional technical development.

The important contribution made by volunteers was also recognised and discussed. JAC Members emphasised the value of volunteer involvement and suggested that opportunities should be considered to further acknowledge their efforts. In response, the range of activities were outlined organised for volunteers throughout the year, including monthly work parties, a dry-stone walling project, social gatherings, and seasonal events. Planned activities included apple harvesting, cider making, and a return visit in the spring of 2027 to sample the finished product.

We welcomed the Annual Report on the Wye Valley National Landscape Team achievements for 2025/26.

8. River Wye Update & Water Crowfoot Species Action Plan

We received a report regarding the latest activities to help restore the River Wye including presenting the Water Crowfoot Species Action Plan.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Riverside Code booklet, published in April 2026 by the Friends of the River Wye, is designed and illustrated to help people respect, protect and enjoy the River Wye.

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

- The Charter for the Rights of the River Wye was launched in May 2026 during the Hay Festival and has been adopted widely by partners across the Wye Catchment, including a Pledge on behalf of the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership.
- Haskoning Ltd. has been progressing with the first phase of the Wye Catchment Management Plan.
- The Environment Agency has published the River Wye Water Quality 2025 Data Analysis Report which identifies that water temperature in the Wye may have a greater influence on algal blooms than nutrient pollution.
- DEFRA and Welsh Government £1million research programme for the Wye is now underway with a 3-year Living Lab approach led by University of West of England (UWE) supported by the Herefordshire Rural Hub.
- The fifth and final Species Action Plan focusing on a Ranunculus Water Crowfoot in the River Wye, has been published.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Team and Friends of the River Wye are collaborating on a project to investigate the decline of Water Crowfoot, with funding from the Nature Networks Fund in Wales and DEFRA in England.
- Other partners in the Catchment are progressing with projects including the Wye & Usk Foundation Resilient Rivers initiative on the River Monnow and Natural Resources Wales' Upper Wye Catchment Restoration Project.

The report highlighted the extensive and growing activity taking place across the River Wye catchment to support the river's recovery. Interest in the River Wye and the recently launched Charter for the Rights of the River Wye continues to spread nationally, with increasing public awareness and engagement. While the environmental challenges facing the river remain complex, there was a strong sense that progress is being made through collaboration between farmers, volunteers, local authorities, environmental organisations and statutory agencies. The update brought together information from numerous sources to provide a broad overview of the work currently underway, including action plans, management plans, workshops, charters and partnership initiatives.

Particular attention was given to the Water Crowfoot (Ranunculus) Species Action Plan, which is the fifth and final species action plan produced for the Wye Valley National Landscape. The plan has been developed in close cooperation with Friends of the River Wye and includes monitoring work through the Big Ranunculus Watch Project. Early observations suggest that Water Crowfoot may be recovering in parts of the river, with river users reporting increased growth compared with recent years. However, concerns remain about the effects of low river levels and unusually high water temperatures, which could create additional pressures on the river ecosystem.

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

We welcomed the ongoing research and monitoring work, including the use of drone technology to establish better baseline data on Water Crowfoot distribution and condition. This monitoring is intended to provide a clearer year-on-year picture of whether recovery is taking place, particularly as the species has disappeared entirely from some locations. It was noted that similar declines in Water Crowfoot are being observed in other rivers across the UK, suggesting wider environmental factors may be affecting river health.

The Environment Agency provided an update on its enhanced river monitoring programme, including the deployment of remote monitoring devices throughout the Wye and Lugg catchments. These sensors continuously collect data on water conditions, such as temperature and indicators of algal blooms, allowing trends to be tracked over time and shared publicly. The data is helping agencies better understand the impacts of climate change on the river, with temperatures reaching unprecedented levels of around 27°C in some locations. While this information provides valuable evidence for future management decisions, it also highlights the increasing threat posed by climate pressures.

Discussion also focused on potential responses to low river flows and rising temperatures. While increasing releases from reservoirs may appear to be a simple solution, experts explained that the issue is complex, with potential unintended consequences, including effects on abstraction licences and river temperature dynamics. Instead, the emerging Catchment Management Plan is looking at wider catchment resilience measures, including habitat restoration and strategic tree planting, alongside a broader understanding of river health and climate adaptation.

Concerns were raised regarding elevated phosphate levels in the River Lugg. It was explained that the Lugg has particularly stringent nutrient targets due to its high conservation value and that nutrient pollution originates from multiple sources, although agricultural land use remains the main contributor. Significant regulatory and advisory work has already been undertaken, including more than 1,200 farm inspections across the Wye catchment since 2022. While these measures are helping to reduce nutrient inputs, there remains a substantial gap between current phosphorus levels and the targets required to achieve favourable ecological conditions. Partners continue to work together to identify additional measures needed to close this gap.

JAC Members requested ongoing updates as the work progresses, particularly as the Wye Catchment Management Plan develops further. Future stages of the plan will include consultation on options for addressing key environmental challenges, creating opportunities for wider debate and stakeholder engagement.

We resolved:

- (i) To welcome the on-going activity across the Wye Catchment to help restore the River Wye, including the expanding adoption of the Charter for the Rights of the River Wye.

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

- (ii) To endorse the Water Crowfoot Species Action Plan, as the fifth and final Species Action Plan of the Wye Valley National Landscape.

9. Grants Update including New Wildlife Rich Habitat Fund

We received a report regarding 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) total allocation from DEFRA for the Wye Valley National Landscape in 2026/27 is £345,389, with similar indicative levels for 2027/28 and 2028/29.
- The FiPL Local Assessment Panel has approved grants for 5 projects totalling £89,981.50 in 2026/27 along with a further 5 projects assessed at the most recent Panel meeting with the final offers still being negotiated.
- DEFRA launched the Wildlife Rich Habitat Fund in May 2026 for the 3 years of 2026/27 to 2028/29 with Wye Valley National Landscape's allocation in 2026/27 being £80,000.
- Two projects have been supported to date through the Wildlife Rich Habitat Fund totalling £26,804.
- The Ffermio Bro total allocation from Welsh Government for the Wye Valley National Landscape in 2026/27 is £235,257 with a similar level for 2027/28.
- The Ffermio Bro Assessment Panel met on 1st July 2026 with 2 grant approvals being negotiated, so no formal grant offers have yet been made, but there is a healthy pipeline of prospective applications.
- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Assessment Panel has approved 5 projects to date totalling £19,468 of the £95,000 allocated by Welsh Government.
- The Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley National Landscape Fund is currently closed for applications while opportunities to grow the Fund are sought.

We received an update on grant allocations across the Partnership's main funding programmes. As these reports are presented early in the financial year, shortly after the first quarter, overall expenditure remains relatively modest. However, spending levels were considered healthy and in line with expectations at this stage of the year.

It was noted that a Farming in Protected Landscapes Panel meeting had taken place shortly before the report was finalised. Although a number of grant applications had

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

been approved by the assessment panel, the awards had not yet been formally confirmed with the relevant landowners and land managers and therefore were not included in the figures presented. Similarly, recent grant decisions from the Ffermio Bro assessment panel were still being finalised and were also excluded from the current report. Overall, progress and the level of grant commitments made so far was satisfactory.

JAC Members were also informed of a significant new funding opportunity from DEFRA. The newly established Wildlife Rich Habitat Fund has allocated £80,000 to the Wye Valley in the current financial year. This funding was secured through a competitive bidding process and was welcomed by the JAC. It was noted that good progress had already been made in allocating the fund and that updates on its use would be included in future grant reports. As DEFRA funding, the scheme applies only to projects on the English side of the area.

Looking ahead, JAC Members noted the increasing national focus on nature recovery, particularly in light of the Government's recently announced "30 by 30" strategy, which aims to ensure that 30% of land is managed for nature by 2030. Officers suggested that this target is likely to drive funding priorities and conservation activity over the coming years.

JAC Members welcomed the breadth and diversity of projects being supported through the various grant schemes, highlighting examples ranging from hedgehog conservation initiatives to projects supporting butterfly species and other wildlife.

We resolved:

- (i) To endorse the recent allocations of FiPL, Ffermio Bro and SDF grants.
- (ii) To welcomes the new Wildlife Rich Habitat Fund allocation from DEFRA.

10. Grant Funding in the setting of the Wye Valley National Landscape

We received a report regarding a process for awarding grant funding in the setting of the Wye Valley National Landscape.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- With increased grant allocations on both the English and Welsh sides of the Wye Valley National Landscape, there is a need for a more systematic, evidence-based approach to funding projects outside the Wye Valley National Landscape where they still further the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the outstanding natural beauty of the nationally designated protected landscape.
- It is proposed that a graded funding system is adopted, where work inside the National Landscape and within 1 km of its boundary receives full support, while eligible projects up to 5km away within the Wye catchment would receive funding

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

based on a 10% reduction per kilometre distance and consequent diminished likely benefit.

- The process should be reviewed annually and a more generous / less steep gradation (Option B), with 5% reductions per kilometre, could be considered.
- The main considerations are related to habitat connectivity and improvements to water quality or flow within specific sub-catchment of the Wye, following The Lawton Review (2010) principles of 'bigger – better – more joined up'.

It was noted that, as more grant funding has become available, the Wye Valley National Landscape Team has received an increasing number of applications for projects located outside the designated landscape boundary. Until now, decisions on these applications have been made on a largely ad hoc basis, depending on the nature of the project and available funding. With growing demand, the Team considered that a clearer and more consistent framework was needed to guide decisions on funding projects beyond the boundary.

Historically, different funding streams have applied different rules. Some schemes have allowed support for projects up to one kilometre outside the National Landscape boundary, while others, such as the Sustainable Development Fund, have focused on whether the majority of the project's benefits would be delivered within the National Landscape. To provide a more structured approach, a mapping system was developed showing a one-kilometre buffer around the boundary, within which projects would continue to receive full grant support. Beyond this zone, additional one-kilometre bands would apply, with grant rates reducing by 10% for each successive band.

The proposed approach also takes account of local geography and catchment boundaries. It was highlighted that some areas beyond the National Landscape remain highly relevant because they form part of tributaries and sub-catchments that feed into the River Wye. Conversely, some areas beyond the boundary drain into the River Severn or the Usk rather than the Wye, meaning that environmental improvements there would contribute less directly to the National Landscape's objectives. The framework is therefore intended to focus limited resources on projects that provide the greatest benefit to the Wye Valley.

The proposed 10% reduction per kilometre is intended as a practical starting point, although a less severe 5% reduction model was also considered. Officers suggested trialling the 10% approach and reviewing its effectiveness. In addition, it was proposed that no more than 10% of the overall grants budget should normally be allocated to projects located beyond the initial one-kilometre buffer. Last year, around 7% of the budget was spent on such projects, making the proposed cap broadly consistent with previous spending patterns.

JAC Members generally welcomed the proposal and considered it a sensible and pragmatic basis for future decisions. However, some suggested refinements. Particular attention was drawn to the Beachley Peninsula, where it was argued that, despite some

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

of the area draining towards the Severn, much of the land still slopes towards the Wye and would benefit from environmental enhancement. It was suggested that reducing funding eligibility in this area may not fully reflect its ecological importance.

Further discussion focused on the potential for projects aimed at improving water quality. It was suggested encouraging successful applicants to undertake citizen science monitoring, particularly on smaller streams that are not regularly monitored by statutory agencies. Such monitoring could help measure the effectiveness of funded projects while expanding local environmental data collection. It was indicated that it could be promoted as part of future grant discussions with applicants.

We resolved to endorse the approach for allowing grants to projects outside, but within the setting of, the Wye Valley National Landscape based on the Option A principle of 10% reductions per kilometre up to a distance of 5km from the boundary within specified sub-catchments of the River Wye.

11. Field to Flow Landscape Connections Application

We received a report requesting support for the submission of a Development Phase application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Connections programme, following the success of the Expression of Interest for the Field to Flow project proposal.

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.
- In March 2026 the Wye Valley National Landscape Team submitted an Expression of Interest for a proposed 'Field to Flow' 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 'Field to Flow' Expression of Interest outlined a 2 year Development Phase estimated at £467,000 followed by an 8 year Delivery Phase with a value of £12,674,000.
- In April 2026 NLHF confirmed the success of the 'Field to Flow' Expression of Interest and invited a full application within 12 months.
- A consultant will be procured to assist with the application process over the next 9 months. The proposed 'Field to Flow' project will be refined through liaison and workshops with key partners and stakeholder including the Wye Catchment Partnership, Farm Herefordshire, Wye & Usk Foundation, Wyescapes Project

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

Board, the Wildlife Trusts, local Food Partnerships, NFU, FUW, CLA and other interested farmers and land managers.

- This is an opportunity to work cross-border at landscape scale to address key challenges facing the Wye Valley National Landscape.

The JAC received an update on the Field to Flow Landscape Connections project, a proposed National Lottery Heritage Fund bid that aims to reconnect local communities with farming, food production, rivers, and the wider landscape. An initial expression of interest was submitted in March 2026 and has successfully passed the first stage, allowing the project team to proceed with a full application. The programme offers access to up to £10 million in funding, with a proposed structure of a two-year development phase followed by an eight-year delivery programme. The full application must be submitted by April 2027.

The proposed project focuses on strengthening links between communities and the agricultural landscape by promoting local food production, procurement, education, and sustainable land management. Central to the proposal is improving the health of the landscape and river catchments that feed into the River Wye. The geographical focus covers the tributaries flowing into the National Landscape area, creating opportunities to work with farmers, landowners, schools, community groups, and environmental organisations across the catchment.

It was noted that some areas have been excluded from the project to avoid duplication with other major initiatives already under development. The River Monnow catchment has been omitted because its lower reaches lie outside the National Landscape boundary and because the Wye and Usk Foundation is developing a substantial flood management and green finance project in the area. Similarly, the Wyescapes Landscape Recovery Project is progressing through Defra assessment and could provide long-term environmental funding in parts of the wider catchment.

JAC Members were advised that the coming months will focus on developing the detailed application through consultation with landowners, farming representatives, local communities, and specialist consultants. If the bid is successful, significant resources could become available to support environmental improvements, sustainable farming practices, community engagement, and river restoration activities across the area. However, it was noted that delivery is still several years away, with considerable work required before funding can be secured.

During discussion, JAC members highlighted the competitive nature of the funding programme and asked how the project could distinguish itself from bids being developed elsewhere in the country. It was suggested that reconnecting people with food production, nature, and landscapes provides a strong theme, while citizen science programmes that engage communities in monitoring river health could become a significant strength of the application. It was acknowledged that the proposal would continue to evolve during the development process as opportunities and priorities are refined.

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

Questions were also raised about County Council-owned farmland and whether local authority land could contribute to the project. While officers were not aware of significant council farm estates within the project area, they agreed this was an issue worth exploring. An officer from Monmouthshire County Council highlighted opportunities to align the project with existing food partnership initiatives and recently awarded climate action funding, creating further opportunities for collaboration across the region.

Discussion focussed on the growing impact of climate change on farming and land management. It was noted that there was increasing interest among farmers in measures such as water retention, natural flood management, tree planting, agroforestry, hedgerows, and shade provision for livestock. These practices are becoming more attractive as farmers adapt to warmer temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and flood risks. The project would seek to deliver environmental benefits while supporting practical farming needs.

The role of citizen science was also emphasised, particularly in monitoring water quality across tributaries feeding into the River Wye. The ambitions to expand monitoring networks to build a more comprehensive understanding of pollution sources and river health were noted. This evidence would support both the funding application and future targeting of interventions to achieve measurable improvements in water quality.

We resolved to endorse the preparation and submission by the Wye Valley National Landscape Team of a Field to Flow Development Phase application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Landscape Connections programme.

12. WVNL Partnership Study Tour: 25th Sept 2025

We received a report requesting endorsement of the date and outline programme for the Annual National Landscape Partnership Study Tour.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership Annual Tour will be held on Friday 25th September 2026.
- The programme is still being finalised but will focus predominantly on achievements and management issues relating to the Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley National Landscape.
- Initial invitations for expressions of interest to attend will be sent out shortly.
- Invitations should be extended to representatives from our neighbouring Designated Landscapes and other appropriate partner organisations in the interest of sharing good practice and broadening collaboration.

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

The annual Partnership Study Tour will take place on 25 September 2026. This year's tour will focus primarily on the Monmouthshire section of the lower valley, examining a range of local projects, developments, and issues. The detailed programme is still being developed and will be finalised over the coming months, with preliminary invitations to be circulated as soon as possible.

The event is open to all Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) members, ward members, town, parish and community councils, as well as other key partners. Invitations will also be extended to neighbouring protected landscapes to encourage wider participation and collaboration.

The Study Tour is regarded as one of the highlights of the year, and efforts will be made to ensure it is both informative and enjoyable. Members are encouraged to attend and are also invited to suggest any sites, projects, or local issues in the area that they would particularly like to see included in the programme, as these may be incorporated into the itinerary where possible.

We resolved:

- (i) To note the date of Friday 25th September 2026 for the Annual Study Tour, with a focus on projects and initiative in the southern and Monmouthshire part of the National Landscape.
- (ii) To encourage a good attendance, and invite representatives from our neighbouring Shropshire Hills, Malvern Hills and Gower National Landscape Partnerships and the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority and other appropriate partners.

13. Partner and National Landscape Progress Reports and Updates

We received a report regarding activity of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team and other local and national partners.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Manager attended the National Landscapes Annual Conference in Norfolk and Suffolk, describing it as an inspiring event that provided valuable presentations, networking opportunities and examples of large-scale farming and land management practices.

JAC Members were also informed that the National Landscapes Association had attended the recent Protected Landscapes All-Party Parliamentary Group meeting at Westminster. A briefing paper for Members of Parliament had been circulated, highlighting the strengthened duties introduced through recent legislation, which now requires public bodies to actively further the purposes of designated landscapes rather than simply have regard to them. There was an intention to engage local MPs more closely and encourage their involvement in the All-Party Parliamentary Group.

A variety of projects were being delivered by the National Landscapes Team. These included habitat management, non-native invasive species control, and priority species

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, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm

conservation work. Particular attention was drawn to efforts to tackle Himalayan balsam and to ongoing environmental improvement initiatives undertaken by staff, volunteers and partner organisations.

Education and community engagement continue to be important priorities. Significant work has been carried out to support hedgehog conservation, with staff visiting schools and providing camera traps and monitoring tunnels for pupils to use either within school grounds or at home. This approach not only gathers valuable evidence about hedgehog populations but also raises awareness among young people about wildlife conservation and the needs of native species. Further work is also taking place on bumblebee conservation and climate change projects.

JAC Members also received an update on the Lower Wye Tracks and Trails Project in Monmouthshire. Current work is focused on priority unclassified county roads (UCRs), where artificial intelligence cameras are being installed to provide objective data on route usage. This evidence will support future decision-making and complement anecdotal information already collected. The project is also examining opportunities to rationalise and improve signage across these routes, with wider public engagement planned through meetings later in the autumn of 2026.

Grazing management remains a key tool for habitat conservation, with cattle currently grazing sites including Cleddon Bog and Beacon Hill. However, concerns were noted regarding reduced water availability due to dry conditions. The discussion highlighted the vital role played by conservation grazing across the landscape in maintaining important habitats that might otherwise be difficult to manage.

JAC Members were keen to recognise the contribution of volunteers, especially those working in areas such as Staunton. Their efforts were described as invaluable, not only through practical conservation work but also through livestock checking and habitat management. The volunteers were praised for the advice and support they provide to local groups on issues such as vegetation management and conservation grazing. The work of livestock-grazing organisations, including the use of cattle and goats on challenging sites, was also acknowledged as being essential to the success of conservation efforts across the landscape.

14. Date of next meeting

2nd November 2026 at 2.00pm.

The meeting ended at 3.33 pm.