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Monday, 6 July 2026

Notice of meeting:

Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee

Monday, 13th July, 2026 at 2.00 pm
The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG & Hybrid on Microsoft Teams

AGENDA

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2.	Appointment of Vice-Chair.	
3.	Hybrid Introductions & Apologies for Absence.	
4.	Declarations of Interest.	
5.	Public Questions.	
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Paul Matthews

Chief Executive

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CYNGOR SIR FYNWY

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:

Local Authority Members with Voting Powers

Gloucestershire:

B. Hoyland
G. Moseley

Herefordshire:

B. Durkin
G. Biggs
E. O'Driscoll
S. Cole

Monmouthshire:

E. Bryn
S. Garratt
D. Rooke
A.E. Webb

Forest of Dean:

D. Wheeler
C. McFarling

Town / Parish Community Councils with Voting Powers

Councillor C. Rees – Gloucestershire Association of Parish / Town Councils
B. Jones – Herefordshire Association Local Councils
Councillor L. Parker – One Voice Wales

Co-opted Members with Voting Powers

Vacancy – Voluntary Conservation Sector in Gloucestershire
Vacancy - Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire
A. Thomas - Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire
H. Dale – Country Land and Business Association
C. Hinds – National Farmers Union

Co-opted Members without Voting Powers

Richard Howell – Friends of the River Wye
A. Lee – Recreation Sector
Vacancy – Local Tourism Sector
Dr. Juliet Hynes – Local Wildlife Trusts
Nerys Lewis – National Farmers Union Wales

Public Information

Gofynnir i chi nodi y bydd Cyngor Sir Fynwy yn ffilmio'r cyfarfod hwn ac y bydd ar gael i'w weld ar-lein ar ffurf fyw ac archif. Mae'n bosibl y gellid ffilmio ardaloedd lle mae'r cyhoedd yn eistedd a drwy fynd i mewn i'r Siambr rydych yn cydsynio i gael eich ffilmio a defnydd posibl y delweddau hynny a recordiad sain ar gyfer dibenion gwe-ddarlledu. Os ydych yn gwneud sylw i'r cyfarfod bernir eich bod wedi cydsynio i gael eich ffilmio.

Caiff recordiadau o'r cyfarfod eu cadw yn unol â pholisi'r Cyngor ar gadw data. Dim ond os yw'r Swyddog Monitro yn ystyried bod angen hynny oherwydd bod y cyfan neu ran o gynnwys y gwe-ddarllediad yn neu'n debygol o fod yn groes i unrhyw ddarpariaeth statudol neu athrawiaeth cyfraith gyffredin, er enghraifft deddfwriaeth Diogelu Data a Hawliau Dynol neu ddarpariaethau yn ymwneud â gwybodaeth gyfrinachol neu eithriedig, y caiff gwe-ddarllediadau neu rannau o we-ddarllediadau a archifwyd eu tynnu o wefan y Cyngor.

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Aims and Values of Monmouthshire County Council

Our purpose

To become a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life.

Objectives we are working towards

- Fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced.
- Green place to live and work with reduced carbon emissions and making a positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency.
- Thriving and ambitious place, where there are vibrant town centres and where businesses can grow and develop.
- Safe place to live where people have a home where they feel secure in.
- Connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued.

Our Values

- **Openness:** we aspire to be open and honest to develop trusting relationships.
- **Fairness:** we aspire to provide fair choice, opportunities and experiences and become an organisation built on mutual respect.
- **Flexibility:** we aspire to be flexible in our thinking and action to become an effective and efficient organisation.
- **Teamwork:** we aspire to work together to share our successes and failures by building on our strengths and supporting one another to achieve our goals.
- **Kindness:** We will show kindness to all those we work with putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions.

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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, 9th March, 2026 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, Steven Garratt, Dale Rooke and A. Webb

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 (with voting powers)

National Farmers Union – Ms. C. Hinds

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Local Wildlife Trusts – Dr. J. Hynes

Technical Advice Officers

National Landscape Manager – Mr. A. Blake

National Landscape Team – Ms. C. Laidlaw

Monmouthshire County Council – Ms. C. Bosley

Monmouthshire County Council - Mr. R. Williams

Gloucestershire County Council – Mr. A. Deb

Herefordshire Council – Mr. J. Bisset

Forest of Dean District Council – Alistair Chapman

Others present:

Councillor M. Getgood (Coleford Town Council)

Mr. J. Pearce – Member of the Public

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APOLOGIES:

Councillors B. Hoyland, G. Moseley, B. Durkin, S. Cole

Ms. H. O'Kane, Ms. E. Johnson, Mr. J Evans, Councillor. R. Hatton, Mr. I. Williams, Mr. M. Quine

1. Declarations of Interest

County Councillors Emma Bryn, Dale Rooke and Steven Garratt declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 4.2 Dixon Housing & Monmouthshire RLDP delay as they are Members of Monmouthshire County Council's Planning Committee.

2. Public Questions

We received the following question from Jonty Pearce:

The Planning Inspector will hold public hearings on the Monmouthshire Replacement Local Development Plan between 16th June and 16th July this year. These hearings were postponed after the Planning Inspector concluded that Monmouthshire County Council had not provided sufficient evidence on the phosphate impacts affecting the River Wye and the River Usk Special Areas of Conservation. The Inspector also found that the Council had not used the most up-to-date population projections when determining the plan.

One of the most contentious site allocations in the plan is the proposed 270-dwelling development at Dixon Road, Monmouth. The site sits within the setting of the Wye Valley National Landscape, and the National Landscape has previously objected to this allocation. Concerns have focused on landscape harm, significant risks to water quality in the River Wye, and negative impacts on the internationally important Horseshoe Bats of the Wye Valley and the Forest of Dean Special Areas of Conservation.

Given the statutory purpose of the National Landscape to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, the question was raised as to whether the Wye Valley National Landscape will participate in the forthcoming Planning Inspector hearings and how it intends to present its concerns about the Dixon Road allocation. In response, it was confirmed that the Wye Valley National Landscape will be engaging in the process and that this matter will be discussed further under agenda item 4.2.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

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

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In doing so, the following points were noted:

Dixton Housing & Monmouthshire RLDP delay

The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) received an update on the delay to the Monmouthshire Local Development Plan (LDP) and the new timetable following its submission to the Welsh Government's Planning Inspectorate in November 2026. A draft hearing programme has now been published, confirming that hearings will take place online over a four-week period from mid-June to mid-July, with one week of no sessions. Key documents are accessible on the RLDP examination webpage. The Council will receive the Inspector's questions on 5 May 2026, and all responses must be submitted by 2nd June 2026. The JAC intends to make a formal submission reiterating its objection to the Dixton Road Site. The Chair will sign off the final response, due before the next meeting.

Discussion followed regarding the limited alternative housing sites around Monmouth. Some JAC members noted that, due to flooding risks at the Wyesham / Wonastow Road area and other local constraints, the choice may effectively be between Dixton Road and Wonastow Road. It was noted that the Inspector will not consider alternative sites and is restricted to evaluating the proposed allocations on issues such as deliverability and policy compliance. The impact of phosphate constraints was highlighted, which has halted development in the north of the County.

The primary concerns for the Joint Advisory Committee's response will relate to landscape and visual impact, character, and housing density. Further evidence, including landscape and heritage assessments, will be reviewed before finalising the submission. It was noted that although the approval of the site could set a precedent, each planning application must still be judged on its individual merits. Monmouthshire officers added that, at the application stage, strict green infrastructure and landscape policies would apply, requiring more detailed assessments and mitigation strategies.

The Chair emphasised the intention to submit the strongest possible objection, addressing landscape protection, biodiversity duties including bat habitats, and all relevant planning concerns. The draft response will be shared with JAC members before submission.

Wyesham A466 Wye Valley Walk Footway

The discussion centred on long-standing safety concerns along the Wye Valley Walk near Redbrook, particularly where pedestrians are forced into the highway immediately after a traffic chicane. It was noted that this stretch is extremely dangerous, with vehicles accelerating after the 30mph zone and having to negotiate the chicane while encountering walkers, often with dogs or in groups. Several near-misses have been observed, prompting frustration that despite raising the problem for over a year, Monmouthshire Highways has not provided any substantive response.

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It was noted that a letter had been sent to Monmouthshire Highways raising three questions: whether any works were planned this year or next; what would be needed to draw up improvement plans; and whether there was interest in cost-sharing with the Wye Valley National Landscape Team. No reply has yet been received, which may reflect pressures on the Highways service, including more urgent issues elsewhere. A small step forward has been the installation of a “Pedestrians in the Road” warning sign, although it is acknowledged as minimal progress.

Concerns were also raised about the condition of other nearby sections of the Wye Valley Walk. One incident involved a car hitting a tree near the Monmouth Showground, leaving damaged trees requiring work. A report has been commissioned reviewing both this area and the stretch near the sewage works up to the Beaufort Bridge. Potential solutions are being explored, although diversions, such as routing walkers along the Offa’s Dyke Path, would be less direct and physically more demanding.

JAC members discussed the possibility of alternative routes, including land at Lords Grove or using sections of the old railway track that locals already walk informally. However, land ownership is uncertain, and it was noted that parts of the current Wye Valley Walk are Permissive Paths not officially public footpaths. Public Rights of Way officers are working jointly with the Wye Valley National Landscape Team to examine all options, but Monmouthshire Highways’ priorities and limited capacity have slowed progress. It was agreed that a stronger follow-up letter should be sent to Monmouthshire Highways urging action.

JAC Membership Review

The Wye Valley National Landscape Manager provided an update on the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) membership. He welcomed Catherine Hinds, who has joined as the NFU’s nominated representative, and noted that Chloe Rees has also been appointed on behalf of the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils, although she was unable to attend the meeting. A nomination is still awaited from the Friends of the River Wye, and several further vacancies remain unfilled.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Manager is continuing to work on recruiting members, though many potential nominees are already heavily committed elsewhere, which is slowing progress. It was noted that the Shropshire Hills National Landscape recently used an open recruitment approach, and this may be considered as an alternative way forward if the remaining seats cannot be filled through nominations.

4. Pre-Consultation Draft Management Plan Framework

We received a report regarding the pre-consultation draft framework for the Wye Valley National Landscape Management Plan and the revised programme.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

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- The proposed Vision for the National Landscape Management Plan 2026-2031 was agreed at the last Joint Advisory Committee meeting.
- The Public Consultation Draft Management Plan will then be finalised and published with a 10 week consultation period, including three public events.
- There is some slippage in the review programme with the likelihood that the new Management Plan will not be formally approved by the Local Authorities and Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) before the end of 2026.
- Therefore, the five-year period of the new Management Plan should be realigned to cover 2027-2032.
- The current Wye Valley AONB Management Plan (2021-2026) will remain valid until the new National Landscape Management Plan is adopted.

The draft Management Plan Framework has been updated to reflect changes over the last five years, retaining its overarching objectives, themes and policies while modernising the structure. The document is still in a skeletal stage, with the core policies developed but the descriptive text yet to be added. Special qualities have been streamlined from 27 to 18 by amalgamating similar elements, and strategic objectives have been reduced from over 70 to around 50 to improve clarity and usability. Public consultation is planned to begin after Easter, and only minor adjustments are expected at this stage, with more substantial feedback anticipated during the formal consultation period later in the year.

Some delays mean that the final plan is unlikely to be adopted until late 2026, so the plan period will shift to 2027–2032. A recommendation has been made to confirm that the existing plan remains valid until the new one is adopted to avoid any policy gaps.

The consultation will include three public events—one in the north (e.g., Ross), one in the south (e.g., Tintern, Trellech, or Brockweir), and one central location such as Monmouth, scheduled at varied times to maximise participation. The consultation will be promoted online, through partner organisations, town, parish and community councils, and via social media. Members highlighted the importance of raising public awareness and suggested using libraries and leisure centres to display QR codes as well as physical documentation.

Discussion also covered the inclusion of tranquillity, dark skies and light pollution within the plan, with JAC members expressing support for their prominence. Concerns were raised about noise impacts such as Scrambler motorbikes, and the growing importance of sustainable and regenerative land management in light of potential future food provision issues.

A further question addressed the concept of geodiversity, which relates to the variety of geological and geomorphological features and processes. The plan involves working with organisations such as Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust and groups

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like the Woolhope Club. Geoconservation includes protecting rock exposures, ensuring accessibility, preventing damage from land management or recreational activities, and potentially enhancing public understanding through guided walks and trail leaflets.

We resolved:

- (i) To provide initial comment and feedback on the pre-consultation draft framework for the Wye Valley National Landscape Management Plan before 31st March 2026.
- (ii) To endorse the revised programme for the review and publication of the National Landscape Management Plan.
- (iii) To recognise that the revised Management Plan is unlikely to be finalised and adopted in 2026 and therefore set the new Management Plan for 2027-2032.

5. Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan

We received a report regarding the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Colchester Declaration – a ‘declaration for nature’ was produced in 2019 supported by all the AONB (now known as the National Landscape) Partnerships and the National Association for AONBs (now the National Landscapes Association).
- The ambition was pledged for every AONB Partnership to prepare a Nature Recovery Plan and deliver Species Action Plans to reverse the decline of threatened species.
- Five species, or assemblage of species, were chosen as representative of the Wye Valley National Landscape Special Qualities as a commitment to the Colchester Declaration.
- The suite of Species Action Plans supports the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan.
- Four previous Species Action Plan (SAP) have been adopted by the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), the fifth and final Species Action Plan will be presented to the next JAC meeting, focusing on Water Crowfoot, emblematic for the sustainable restoration and management of the riverine habitat.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan and Species Action Plans are designed to align with the Monmouthshire Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) and Gloucestershire and Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSSs).

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- The Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy is currently out for public consultation until 22nd March 2026.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team is finalising its Nature Recovery Plan, built around five representative species that reflect the area's ecological special qualities. The plan consolidates extensive ecological data, mapping, and species assessments, and acts as an umbrella for individual species action plans. It is intended to align with wider statutory frameworks, including the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the Nature Recovery Action Plan in Monmouthshire.

The urgency of ecological recovery was raised, noting the ambitious 2030 targets set out in the Colchester Declaration and the significant challenges posed by current declines, such as the Wye's unfavourable river condition.

Concerns were raised about potential conflicts between recreational river use particularly paddle sports and sensitive species like water crowfoot, with a need for further evidence on the impact.

The importance of monitoring progress against species baselines was highlighted, though acknowledged that reliable baseline data is lacking for some species. An update report in the form of the State of the National Landscape Report including trends is planned for the next Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) meeting.

Discussion also addressed ancient and veteran trees within the landscape. Clarification was sought on the distinction between "ancient" and "veteran" trees, with members directed to the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory for accessible definitions. The issue of protecting iconic trees from deliberate vandalism, referencing the Sycamore Gap incident, was raised, though it was noted that most local ancient trees are on private land and not widely accessible, reducing their vulnerability. Tree Preservation Orders remain an available tool where needed.

We resolved:

- (i) To endorse the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan, in accordance with the Colchester Declaration commitments.
- (ii) To note the public consultation on the draft Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

6. Wye Valley National Landscape Funding & Work Programme 2026-27

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We received a report seeking approval for the outline work plan for the Wye Valley National Landscape during the forthcoming financial year, following confirmation of funding from DEFRA, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- DEFRA, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales have all made confirmations of funding allocations for Wye Valley National Landscape for 2026/27.
- Welsh Government has offered a 29% increase in Core Revenue funding for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team whereas all other allocations are the same as 2025/26.
- The outline Work Programme for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team for 2026/2027 is furthering the conservation and enhancement of the area's natural beauty, themed around delivering for Nature, Climate, People and Place.
- Priorities include: the consolidation of the support for farming, through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Ffermio Bro programmes, a proposed in-year extension of the Wye Adapt to Climate Change? Programme; on-going focus on Nature & Climate outcomes through DEFRA and Welsh Government Capital funding, including the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme and Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in Wales; continued Planning advice shared jointly with the Malvern Hills National Landscape Partnership; the on-going activities and achievements of the Volunteers and Young Adventurers; the delivery of the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects; the completion of Management Plan review; and continuing a range of existing activities and projects, including continuation of the control of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and progressing the Lower Wye Tracks & Trails Action Plan; while retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Team core budget for 2026/27, as presented to the Steering Group, is £575,945 and additional Capital funding programmes, grants and other project funding is anticipated to reach £1,250,000 levered into the National Landscape during the year.

The Wye Valley National Landscape team had anticipated a standstill budget from Government for 2026–27, which would have required careful prioritisation of projects and increased fundraising. However, the Team has been informed that additional funding is likely to be provided.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Manager explained that the extra funding stems from a national DEFRA allocation, not yet fully confirmed, but made possible thanks to efficient delivery across national landscapes. As a result, next year's budget is secure, allowing continuity in the work programme and enabling the team to consolidate current initiatives while planning more strategically. The draft work programme has been outlined, and funding will be allocated across projects once costings are refined.

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During the discussion, several questions were raised. On reserves, it was clarified that although Herefordshire Council holds reserves for the Team, these will not need to be used next financial year. They may, however, be used for significant initiatives such as the £10 million, ten-year Landscape Connections bid.

Public engagement remains a major area of work and includes website improvements, social media, walks, talks, events, school partnerships, and extensive work with farmers and landowners. The Team also hopes to expand diversity and inclusion projects with diverse communities in Newport and Gloucester if resources allow.

The Young Adventurers scheme will continue, with potential expansion to additional age groups, and may connect with the national Generation Green initiative if it is revived.

Enhancements to the 65 and 69 bus route walking projects will also continue in partnership with Newport Bus, depending on staffing capacity and revenue funding. It was noted that capital-only funding this year limited the scope of engagement activities, so increased revenue funding will be beneficial. Members praised the quality of the 69-bus route information leaflet and requested additional copies. The current staffing and funding position is strong, but that future planning, such as resourcing the next five-year management plan, will also require sustained support.

We resolved:

- (i) To welcome the funding commitments from DEFRA, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales for the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership.
- (ii) To endorse the outline Wye Valley National Landscape Team Work Programme for 2026/2027.

7. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Proposed Reforms

We received a report reviewing changes in the proposed reforms of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in England.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is seeking views on a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) with a consultation closing at 11:45pm on 10th March 2026.
- The revisions include several changes in the way in which National Landscapes are addressed in national planning policy.
- The National Landscapes Association has collated a response, developed in consultation with the Planning and Placemaking panel.

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The discussion focused on the proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in England. It was considered that although the NPPF is being updated to reflect changes in government and shifting priorities, the amendments generally weaken protections for wildlife and natural landscapes. The reforms downgrade the current status of designated National Landscapes, reducing the weight previously afforded to their protection. While the changes also aim to encourage sustainable development, they effectively lower the bar for developers seeking planning permission. There is uncertainty about how much the consultation will influence the final policy.

A significant proposed change is the replacement of the term 'landscape and scenic beauty' with 'natural beauty'. This is welcomed because 'natural beauty' is the original purpose of designation for National Parks and National Landscapes. The submission deadline for the consultation is imminent, and final comments need to be submitted as soon as possible.

A question was raised whether other organisations share similar concerns raised. It was noted that a wide range of national bodies, including the National Landscapes Association, National Parks England, CPRE, the National Trust, the Landscape Institute, and major environmental NGOs such as the RSPB and Wildlife Trusts, are coordinating regarding responses. These groups are collectively working to refine arguments and present a unified stance.

We resolved:

- (i) To endorse and adopt the response from the National Landscapes Association on the proposed reforms of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- (ii) To encourage partner organisations to incorporate the NLA response in their submissions on the NPPF.

8. Updates on Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL), Ffermio Bro, Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley National Landscape Fund

We received a report 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 approved grants for 13 projects totalling £93,600 since the last Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), with near complete allocation of the £339,063 budget for 2025/26.

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- The Ffermio Bro Assessment Panel approved 13 grants for £64,832 on behalf of Rural Payments Wales, allocating all the remaining available funding for this year totalling £99,450.
- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Assessment Panel recently approved three projects allocating the remaining funds of the total £95,000 on behalf of 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.
- The continuation of FiPL, Ffermio Bro and SDF grant allocations in 2026/27 have been confirmed by DEFRA and Welsh Government respectively.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team expressed satisfaction with both the collaborative work with farmers, landowners and land managers, and with the breadth and quality of applications approved.

Ffermio Bro, although a smaller scheme this year, is set to receive almost double the funding next year, which is seen as very positive. As this is only the first year of Ffermio Bro, it is beginning to build momentum heading into the next financial year. The Sustainable Development Fund also continues to support a good variety of schemes. The Wye Valley Fund, held with Herefordshire Community Foundation, currently remains largely inactive due to a lack of donations and requires renewed fundraising efforts before further grants can be issued.

Questions were raised about impact measurement and whether funded projects, such as leaky dams, are monitored over the long term. It was noted that although monitoring is not fully systematic, the Team returns to sites, maintains relationships with recipients and ensures work is completed. Successful examples are often showcased through farm visits with other landowners, while less successful work is used internally for learning and improving future methodology.

Further discussion explored specific funded items, including shelter belts, which are wide hedges or narrow wooded strips designed as natural windbreaks and beneficial for livestock protection, soil conservation, and waterflow management.

Sand Martin nest box structures were enquired about. These are placed above flood level to protect breeding colonies from increasingly unpredictable river flooding. The boxes contain multiple nest cavities and can be monitored via rear access. The Team will track their effectiveness over coming years to determine whether they successfully attract breeding pairs. The Joint Advisory Committee expressed interest in receiving feedback or camera footage once results become available.

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

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, 9th March, 2026 at 2.00
pm**

9. River Wye Charter and Update

We received a report regarding the Charter for the Rights of the River Wye and were advised of the latest activities to help restore the River Wye.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Herefordshire Council has adopted a Charter for the Rights of the River Wye and is encouraging other partners to endorse it.
- Haskoning Ltd. has been appointed to produce the Wye Catchment Management Plan.
- The Diffuse Water Pollution Plan (DWPP) for England and the Welsh Evidence have been published, contributing to the evidence base for the Catchment Management Plan.
- DEFRA and Welsh Government £1million research programme for the Wye is currently out to tender.
- 'Forest to Sea - A Vision and Strategic Action Plan for water in the Forest of Dean' has completed a public consultation period and is being reviewed by the Severn Vale Catchment Partnership in collaboration with the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.
- The Wyescapes – food, nature, water - Landscape Recovery programme has been submitted to DEFRA by Herefordshire Rural Hub.
- Welsh Government is consulting on a Green Paper 'Shaping the Future of Water Governance in Wales' until 7th April 2026.

The Committee noted that the Charter, led by Herefordshire Council and due to be launched at the Hay Festival, deserves support.

A key development is the long-awaited production of the Wye Catchment Management Plan, which, despite being non-statutory, is expected to guide future action and attract significant interest. Alongside this, the recently published Diffuse Water Pollution Plan highlights pollution issues and outlines potential solutions; its findings will feed into the catchment plan. The Committee was encouraged to read the executive summary as well as related reports, including the Wales State of Nature report, which emphasise the need for systems-level change rather than relying on existing mechanisms alone.

Updates were also given on the Wyescapes Landscape Recovery Programme, a 30-year proposal involving farmers along stretches of the Wye and Lugg, whose success will depend on upcoming decisions by DEFRA. Additional DEFRA-funded research into water

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, 9th March, 2026 at 2.00 pm

quality is underway, and the Committee will be kept informed of developments. The Wye Navigation Advisory Committee will also meet shortly, focusing on navigation matters.

The chair highlighted the emerging movement around the Rights of the River Wye, which aims to give the river legal representation and intrinsic rights, such as the right not to be polluted and the right to regenerate. Forest of Dean District Council supports such a charter.

We resolved to endorse the Charter for the Rights of the River Wye and welcome the other progress in the Wye Catchment.

10. National and Local Updates

We received a report regarding activities of the National Landscapes Association, Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) and the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.

The National Landscapes Association recently hosted a meeting of Lead Officers in Birmingham which focused on setting out the direction of travel for the coming year. The annual conference will take place in early July 2026, just before the next Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) meeting. Therefore, because of this timing, both today's meeting and the July 2026 JAC meeting have been moved from the usual first Monday of the month to avoid difficult travel arrangements.

Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) is currently undertaking an important piece of work examining the effectiveness and efficiency of National Landscapes and National Parks in Wales. Interim findings are expected in April, with final results in June 2026, ahead of the Senedd Election in May 2026. This will ensure that key messages and recommendations are available for the incoming Welsh Government. Alongside this, a manifesto has been produced for all political parties in Wales. The Wye Valley National Landscape Manager is currently serving as chair of TCLW and will complete his term in June 2026. Catherine Mealing-Jones, CEO of Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, will succeed him.

Locally, the National Grid Landscapes Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects are progressing well, with noteworthy outputs emerging, in the area between Whitchurch and Ross. This marks the first of three years of planned project activity. Work on the Tracks and Trails strategy within Monmouthshire is also moving forward, although progress last year was slower than hoped. An audit of key unclassified county roads has now been completed, and the Steering Group are in the process of prioritising routes and identifying both quick wins and more complex challenges. A public meeting will be held in the spring of 2026 to update local communities on the work.

We noted the report.

11. Dates of meetings for 2026:

Monday 13th July 2026 at 2.00pm.

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, 9th March, 2026 at 2.00
pm**

Monday 2nd November 2026 at 2.00pm.

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

Before closing the meeting, the following information was noted:

The Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity) Wales Bill has now passed the Senedd and is awaiting Royal Assent. This represents a significant step forward, introducing legally binding targets to reverse biodiversity loss in Wales and establishing the Office for Environmental Governance Wales. This new body will provide a mechanism for individuals to raise concerns and hold Welsh public bodies to account.

The meeting ended at 3.56 pm.

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

13th July 2026

WYE VALLEY NATIONAL LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

Purpose

To present the revised programme for the Review of the Wye Valley National Landscape Management Plan.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. Endorses the revised programme for the review and publication of the National Landscape Management Plan
- B. Endorses the further refinement of the Special Qualities for inclusion in the Draft Management Plan.
- C. Recognise that the existing AONB Management Plan 2021-2026 remains valid until the new National Landscape Management Plan 2027-2032 is finalised and adopted.

Key Issues

- 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.

Reasons

Sections 89-90 of the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 require local authorities to review adopted and published AONB Management Plans every five years. The CROW Act

also requires local authorities to ‘act jointly’ in the preparation and review of AONB Management Plans.

Implications

Due to slippage with ‘in-house’ delivery of the Management Plan Review programme, a consultant has now been commissioned to assist with process. The appointed consultant also worked on the Malvern Hills National Landscape Management Plan, and has broad experience of the Management Plan process in both England and Wales.

At the previous JAC meeting the draft policies were endorsed along with the rationalisation of the Special Qualities from 27 in the existing Management Plan down to 18. The consultant has facilitated the further consolidation of the Special Qualities down to ten – as appended below. The five-theme structure of Nature, Climate, Water, People and Place remains along with the 50 Policies as presented at the last meeting.

The contextual text and accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) are being prepared by the consultant, ensuring alignment with both Natural England’s and Natural Resource Wales’ respective Management Plan guidance, and other cross-border policy responsibilities.

Appended below is the revised programme for the Management Plan review. The Public Consultation process will last for 6-8 weeks in the autumn and include 3 open events at different locations and times across the National Landscape. This will enable a range of stakeholders to engage face to face as part of the public consultation.

Background

The CRoW Act 2000 (Sections 89 and 90) require local authorities to review AONB Management Plans within five years of the publication of a Plan. The Management Plan formulates their policy for the management of their AONB and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it.

The current Management Plan 2021-2026 is available on the National Landscape website <https://www.wyevalley-nl.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/management-plans/>

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Proposed Special Quality & description	Supporting Special Features	Related SQs in 2021–26 Plan
SQ1. A cross-border river valley landscape of striking contrasts The Wye Valley National Landscape straddles the English-Welsh border which gives the area a distinctive identity, with the river at its heart. It is defined by strong contrasts in landform and scenery, creating a distinctive and varied landscape. In the north, the river meanders through the broad meadows of the Herefordshire lowlands, giving the landscape a more open and gentle character. Further downstream, the scenery becomes more dramatic, with steep wooded slopes, sheer cliffs and striking gorges. These more enclosed and rugged sections are interspersed with broader valley reaches, rounded hills and prominent bluffs, adding further variety to the landscape.	• River Wye corridor • Broad floodplain meadows • Herefordshire lowlands • Steep wooded slopes • Limestone cliffs and dramatic gorges • Rounded hills and bluffs • Riverside settlements • Market towns • 16 Landscape Management Zones • Cross-border setting and identity	• SQ1 Overall Landscape • SQ3 River and Tributaries • SQ10 Riverine Geomorphology • SQ11 Picturesque, Extensive and Dramatic Views • SQ20 Vernacular Architecture • SQ21 Language and Dialects.
SQ2. Dramatic geology and geomorphology The Wye Valley's rocks, landforms, soils and river processes are fundamental to the National Landscape's natural beauty, having shaped the valley's cliffs, caves, gorges, river terraces, tufa features and soils. The Wye Valley National Landscape contains an impressive variety of geological outcrops and important examples of active and past geomorphologic processes, including the full sequence of the Carboniferous Limestone Series. The differing geology has given rise to a range of distinctive settlement and farming patterns. The landscape continues to be shaped by natural processes, especially through the river and its tributaries.	• Silurian rocks of the Woolhope Dome • Lower Devonian Old Red Sandstone • Quartz conglomerate • Carboniferous Limestone • Limestone cliffs, caves and limestone pavement • Gorges • River terraces • Landslips • Tufa dams and deposits • Natural stream channels • Distinctive soils • Geological exposures • Geological SSSIs and Local Geological Sites • Influence of geology on settlement, farming, woodland, quarrying and building materials	• SQ6 Silurian Rocks • SQ7 Lower Devonian Old Red Sandstone • SQ8 Quartz Conglomerate • SQ9 Carboniferous Limestone • SQ10 Riverine Geomorphology • Parts of SQ1 Overall Landscape • SQ11 Picturesque, Extensive and Dramatic Views • SQ16 Post-medieval Industrial Sites and Associated Landscapes • SQ20 Vernacular Architecture

Proposed Special Quality & description	Supporting Special Features	Related SQs in 2021–26 Plan
SQ3. A renowned river system The River Wye, its tributaries, floodplains, wetlands and river landforms are central to the character, ecology and cultural identity of the Wye Valley National Landscape. The river connects places, habitats and communities, supports internationally and nationally important wildlife, and has shaped settlement, farming, industry, recreation and people's sense of place. There is a Public Right of Navigation on the Wye reflecting the historic use of the river as a transport corridor. The Wye is a Special Area of Conservation and it was the first major river to be designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest along its entire length. There is also a Charter for the River Wye recognising its "intrinsic rights" as a living ecosystem.	• River Wye and tributaries • Tributaries and side valleys • Floodplains, riverside meadows, wetlands and riparian habitats • River Wye SAC and SSSI • Riparian species • Water quality • River crossings, bridges and ferries • River as historic transport route • River-based recreation	• SQ3 River and Tributaries • SQ10 Riverine Geomorphology • SQ11 Views • SQ12 Tranquillity • SQ16 Post-medieval Industrial Sites and Landscapes • SQ17 Railway Heritage • SQ24 Wye Valley Walk
SQ4. Nature-rich and connected habitats The Wye Valley National Landscape is particularly important for its rich, varied and connected wildlife habitats. Its river, valley-side ancient woodlands and bat roosting sites form a remarkable concentration of internationally important habitats, supported by a wider network of SSSIs, National Nature Reserves, local wildlife sites and priority habitats. The National Landscape's predominantly wooded and riverine character is complemented by a matrix of species-rich grasslands, pastures, hay meadows, traditional orchards, hedgerows, drystone walls, wetlands, commons, sunken lanes, road verges and boundary habitats. Together, these form a strong habitat mosaic that makes the landscape robust and permeable for many species, supporting nature recovery across farmed, wooded, riparian, common, settlement-edge and other managed landscapes.	• River, woodland and bat SACs • SSSIs, National Nature Reserves and local/key wildlife sites • Priority habitats and locally important habitats • River, tributary, wetland and riparian habitats • Ancient woodland, limestone woodland and wooded slopes • Bat roosts, flight lines and foraging habitats • Species-rich grasslands, pastures and hay meadows • Traditional orchards • Hedgerows, copses, field margins, banks, lanes and verges • Commons, village greens and access land with nature conservation value • Boundary habitats and transitional habitats	• SQ4 Species-rich Grassland • SQ5 Boundary Habitat Diversity and Connectivity • SQ26 Small Commons and Greens • SQ27 Orchards • SQ1 Overall Landscape • SQ2 Woodlands • SQ12 Tranquillity • SQ20 Vernacular Architecture • SQ22 Old Tracks • SQ18 Ancient and Veteran Trees • SQ25 Access Land • SQ3 River and Tributaries

Proposed Special Quality & description	Supporting Special Features	Related SQs in 2021–26 Plan
	- Habitat connectivity between rivers, woodlands, farmland, grasslands, commons, wetlands and settlements - Traditional and nature-friendly land management	
SQ5. Exceptional ancient woodlands and veteran trees Woodlands are one of the Wye Valley National Landscape’s dominant landscape features. Most are ancient woodland of high nature conservation value and are irreplaceable. They provide nationally and internationally important habitats, contribute strongly to scenic beauty and tranquillity, and hold deep cultural and historic associations through woodland management, boundaries, estates, commons and settlement. The limestone woodlands are especially notable as a refuge for rare species and form part of one of the largest remaining areas of ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland in the country. As living relics of great age, ancient and veteran trees contribute to both biodiversity and cultural history and can inspire a strong sense of awe and mystery.	- Ancient semi-natural woodland - Planted ancient woodland sites - Wye Valley Woodlands SAC and other designated woodland sites - Limestone, beech, yew and ravine woodland - Wooded gorge sides and wooded slopes - Coppice and woodland management heritage - Ancient, veteran and notable trees - Trees in hedgerows, parklands, estates, commons, lanes and settlements - Woodland biodiversity and nature conservation interest, including characteristic woodland habitats and associated species - Woodland connectivity with rivers, grasslands, hedgerows, commons and farmland habitats	- SQ2 Woodlands - SQ18 Ancient and Veteran Trees - SQ5 Boundary Habitat Diversity and Connectivity - SQ11 Views; - SQ12 Tranquillity; - SQ19 Historic/Registered Parks and Gardens

Proposed Special Quality & description	Supporting Special Features	Related SQs in 2021–26 Plan
SQ6. Picturesque views, tranquillity and dark skies The Wye Valley National Landscape is renowned for its extensive and dramatic views, including viewpoints that helped shape the British appreciation of landscape and inspired some of the great British poets and writers. The Reverend William Gilpin was inspired in 1770 to write his treatise on the notion and depiction of landscape and gave birth to the ‘picturesque’ movement. Its sensory qualities are equally important: tranquillity, relative remoteness, naturalness, dark skies, birdsong, river sounds, woodland enclosure, seasonal colour and changing light. These qualities are central to how people experience the National Landscape and are vulnerable to incremental change.	• Picturesque, extensive and dramatic views • Symonds Yat Rock, Wynd Cliff and other recognised viewpoints • Designed and informal viewpoints • Framed river views • Wooded enclosure • Views to cliffs, gorges, castles, Tintern Abbey, river meadows and wooded slopes • Picturesque movement • Artistic and literary associations • Tranquillity • Relative remoteness • Naturalness and wildness • Dark skies • Low levels of visual and noise intrusion • Natural sounds, including birdsong, river sounds and woodland sounds	• SQ11 Picturesque, Extensive and Dramatic Views • SQ12 Overall Sense of Tranquillity, Remoteness, Naturalness/Wildness and Dark Skies • SQ1 Overall Landscape • SQ2 Woodlands • SQ3 River and Tributaries • SQ9 Carboniferous Limestone • SQ15 Medieval Defensive and Ecclesiastical Sites • SQ19 Historic/Registered Parks and Gardens
SQ7. A deeply layered historic landscape The Wye Valley National Landscape contains an abundance of sites of historic and cultural significance. Several nationally significant cultural, industrial and artistic associations have roots in the Wye Valley. It is a palimpsest landscape, where successive periods of human activity remain visible in the land. Prehistoric caves and hillforts, Roman and early medieval sites, Ergyng, Offa’s Dyke, castles, churches, monasteries, Tintern Abbey, industrial sites, quarries, mills, railways, wharves, bridges and historic parks together tell the story of a river valley shaped by movement, defence, faith, farming, industry, tourism and settlement. The river is both the backbone and the border of the historic environment that underlays the landscape of the Wye Valley. The river was the main transport route up and down the valley, superseded by the railway. Tributaries cascade down side	• Palaeolithic cave sites • Prehistoric hillforts and settlement remains • Roman sites • Early medieval sites • Offa’s Dyke • Medieval defensive sites and landscapes • Medieval ecclesiastical sites and landscapes • Tintern Abbey • Post-medieval industrial landscapes • Wireworks, papermaking, tanning, tin-plate, quarrying and milling sites • Water-powered industry and tributary valleys	• SQ13 Prehistoric Sites • SQ14 Roman and Early Medieval Sites including Offa’s Dyke • SQ15 Medieval Defensive and Ecclesiastical Sites • SQ16 Post-medieval Industrial Sites and Associated Landscapes • SQ17 Railway Heritage • SQ19 Historic/Registered Parks and Gardens • SQ18 Ancient and Veteran Trees • SQ22 Old Tracks

Proposed Special Quality & description	Supporting Special Features	Related SQs in 2021–26 Plan
valleys to join the Wye, giving focus to settlements and power to pioneering industries. The Wye Valley's time-depth is experienced through individual heritage assets, but also through wider cultural and historic landscapes, routeways, designed landscapes and the relationship between archaeology, landform, river and woodland.	• Wharves, bridges and river infrastructure • Railway heritage, including bridges, tunnels and embankments • Historic and registered parks and gardens • Designed and Picturesque landscapes • Scheduled monuments and archaeological remains	• SQ23 Offa's Dyke Path
SQ8. Distinctive settlements, vernacular buildings and built heritage Local building materials, settlement form, scale, rooflines, walls, lanes, bridges and enclosure patterns give different parts of the Wye Valley National Landscape their distinctive sense of place. Market towns, villages, hamlets, farmsteads, commoners' cottages, estate houses, churches, mills and other historic buildings are closely related to the river, landform, routes, geology and historic patterns of land use. Traditional dry-stone walls are a particularly important feature, reflecting local geology, historic landownership, farming and common land management. They contribute to the small-scale field pattern, provide habitat for wildlife, and form part of the experience of lanes, paths, settlements and farmed landscapes. The built heritage of the National Landscape remains recognisably local, rural and settled, rather than generic.	• Market towns, villages and hamlets • Riverside settlements • Farmsteads • Commoners' cottages • Historic parks, gardens and estate houses and buildings • Vernacular architecture • Local building materials and detailing • Dry stone walls • Settlement patterns influenced by river, routes, geology and landform • Historic bridges, walls and small-scale built features • Conservation areas • Listed buildings and locally distinctive buildings • Small-scale rural buildings, boundaries and lanes	• SQ20 Vernacular Architecture • Parts of SQ1 Overall Landscape • SQ6-SQ10 Geology and Geomorphology • SQ15 Medieval Defensive and Ecclesiastical Sites • SQ16 Post-medieval Industrial Sites and Associated Landscapes • SQ17 Railway Heritage • SQ19 Historic/Registered Parks and Gardens • SQ22 Old Tracks

Proposed Special Quality & description	Supporting Special Features	Related SQs in 2021–26 Plan
SQ9. Living culture, language and identity The Wye Valley National Landscape has a living cultural identity expressed through Welsh language and place names, local accents and dialects, myths and stories, artistic and literary associations, local food, rural skills and community stewardship. These cultural associations are part of how the palimpsest landscape is understood, valued and cared for, and they help connect the Wye Valley's natural beauty with the people who live in, work in and visit it.	• Welsh language • Welsh place names • Forest of Dean dialects and accents • South Herefordshire dialects and accents • Myths and stories associated with the Wye/Gwy • Local identity and sense of belonging • Artistic, literary and cultural associations • Picturesque associations • Local food and drink traditions • Orchard traditions and cider/perry heritage • Woodland products and rural skills • Farming, forestry and commoning traditions • Volunteering, interpretation and community stewardship	• SQ21 Welsh language, accents and dialects • SQ27 Orchards • SQ11 Picturesque, Extensive and Dramatic Views • SQ12 Tranquillity • SQ16 Post-medieval Industrial Sites and Associated Landscapes • SQ17 Railway Heritage • SQ19 Historic/Registered Parks and Gardens • SQ20 Vernacular Architecture • SQ26 Small Commons and Greens
SQ10. Access, recreation and direct experience of the landscape The Wye Valley National Landscape is experienced through a rich and extensive network of historic routes, promoted trails, access land, commons, river-based and valley-side recreation, viewpoints and pathways. These routes and places allow people to experience and appreciate the river, woodlands, views, heritage, settlements, wildlife and tranquillity directly.	• Offa's Dyke Path • Wye Valley Walk • Old tracks and sunken lanes • Rights of way network • Access land • Commons and village greens • Riverside routes and river access points • Viewpoints and promoted views • Walking, cycling, horse riding and quiet countryside recreation • Canoeing and other river-based recreation • Recreational links with market towns, villages and visitor hubs • Responsible recreation and quiet enjoyment compatible with conserving natural beauty	• SQ22 Old Tracks • SQ23 Offa's Dyke Path • SQ24 Wye Valley Walk • SQ25 Access Land • SQ26 Small Commons and Greens • SQ3 River and Tributaries • SQ11 Picturesque, Extensive and Dramatic Views • SQ12 Tranquillity • SQ15 Medieval Defensive and Ecclesiastical Sites • SQ16 Post-medieval Industrial Sites and Associated Landscapes

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Wye Valley National Landscape / AONB Management Plan Review Programme (July 2026)

Task No.	Task	Suggested timetable	Progress
	Formalities and Notification		
1.	Endorse outline Management Plan Review programme	Nov 2024	Achieved
2.	Authorisation from local authorities to undertake review on their behalf	Dec 2024	In MoU 2021-24
3.	S90 (1) Notify Natural England & Natural Resources Wales	Dec 2024	Verbal
4.	Announce requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Jan 2025	TBC
5.	Finalise process and timetable of review	Feb 2025	Achieved
	Scoping		
6.	Consider strengths and weaknesses of current Plan and new strategic priorities	Feb 2025	19 th March Seminar
7.	Endorse consultation programme	Mar 2025	JAC 3 rd March
8.	Online survey to gather initial comments and views	Mar-Apr 2025	
9.	Publish State of AONB Report	Mar 2025	TBC
10.	JAC/ Partnership 'workshop' on current Plan, policies, evidence, positions and new strategic priorities	Mar 2025	19th March Seminar
11.	Review and assess other new evidence, law, policies, strategies, plans and issues which are of relevance (including the Outcomes Framework, requirement for climate change adaptation plans etc).	Mar-Apr 2025	On-going
12.	Identify main areas requiring update or new work	May 2025	On-going
13.	Collate responses & views on issues from existing sources	May-Jun 2025	On-going
14.	Start SEA Scoping Study, collation of data and evidence of other plans and programmes, seek input from the Environmental bodies.	Jun 2025	June 2026 Consultant commissioned to progress.
	Consultation		
15.	Undertake targeted consultations/participatory workshops with relevant groups on current Plan, policies, evidence, positions and new strategic priorities	Jun 2025	19th March Seminar & on-going
16.	Identify key issues, aims and objectives	July 2025	Nov/Dec 25

Task No.	Task	Suggested timetable	Progress
17.	Draft new wording for consultation draft of revised Plan	Aug 2025	Dec 25 /Jan 26. June 26 Consultant commissioned 2 nd draft in progress.
18.	Write SEA report, setting context and objectives, establishing baseline evidence and indicators (Stage A). Assess effects of objectives, policies and actions and for SEA and/or SA (stage B). Collate Environmental Report for SEA/SA (stage C) plus non-technical summary	Sept 2025	June 26 Consultant commissioned and drafting in progress.
19.	Consultation Draft reviewed	Nov /Dec 2025 July / Aug 26	
20.	Run public consultation on new draft plan and SEA/SA report (Stage D). 12 weeks. Consult on scoping report for SEA	Apr 2026 for 10 weeks (avoiding Easter) 6-8 weeks Oct/Nov 26	
21.	Undertake specific targeted consultations/participatory workshops with relevant groups as required	3 public events during 10 week consultation	
22.	Consider comments from consultation and amend plan	July – Aug Nov/Dec 2026	
23.	Initial report on consultation and suggested amendments	TOWP Oct 2026 Feb 2027	
	Adoption		
24.	Draft revised Plan to JAC for approval	Nov 2026 March 2027	
25.	Send to Natural England for formal observations	Nov 2026 March 2027	
26.	Consider comments from formal observations and amend Plan	Dec 2026 March 2027	
27.	Get new plan formally approved by Local Authorities and JAC Chair	Jan April 2027	
28.	Design, printing and distribution	Feb May 2027	
29.	Send approved plan to Secretary of State	Mar May 2027	
30.	Publish statement of how SEA taken into account and changes	Mar 2027	
31.	Confirmation of full adoption of Plan	JAC Mar July 2027	

ANNUAL REPORT

Purpose

To present the annual reports for 2025/26 on the achievements of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.

Recommendations

That the JAC welcome the Annual Report on Wye Valley National Landscape Team achievements for 2025/26

Key Issues

- The 2025/26 Annual Report on the Work Programme is appended for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.
- High levels of achievement were maintained across nature recovery, climate resilience, sustainable land management, community engagement and access.
- The appended map and Infographic identify the spread of achievements both spatially and thematically.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Team was consolidated in 2025/26 with the new FIPL and Ffermio Bro Officers joining the Team.
- 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 JAC.

Reasons

The Work Programme Report for 2025/26 tabulates the achievements of the National Landscape Team during the period. The Work Programme Annual Report is also presented to DEFRA and Welsh Government as contributory evidence to the National Landscape Partnership annual grant claims to the two government core funding partners.

Implications

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team delivered a strong and varied programme of work during 2025-26, achieving significant outcomes for nature recovery, climate resilience, sustainable land management, community engagement and access. Across the year, the Team successfully managed major grant programmes, strengthened partnerships with farmers, landowners, communities and local authorities, and continued to deliver practical improvements across the National Landscape.

Land management support was a major area of achievement. The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme fully spent its £339,063 allocation, supporting 33 projects, involving

118 farmers and benefiting 326 ha of land (10% of the National Landscape). In Wales, the first year of Ffermio Bro was successfully launched and delivered, with its £98,000 budget fully spent and practical landscape-scale outcomes including new and restored hedgerows, woodland enhancement, riparian corridor improvements, leaky dams, ponds and drystone wall repairs. The Wye Adapt to Climate Change programme also expanded climate adaptation and natural flood management work, providing 18 farms with site-specific advice and supporting delivery of ponds, leaky dams, meadow restoration, hedge planting, fencing, tree planting and herbal ley creation. Similar collaborations and achievements were developed through the 3 National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects.

The Team made important progress on biodiversity and habitat restoration. The Woodland Butterfly Species Action Plan was published and adopted, the Water Crowfoot Species Action Plan was drafted, and further work delivered the Noble Chafer, Hedgehog and Bumblebee Species Action Plans, including bespoke surveys, habitat creation, workshops and public engagement. Invasive non-native species (INNS) control remained a significant focus, with treatment of Japanese Knotweed, American Skunk Cabbage and Cherry Laurel, alongside volunteer action on Himalayan Balsam. At Cleddon Bog SSSI, peatland restoration continued through scrub clearance, tree removal, conservation grazing and updated vegetation monitoring, confirming the site's continuing high conservation value.

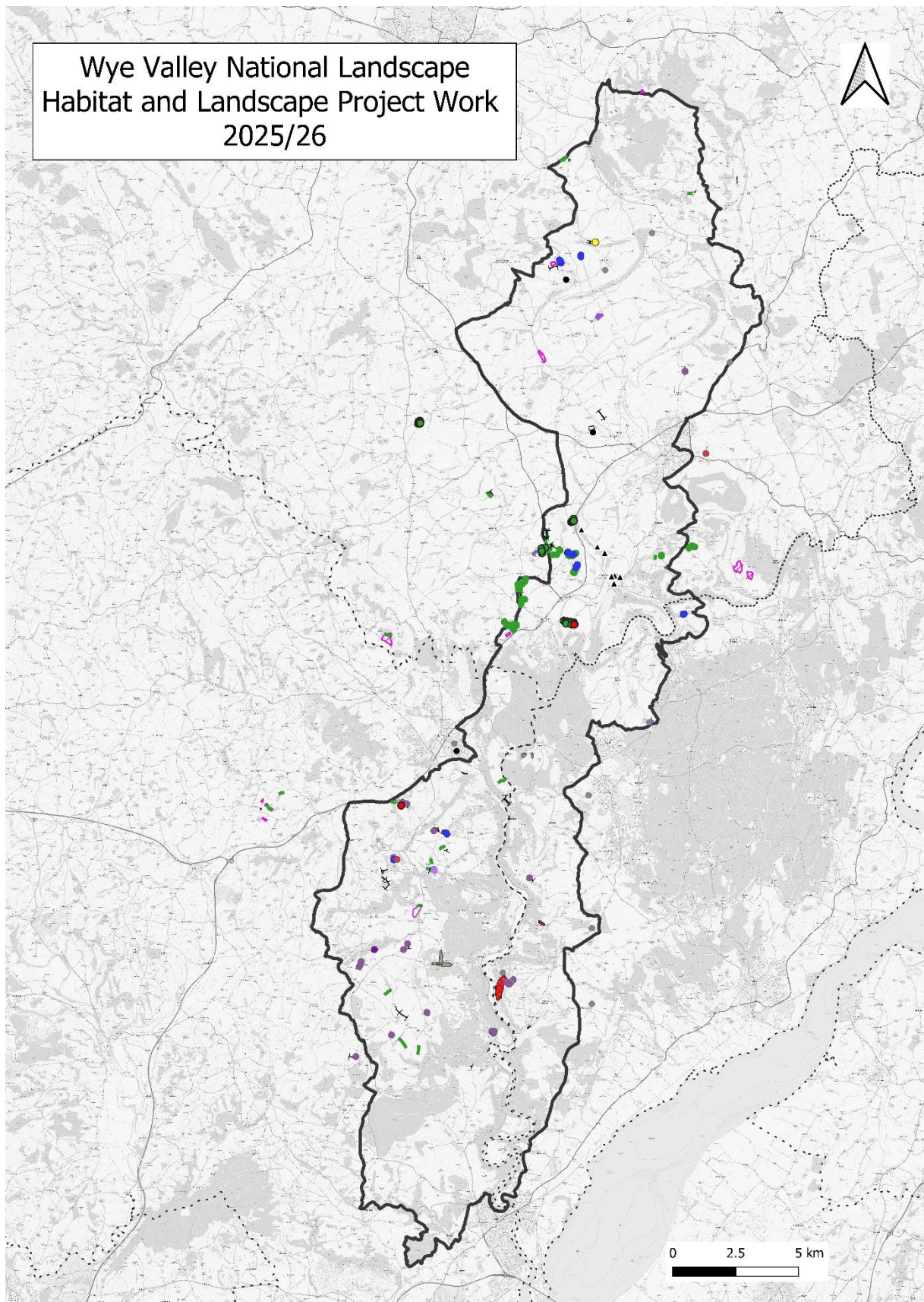
Community participation and public engagement were also strong. Volunteers contributed 2,940 hours across 240 work days, while Young Adventurers achieved 82 attendances by young people who took part in activities helping to build their skills, confidence and connection with the landscape. The 50th anniversary of the Wye Valley Walk was celebrated through a new official guidebook, guided walks of the whole route, benches, a public transport map, a major exhibition and a growing passport scheme. Access and inclusion were improved through 14 Access for All projects and the successful resurfacing of 240 m of path at Trellech Common, making the landscape easier to enjoy for residents and visitors with a wider range of mobility needs.

Strategically, the Team strengthened the foundations for future delivery. The Nature Recovery Plan was completed and approved, the Management Plan review progressed, governance and partnership arrangements were supported, and all budgets were spent and claimed within required thresholds. The submission of an Expression of Interest to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a 10-year Landscape Connections initiative provides a major future opportunity to work at scale with farmers, landowners and communities to restore nature, improve water quality and strengthen people's relationship with the Wye Valley National Landscape.

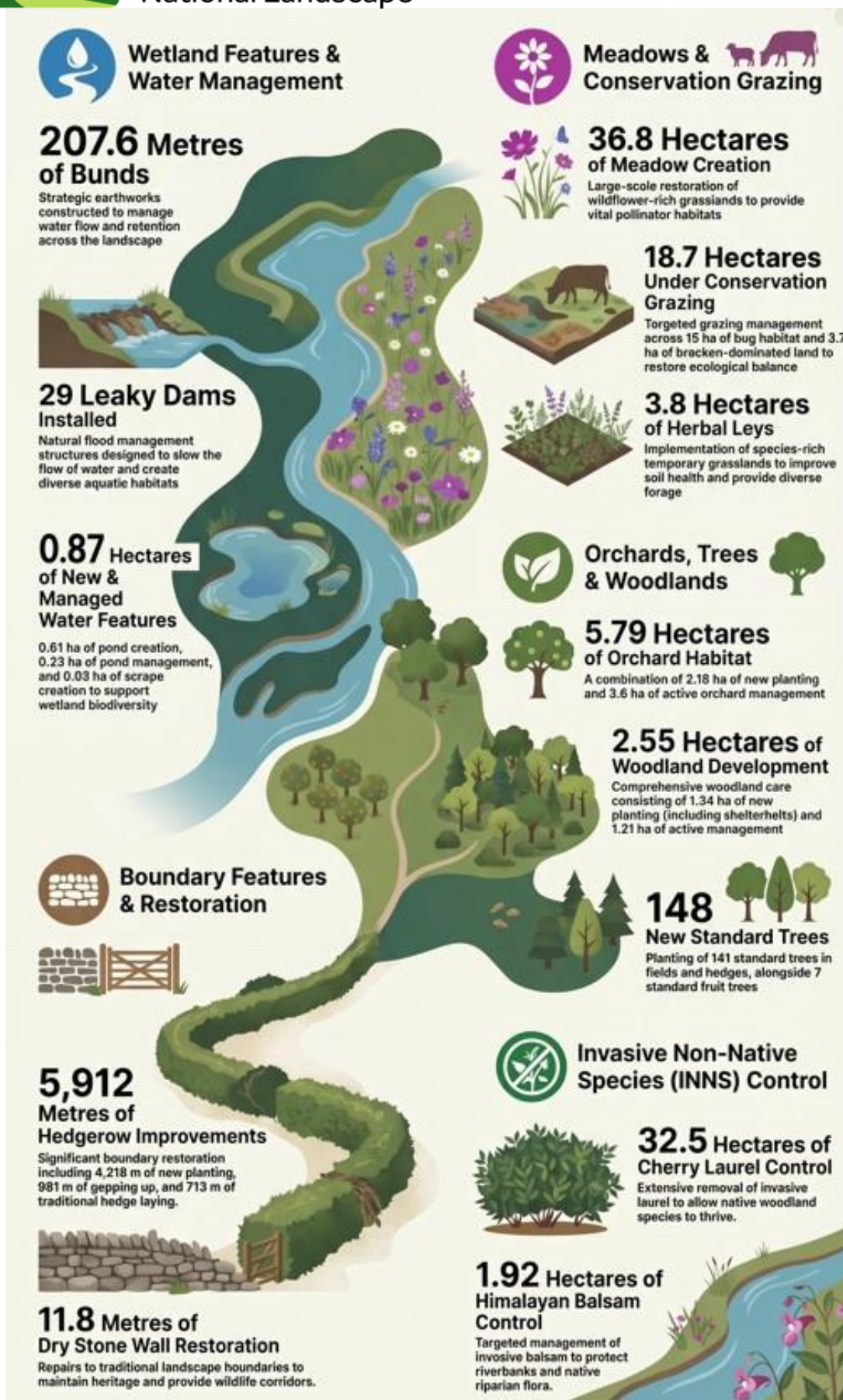
Below is a map showing the distribution of habitat and landscape management project work by the Team during 2025/26. These outputs are now collated on the Wye Valley National Landscape Team Geographical Information System (GIS) which aids spatial collaboration and targeting, as well as reporting to funders. This data was also used to create the Infographic, below, that highlights some of these outcomes thematically.

The full table of achievements on the Work Programme is appended as the 2025/26 Annual Report for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team. The summary financial report will be presented at the November JAC, but full spend was secured on all available budgets helping partners further the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the outstanding natural beauty of the National Landscape.

Wye Valley National Landscape
Habitat and Landscape Project Work
2025/26



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Wye Valley National Landscape Team - Work Programme 2025-2026 – Annual Report

Work Programme Objectives	National Landscape Team Achievements & Outcomes 2025-26
<u>Nature</u>	
<u>Species Actions Plans (SAP) for Special Qualities [SQ]</u>	
· Finish/publish: Woodland butterfly assemblage SAP for Wood White and Pearl Bordered Fritillary in relation to Woodlands [SQ2]	Published and adopted by Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee, as 4 th of 5 SAPs
· Draft Water Crowfoot SAP as indicator for River [SQ3, SQ10]	Final SAP drafted and presented to TOWP. Collaboration with Friends of River Wye over river drone filming trials and Big Ranunculus Watch. Water-crowfoot (Ranunculus) drone survey methodology written up for peer review.
o Noble Chafer beetle SAP in relation to Orchard habitats & Veteran Trees [SQ27, SQ18]	In partnership with The eDNA Consultancy, a new species-specific environmental DNA (eDNA) primer was investigated to enable more effective detection of Noble Chafer populations. Once validated, this technique will be used to survey orchards across the National Landscape, helping to identify previously unknown populations, target conservation efforts and inform future habitat management. Habitat enhancement has included the creation of new traditional orchards at Bendith, Ross-on-Wye, and Stowe Court, St Briavels (20 trees), alongside the provision of fruit trees to landowners to restore existing orchards. Funding was also provided to support a programme of traditional orchard management and pruning workshops delivered by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, helping landowners develop the skills required to maintain these valuable habitats. Public engagement has remained an important aspect of the project. A Traditional Orchard Storytelling event, led by ethnobotanist Pridie Tiernan, combining folklore, outdoor learning and nature connection to raise awareness of the ecological and cultural importance of traditional orchards and the wildlife they support. To further enhance breeding habitat, three new Noble Chafer habitat boxes were constructed to be installed within suitable orchards.

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o Hedgehog SAP as a locally iconic species [SQ1, SQ4, SQ5, SQ26]; including Support Hedgehog Rescue Centre	The Hedgehog Monitoring Project was delivered at Walford Primary School, Trellech Primary School and Whitchurch Primary School, engaging over 300 children in hedgehog conservation and citizen science. The supply and loan of tracking tunnels and wildlife cameras enabled hedgehog activity to be recorded at all three schools. Monitoring was also undertaken at Lower Gockett Farm (Monmouth) and Howle Hill (Walford). Two individual hedgehogs were recorded at Lower Gockett Farm, while no activity was detected at Howle Hill, providing valuable baseline data to inform future conservation work. Community engagement included six public events promoting hedgehog conservation, including workshops, family activities and community events across the Wye Valley. A hedge laying course at Trellech Wet Meadow, delivered in partnership with Monmouthshire Meadows, supported the restoration and traditional management of hedgerows as essential habitat and wildlife corridors for hedgehogs. The Prickly Patch Hedgehog Rehabilitation Centre, near Monmouth, funded and supported, strengthening local capacity for the rescue, rehabilitation and release of injured and orphaned hedgehogs.
o Bumblebee assemblage SAP with focus on Shrill Carder, Brown-banded Carder, and Red-shanked Carder in Grassland sites [SQ4].	Three Bumblebee ID and Monitoring Workshops were delivered to recruit and train volunteers for the Buzzwatch project, increasing and up-skilling local capacity for long-term bumblebee monitoring. The workshops were successful, with participants at Trellech Wet Meadow recording one of the National Landscape's priority species, the Red-shanked Carder Bee. Public engagement activities included educational stalls at the Ross Town Council Picnic in the Park, where visitors learnt about the importance of bumblebees and took part in wildflower seed bomb activities to promote pollinator-friendly habitats. Baseline eDNA surveys were also undertaken at Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) grassland restoration sites to investigate the potential for monitoring bumblebee populations before habitat enhancement works. Although no bumblebee DNA was detected using the initial methodology, the findings have informed a revised survey approach, with repeat surveys planned using an improved methodology this year.

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Farming & land management support: advice, guidance and grants, including River Friendly Farming, Natural Flood Management (NFM) & Habitat Creation/Restoration	
· Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme [England only]	The new FiPL Officer was recruited. The FiPL allocation for the year was £339,063.00 with the budget being fully spent during the year. In total grants were offered to 33 projects. 118 farmers were involved in one capacity or another, with 326 ha of land supported. Outputs included: • Thirteen projects delivered outcomes reducing flood risk, including 6 new ponds. • Seventeen projects were involved with delivering understanding of Carbon storage, Carbon emissions and Climate Change impacts, such as the creation of 6.3 ha of woodland and 490 metres of hedgerow. • Ten school days were supported. • Eight projects delivered outcomes to improve the resilience of nature friendly sustainable farming businesses. Examples include an on-farm butchery retail unit; A2 milk pasteurising for on-farm sale; faster sterilising of apple juice bottling.

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Ffermio Bro, Welsh Government programme. Working together to:- • Support nature recovery and ecosystem resilience • Deliver activities spanning multiple farms to achieve common environmental goals • Enhance farm business sustainability and resilience • Create opportunities for public engagement with our landscapes and cultural heritage	Ffermio Bro Officer recruited, and delivery of the collaborative programme funding activities spanning multiple farms to create landscape-scale impact. Full budget spend of £98,000 was achieved. Collaboration focused on 2 aspects: Thematic – Farms across the National Landscape working toward shared goals, without requiring formal cluster arrangements, Geographic - Projects where farmers work together on connect habitats and/or through local catchments along rivers or streams undertaking coordinated actions to improve water quality, In the first year Ffermio Bro worked with 11 Farmers facilitating: – 1,600m of new hedgerows planted – 710m hedgerows restored – 12ha of woodland enhanced – Leaky dams installed and ponds created – 914m of riparian corridors enhanced – Dry Stone Walls repaired
· Wye Adapt to Climate Change? (WACC) Programme	18 new farms were visited and provided site-specific advice on opportunities for nature recovery, sustainable land management, and natural flood management. Support was provided to deliver the following interventions: - 5 ponds created - 2 ponds restored - 26 ha meadow restored - 33 leaky dams installed - 1.1 km hedge planted - 1.2 km fencing installed (e.g. to fence off a brook from livestock or improve grassland management). - 327 m hedge laid - 1.8 ha trees planted (i.e. to create shelterbelt, orchard and riparian woodland)

Work Programme Objectives	National Landscape Team Achievements & Outcomes 2025-26
	- 3.5 ha herbal ley seeded
<u>· National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects</u>	
o Magnificent Meadows Tremendous Trees and Wonderful Wetlands [LEI 1]	• 1.73ha of meadow grassland creation across 2 landholdings. • 30 parkland trees and 5 orchard trees planted. • NFM interventions at one farm including a 140m bund, sediment trap and a 200m² attenuation pond. • 8 leaky dams installed across 2 landholdings.
o Marstow and Pencraig landscape connections [LEI 2]	• 826m of new hedge planted across 3 landholdings. • 21 Standard Hedgerow Trees planted in new and existing hedge lines, over 2 landholdings • 184m of hedge have been restored at Little Whitfield Farm through protection from livestock
o Whitchurch to Howle Hill landscape enhancements [LEI 3]	• 793m of new hedge planted across 5 landholdings. • 55 Standard Hedgerow Trees planted in new and existing hedgelines, over 4 landholdings • 367m of hedge has been restored through gapping up and coppicing on 3 farms. • 11 roadside field gates have been installed adding to the distinctive character and setting of the landscape.
· Conservation Grazing	Collaboration on-going with Herefordshire Meadows CIC, Monmouthshire Meadows Group, Grazing Management Ltd, Woodland Trust and other interested landowners.
· River Friendly Farming	Worked with Herefordshire Rural Hub, Farm Herefordshire and Wye & Usk Foundation, particularly through Wyescapes - Food, Nature, Water - Landscape Recovery project. Farm Herefordshire & Wyescapes boards attended, supported Rural Hub with evidence for Wyescapes submission to DEFRA. Outputs included within LEI project work, FiPL and other updates
· Natural Flood Management (NFM) projects	NFM advice, guidance and signposting to grants through FiPL & WACC On-going liaison with Local Planning Authorities and other stakeholders over Planning requirements for ponds & lakes. Outputs included within LEI project work, FiPL and other updates

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Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) control	• 336 recorded stands of Japanese Knotweed treated. • 448 American Skunk Cabbage plants treated at sites across Brockweir, Cleddon and Whitebrook. • 3,800 Cherry Laurel stems treated at Brockweir and the Hudnalls SSSI / National Nature Reserve. • 3 volunteer days of Himalayan Balsam bashing organised. • 1 Himalayan Balsam action group supported (Archenfield Community Environment Group).
Wildlife of the Wye Valley Guide/Leaflet	Draft text prepared.
<u>Climate</u>	
Peatland Restoration particularly at Cleddon Bog SSSI	• 1800m2 of scrub cleared (about 1.2% of SSSI), with 660 workhours in total, from four chainsaw operators and 25 labourers removing around 4,500 willow and birch trees. • 8 cattle with no-fence collars grazed the site from May-September with Grazing Management Ltd. & volunteer cattle checkers • A National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey of Cleddon Bog SSSI was carried out in July 2025, to compare with a 2008 NVC 'Lowland Peatland Survey'. Changes to vegetation communities which have occurred since 2008 were assessed. ○ A number of locally scarce or rare plants are still present. One notable liverwort was newly recorded – <i>Kurzia sylvatica</i> is new to Monmouthshire. The site remains of high conservation value for its mire communities. ○ Meetings held to refine reduced grazing numbers on SSSI for 2026 due to survey results.
Climate Action Plan	• Initial draft prepared with guidance from National Landscape Association (NLA). • 4 staff attended Carbon Literacy training • Staff at Landscape Observatory: Climate Smart Adaptive Management Workshops. • Upgraded EV van purchased for Wye Valley National Landscape Team.
Carbon & Climate Assessments of Landscape Management Zones (LMZs)	Preliminary investigation made. But time and data insufficient for detailed output.

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Climate Action Network (CAN) & Wye Adapt to Climate Change (WACC) events	CAN meetings convened and hosted. In September 2025, the WACC project coordinated a 'Day of Action' for climate and wildlife, bringing together around 20 events across the Wye Valley National Landscape and Herefordshire. Delivered in partnership with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust (HWT), the day featured activities led by staff from the Wye Valley National Landscape team, HWT, and a range of community groups and organisations. Events focused on climate action, nature recovery, and sustainability, with highlights including free travel on the 65 and 69 bus routes between Monmouth and Chepstow—sponsored in collaboration with Monmouthshire County Council—to encourage sustainable transport. Other activities included a tour of an off-grid smallholding, farm walks showcasing climate-friendly farming, and surveys exploring local biodiversity. Around 150 people took part in events throughout the day. Feedback identified that the events were well received and the subsidised buses had increased passenger numbers. We hope to replicate the day September 2026.
Training & Development	4 staff attended Carbon Literacy training
<u>People</u>	
Volunteers – tasks & events	Monthly conservation tasks with average 15-25 volunteers. • 12 task days over 11 months (break for August). Tasks include Scything, Balsam Control, drystone walling, vegetation clearance, birch clearance, hedge & tree planting, shelterbelt planting & litter picks. Collaborated with 10 different organisation/landowners on volunteer events. • also held 2 volunteer training session: ○ Clay Estates Farm Tour- learning about their sustainable farming practices and future projects. ○ Lower Gockett Farm- learning about Natural Flood Management, sustainable farming and the Prickly Patch Hedgehog Rehabilitation Centre. • WVNL supports various local Volunteer Groups ○ Hedgehog First Responders Unit & Prickly Patch Rescue Centre. ○ Wet Meadow Cattle Checkers. ○ Beacon Hill & Cleddon Bog Cattle Checkers. ○ Ross Walkers are Welcome - Miles without Stiles group.

Work Programme Objectives	National Landscape Team Achievements & Outcomes 2025-26
	○ Young Adventures. ● Cattle Checkers have clocked up 378 hours of volunteering. ● Hedgehog First Responders & Prickly Patch Volunteers have clocked up 900 hours. ● Ross walkers are Welcome- Miles Without Stiles volunteers have clocked up 594 hours. ● Youth Adventurers volunteer has clocked up 24 hours. Total volunteer hours over the past 12 months: 2,940 hours over 240 days of work.
Young Adventurers	Engaged 82 attendances of young people, several regular children who attend have SEN. Activities included: ● April 25- Tour of the Beaver Enclosure, near Lydbrook. ● May 25- Bush Craft at Bearse Farm, St Briavels. ● June 25- Hedgehog House Building with a talk from our hedgehog Champion Dylan Allman. ● July 25- Traditional Crafts- Whittling and Drystone walling at Trellech Church. ● September 25- Water sampling and invertebrate ID - Climate Day of Action, Llanishen. ● October 25- Geology Walk and Cave exploring, Lords Wood, The Doward. ● November 25- Screen Printing, Whitchurch Village Hall. ● December 25- Xmas crafts at Bears Farm. ● February 26- Outdoor cooking at Wyesham Community Woodland with Ancient Boar Adventurers.
Training & Development of LPA staff & Cllrs including s85 Training	Programme in development. Standard response letter drafted and shared with LPAs with offer of training sessions, jointly with Malvern Hills NL.
Governance, including Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) & National Landscape Partnership (inc. training, Tour & Seminar)	● JAC Membership review progressed, with 2 new JAC members recruited. Work to fill further vacancies suffered due to time constraints, both of potential new members and other WVNL priorities. ● Annual Study Tour organised on 26th Sept, with 31 attendees from a good spread of representatives from across the National Landscape. The Tour visited various conservation and access and farm projects around the Bishopswood, Goodrich and Brelston Green area, including undergrounding of electricity lines, Kerne Bridge Canoe launch site, the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) and Wyescapes projects. ● 3 JAC's serviced, along with 3 Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP) meetings hosted and 2 Steering Group meetings. ● New Memorandum of Understanding drafted and shared with LA partners and Malvern Hills NL.

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	• 2026/7 draft Work Programme presented to TOWP & JAC
Wye Valley National Landscape Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF)	The fund is currently closed to allow the Endowment Fund interest to grow in value for new applicants.
Wye Valley Walk (WVW) 50th Anniversary events	• Launch of new source-to-sea Wye Valley Walk Official Cicerone Guide Book at Chepstow Library during Chepstow Walking Festival. • Programme of 13 guided walks from source to sea, April to October (200 participants). • Certificate award ceremony in Chepstow Museum for individuals that completed whole route. • Spin off exhibition of paintings/ video 'Flow/Llif' in the Museum Winter 2025/6, (4,369 visitors). Exhibition to move to Hereford in July 2026. • Collaboration with The Outdoor Guide putting the Wye Valley Walk onto this popular walking platform and supplying 10 'Waterproofs and Wellies' packs for schools on the Wye Valley Walk. • Travel Lightly Public Transport Map for the Wye Valley Walk produced. • 8 eye-catching Wye Valley Walk benches installed at the key viewpoints on the Walk: Hafren Forest, Fownhope, Caplor viewpoint, Townsend Farm, Biblins, Monmouth Showground, Duchess's Ride Llandogo and , St Michaels Church Tintern. • Wye Valley Walk passport scheme currently has 666 members. Counter data retrieved from Piercefield for 12 month to August 2025. Highest counter (of 4) totalled 24,056 for year, with 3,694 for August, therefore an average of about 65 people per day. 50% of all use is on the weekend. 51% of use between 12noon and 5pm.
Website update & review	Proposals & specification drafted
LA Liaison	Turnover of senior officers at Herefordshire Council necessitated renewed engagement with new hierarchy. Herefordshire Cabinet member briefing delivered in March 26.
Local, Regional & National partnerships, collaborations & liaison, including National	• Good team representation at the National Landscapes Conference in Winchester • Wye Valley National Landscape Manager in 2nd year as chair of TCLW.

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Landscapes Association (NLA) and Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW)	• Hosted TCLW seminar at Caer Llan with 60 delegates from across Wales' 5 National Landscapes and 3 National Parks. Site visits took delegates to Meend Farm, Lower Gockett Farm and Cleddon Bog SSSI. The event incorporated the official launch of Ffermio Bro by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Changes and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies, at Meend Farm, Penallt. • Staff engagement variously with NLA & TCLW briefings, workshops, working groups & training sessions. • NLA Lead Officers' meeting attended in Birmingham and NLA Chairs' Conference in London. • 2 staff involved in National Landscapes Academy, with series of residential CPD / personal development / teamworking events.
Place	
AONB Management Plan Review	Programme progressed, albeit slowly in-house. • Vision and Special Qualities reviewed & condensed, document framework produced and Strategic Objectives reviewed and consolidated. • Pre-consultation Draft Management Plan prepared and shared with TOWP & JAC.
· Nature Recovery Plan	Complete Nature Recovery Plan, presented to TOWP and approved by JAC.
· State of the National Landscape Report	State of the National Landscape Report draft updated
Lower Wye Track & Trails Action Plan & Steering Group	• 2 Steering Group meetings held. • Consultants' report received on the audit of approximately 11 km of unsealed UCRs across two areas around Tintern and Whitebrook. The audit focuses on the condition and management of each unsealed UCR, including a habitat survey, along with proposed options for practical interventions to address identified issues, including surface repairs, improved drainage, and restoration of natural and cultural/historical features. • 1 Steering Group workshop facilitated to consider results of UCR condition audit. 4 priority routes agreed: ○ Whitebrook: Horse Way/Grove Road & the Maypole Road cluster ○ Tintern: Tintern Road & Chapel Hill Road.

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Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) Nature & Climate programme[Wales only]	Wide range of Nature & Climate projects funded, including River Friendly Farming & NFM interventions, INNS control, SAP delivery also Fencing off of SAC woodland by Alcove viewpoint in Piercefield Woods SSSI. 2 Community halls were supported with Decarbonization Enhancements. • Mitchel Troy received an energy audit from Gwent Energy CIC • The Bridge Centre had an electric vehicle charging point installed. Upgraded EV Charge Point installed at Wye Valley National Landscape Office
Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) [Wales only]	10 projects were supported through the SDF. • Grazing Management- Conservation Grazing at Wet Meadow [Yr 2 of 2]. • Marches Real Food and Farming Network- Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence. • The Prickly Patch: Rehabilitating hedgehogs for a Wye-Id and happy future. • Chepstow Boat Club- Enhanced Chepstow Pontoon & Walkway. • Wye Valley River Festival- Rare Earth [Yr2 of 2]. • One Planet- Community Biochar Training [Yr 1 of 3]. • Lower Gockett Farm- Events Shelter. • Roots In- Regenerative farm engagement programme • Wyesham Community Woodland Management Plan [Yr1 of 2] • St Michael's Church, Mitchel Troy- Drystone wall repairs.
Access for All enhancements (England)	14 projects were supported through the DEFRA Access for all funding • Footpath enhancements along the WVV in Fownhope included a new handrail and steps up to Caplor Camp and surface improvements. • Carpark surfacing and installation of 2 disabled bays at Fownhope Pavilion. • New access for all picnic bench at Haugh Wood car park area. • New sensory, bench along the access route and wood white butterfly walk in Haugh Wood. • Re-surfacing Haugh Wood Carpark and the installation of marked disabled bays. • 'Wye Princess' river boat refurbishment project to enable vessel to be launched as a community facility to run educational and recreational trips for disadvantaged and disabled groups.

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	• 1 new gate was installed at Bicknor Court along footpath REB7 replacing a stile to create better access for local walkers. • Contribution to development and design of an access for all Changing Places facility at Red Meadow carpark in Ross-on-woye. • Contribution to installation of a wheelchair path to Biblins Youth Campsite activity field to enable users access to campfire site and archery area. • Contribution towards the preliminary designs for upgrading both Redbrook Bridge and Lydbrook Bridge. • WVV bench was installed at Biblins. • Access for All bench installed along the Rope Walk in Ross, this included laying Biopave and Teram geotextile matting around the bench area to enable wheelchair users to access the bench. • Further mapping, warmakers, interpretation and illustrated map designs for the 'Willow Walk'. • Willow coracle man woven sculpture installed at Townsend Farm. • Willow Walk illustrated map completed • Stiles replaced with gates in Fownhope and Woolhope area, improving access for local residence and visitors as part of Ross Walkers are Welcome - Miles without stiles programme.
Trellech Common Access Improvements	Following the installation of a 2-way bridleway gate in 2024 for the Wheelchair Ramble, The North Footpath Group asked if the section of path that leads from the gate into Trellech Common could be surfaced as it is a well-used path for locals. The WVNL liaised with Monmouthshire Countryside, NRW and the Community Council to oversee the re-surfacing of the 240m of PROW 382/406/2 in October 25. The project was a huge success with many positive comments from local residence who are now able to use the path all year-round including residents with off road wheelchairs and pushchairs.
Access Audits	Experience Community were commissioned to carry out access audits at Haugh Wood and Chepstow Park Woods. The audits made recommendations to improve access to both sites and created a Photo Trail for wheelchair users to follow. Following the audits a number of improvements have been made at Haugh Wood through the Defra Access for All funding.

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	The Chepstow Park Wood recommendations have been presented to the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum and NRW with a view to implement quick wins in the future such as on-site information and wheelchair accessible benches and picnic tables.
· Cleddon Falls & Jubilee Walk	Enhancements made to waterfall steps after treefall and landslip.
· 65 & 69 Bus Routes/Walks	Climate Day of Action included free travel on the 65 and 69 buses allowing attendees at events to travel by public transport. Travel lightly public transport map for WVNL in production.
Fixed Point Photos	Summer photos in 2025 completed. Winter 2025/26 incomplete due to time resources – consideration being given to reducing level of photography from twice per year to a single summer programme.
Undergrounding (low voltage lines)	Wales – schemes in Trellech and Llanishen have been approved by the steering group and work, including landowners' consent, being programmed in by National Grid. Anticipated completion by Spring 2027. England – schemes at Sollers Hope, Fownhope and Edge End, nr Coleford have been approved by the steering group and are now with National Grid teams for consultation and, pending permissions and consents, delivery.
Planning & Development Control - Planning applications - Local Plan reviews - Position Statements on Tranquillity, Setting & Cultural Capital - Land use Framework	• Ongoing monitoring of Planning Applications and 35 comments/responses made. • Liaison with LPAs over Local Plans • Tranquillity context drafted for new Position Statement • Information fed into various NLA responses, including on Land use Framework. • On-going monitoring of Planning Applications and comments / responses made as necessary. • Forest of Dean Local Plan scrutinised and response prepared with Malvern Hills NL, • Comments provided to Scrutiny Committee on Monmouthshire Review Development Local Plan.
Cultural heritage projects - Overlooking the Wye legacy & Offa's Dyke Collaboratory	Assessment of various Overlooking the Wye interpretation panels that had reached end of life. Overlooking the Wye self-guided walking leaflets reviewed and redrafts prepared.
Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence	The Convergence took place 3-4 th October 2025 at Square Farm, Mitchel Troy, bringing together nearly 200 people over 2 days for conversations, panel sessions, workshops, walks and talks on a wide range of food

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	and farming topics. Despite storm Amy bringing wind and rain and reducing on the day footfall, the event went well and was successful in building connections across the bioregion. See full programme here The video clip on the website and photo gallery capture the spirit of the event. Over the weekend there were: • 8 plenary discussions covering issues from regenerative farming to diets and involving council members, farmers and producers, food advocates and school children. • 8 open forum discussions, providing space for dialogue on farm clusters, listening to the land, a basic income for farmers and food partnership priorities. • 4 farm walks both with the host farmer Rob and local experts and practical sessions that covered measuring nutrient density, to making preserves and seeing what was alive in the soil from a Johnson Su experiment. • The Collaboration Hub-space to facilitate conversation and to capture ideas, opportunities and challenges.
Landscape Connections Bid to National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)	Proposals developed for a 10 Year cross-border initiative working with famers, landowners and communities to strengthen connections between people and their landscape, restore nature and improve water quality. Focus on catchments feeding into the River Wye within the Wye Valley National Landscape, addressing systematic problems at a landscape scale. Proposals shared with partners including Farm Herefordshire, Wye Catchment Partnership, Wye & Usk Foundation, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence, Herefordshire Council Natural Environment Team, Woodland Trust, Wyescapes Project Board, TOWP and endorsed by JAC. Expression of Interest submitted to NLHF in mid March 2026.
PR, communications & outreach activities	Dark Skies Promotion and Outreach: • 4 x Biofluorescent Walks at Whitestone (60 participants), • Planetarium at Trellech Church and The Garron Centre (80 participants total). • Dark Skies bench installed at Fownhope Recreation ground with associated Dark Skies content web content: https://fownhopeparishcouncil.gov.uk/from-the-dark-skies-bench/ • Nightjar walk on Beacon Hill (20 participants),

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	Walking Outreach: • Chepstow Walking Festival - Paperchase through Whitebrook walk (16 participants) & Wye Valley Walk illustrated talk (60 participants), Geology Walk (20 participants), • Ross Walking Festival Flower Patch Walk (20 participants), • Community Walk to Wye Valley Walk bench Beacon Hill (20 participants) Comms: Our social media presence has continued to grow with just under 14,000 followers. Facebook accounts for most of the growth and is our most effective channel for sharing information on our activities and events, with LinkedIn becoming increasingly useful. We published 210 posts on Facebook. during the year, which were also published on Instagram and LinkedIn. Additional stories were put out on Instagram to publicise events and on our newish Wye Valley Walk Instagram page. Top content through views past 3 months was: Wye Valley Walk new benches & walk suggestions (25366), WVV Public Transport Map (20673), Volunteers at St Mary's Tintern (11386) Wye Valley Walk 'Flow/ Llif' exhibition (7557), Invasive Species (6950), Himalayan Balsam (6222) and Woodland Butterfly Walk (5345)
Funding, resource management & Monitoring	▪ Herefordshire Cabinet report on Acceptance of National Landscape funding. ▪ Bids and Claims submitted as required, with 10 different core & capital claims submitted to different criteria and deadlines for end of financial year and 2 project claims. ▪ Monthly meetings with Herefordshire Council Capital Accountant. ▪ Wye Valley National Landscape Steering Group serviced and reviews budget in October & February. ▪ All budgets spent and claimed within thresholds.
Work placements	• 4 day placement provided to A Level student. • Careers advice provided to 2 young people. • Reference provided for former placement. • List of proposed Masters topics circulated to local colleges & universities. • Hosted site visit for Worcester University BSc Environmental Management and Sustainability students.

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RIVER WYE UPDATE AND WATER CROWFOOT SPECIES ACTION PLAN

Purpose

To advise of the latest activities to help restore the River Wye including presenting the Water Crowfoot Species Action Plan.

Recommendation

That the JAC

- A. Welcomes 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,
- B. Endorses the Water Crowfoot Species Action Plan, as the fifth and final Species Action Plan of the Wye Valley National Landscape.

Key Issues

- The Riverside Code booklet, published in April by the Friends of the River Wye, is designed and illustrated to help people respect, protect and enjoy the River Wye.
- The Charter for the Rights of the River Wye was launched in May 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 (appended).
- Haskoning Ltd have been progressing with the first phase of the Wye Catchment Management Plan.
- The Environment Agency have published the River Wye Water Quality 2025 Data Analysis Report (summary appended), 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, is published and appended below.
- 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.

Reasons

The River Wye is the fourth largest river in England and Wales and supports ecological, economic and recreational diversity. It is a central feature and Special Quality of the Wye Valley National Landscape. The River Wye faces a number of challenges, including how clean its water is and how much water there is flowing - at times too much and at others too little. The river remains a focus for many and it brings people together, whether local people, organisations or businesses. Good water quality is integral to ensuring the health of the river and the local economy. It helps conserve the species which call it home (including us) and maintains the ecosystem services it provides like flood regulation, clean drinking water and recreational activities, for both those who live in or visit the catchment. Communities are increasingly aware of the pressures facing the river and are seeking meaningful ways to contribute to its protection.

Implications

The Riverside Code was launched on 22nd April, collated and published by Friends of the River Wye. It is a 16-page booklet that aims to empower residents of the Wye catchment to be better river guardians. Just as the Countryside Code was designed to help people respect, protect and enjoy our outdoor spaces, the Friends of the River Wye collaborated on the creation of the Riverside Code to help protect our precious rivers and streams.

The Riverside Code explains how to effectively identify and report pollution incidents to the regulators - for example, being able to identify sewage fungus, or to tell the difference between a natural oily sheen and an oil spill. It also clearly communicates the key farming rules, for example around manure spreading and storage, helping people to identify malpractice and how to report it. Additionally, it includes actions people can take in their homes and by the river, raising awareness about the deadly threat of pet flea treatments to river invertebrates and more. Local organisations working to protect the Wye are listed, signposting readers to local volunteering opportunities and further information, such as how to take part in the Big Ranunculus Watch. The booklet contains illustrations from local artist Jessica Watkins, including a stylistic catchment map.

The Code is available at selected bookshops and community spaces throughout the Wye catchment, including Green Ink Booksellers, Hay-on-Wye; Herefordshire Wildlife Trust shops at Queenswood Country Park, near Leominster and Church Street, Hereford; Made in Ross, Old Market House, Ross-on-Wye; Chepstow Books & Gifts. It is also [downloadable here](#).

The Rights of the River Wye Charter was launched at a public ceremony on Sunday 24th May 2026 at The Warren, Hay-on-Wye, marking a significant moment for both the Wye Catchment and the growing Rights of Nature movement across the UK.

The River Charter was endorsed by the JAC at the previous meeting. The Charter recognises the River Wye as a living ecosystem with intrinsic rights including the right to flow, biodiversity, regeneration and freedom from pollution. It is believed to be the first full catchment River Charter in the UK and the first Rights of River framework for a Welsh river. It has been developed collaboratively across the catchment and endorsed by councils and institutions including Herefordshire Council, Powys and Monmouthshire County Council, the

Forest of Dean District Council and Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority. Each signatory made a Pledge at the signing and the Wye Valley National Landscape Pledge is:-

The River Wye and its tributaries are a Special Quality of the Wye Valley National Landscape, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, that covers one third of the lower reaches of the River Wye, but only 8% of the Wye Catchment. The Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership pledges to work with all partners to restore the River Wye - improving water quality, reducing excess nutrients, and supporting collaborative action across the catchment to conserve and enhance its outstanding natural beauty.

The illustrated Wye Charter and the Wye Valley National Landscape Pledge are appended.

The Charter forms part of a growing international Rights of Nature movement that is reshaping how ecosystems are recognised and protected in law and governance. The rights expressed in the Charter do not constitute any new legal status but reflect protections already recognised across existing environmental legislation and regulation.

Wye Living Labs is the new research programme, funded by DEFRA and supported by the Welsh Government, led by researchers at University of West of England (UWE), Bristol and the Herefordshire Rural Hub. It is a major 3 year project that brings farmers and stakeholders together to test practical solutions for soil health, nutrient management and water quality in the Wye catchment.

It recognises that farmers in the Wye catchment hold knowledge that no published report contains. The Living Labs programme is designed to identify that knowledge, test it, and turn it into solutions that policy can act on. Research by the Herefordshire Rural Hub has identified that 55% of Wye fields contain more nutrients in the soil than crops need and inputs have exceeded outputs for years. Thus the existing nutrient store in many soils could meet crop needs without new inputs. Nearly fifteen years of voluntary action has left the river struggling. The data indicates that voluntary measures alone have not been sufficient to reverse the decline in water quality. The Wye Living Labs programme is not intended to allocate blame for that decline, but to understand what is actually happening in the Wye catchment, in order to design solutions that works. It seems that for many farms, reducing nutrient inputs is not an environmental sacrifice, as the nutrients are already in the soil. Thus buying in fertiliser and feed is paying for something the land does not need, and the surplus has to go somewhere. Drawing soil nutrient levels down to the agronomic optimum may not cause loss of yield, and for many farms it might reduce input costs immediately. Some of the main questions for the Living Labs are:

- Can nutrient drawdown be operationalised on working farms in the Wye?
- What does the transition look like?
- Does any improvement in river condition become detectable within a Living Labs timeframe?

These are not answered in any existing report.

Farmers, landowners, and anyone with an interest in the Wye Catchment and its rivers have been invited to join co-design workshops, at Garway Village Hall on 29th June, Weobley Village Hall on 27th July and 10th August at the Royal Welsh Showground. These informal workshops will help decide which interventions to trial and where. There is a strong emphasis on Farmer engagement, Cross-border inclusion (England & Wales) and Evidence-led decision making. Evidence gap analysis to date has identified 13 priority gaps: Highest – agricultural / technical (soil phosphorus, manure, farm practices); High - governance &

behaviour; Medium – monitoring & data. Over the next 3 years, the Living Labs programme will explore practical solutions that support both water quality & sustainable farming.

The 2025 River Wye Data Analysis Report has been published by the Environment Agency (EA) [River Wye Water Quality | Engage Environment Agency](#). The first report was published in 2022 with the Data Analysis Report released annually. The report captures the EA's monitoring data in the Wye Management Catchment, helping to improve understanding of the causes of changing conditions in the Wye. The Report Summary is appended, and notes:

“Conditions in 2025 were closer to those present in 2022 (another hot and dry summer). However, mean and maximum temperatures recorded in July 2025 slightly exceeded those recorded in 2022. Despite elevated temperatures, prolonged blooms of planktonic algae did not occur in 2025, this is potentially due to reduced runoff of nutrients in spring, and no summer storms occurring. Ongoing work suggests that water temperature has a greater influence upon algal communities and blooms in the River Wye than nutrient pollution.”

The **Water crowfoot Species Action Plan**, the last of the 5 Species Action Plans for the Wye Valley National Landscape, has been produced and is appended below. Water crowfoot is an indicator of both river water quality and quantity. It is recognised as an important indicator species of good ecological status under the Water Framework Directive. Its presence in a river system often reflects high water quality, suitable flow conditions and relatively low nutrient pollution, making it a useful species for environmental monitoring and conservation. In recent years, the abundance of Water crowfoot in the River Wye has declined dramatically, as well as on the neighbouring River Usk and other rivers in the region. The exact causes of this decline remain uncertain, but several contributing factors are believed to be at play including the well document water quality issues and the major flooding events between 2018-2020 which physically scoured the riverbed, removing large stands of the plant. In the seasons that followed, hot and dry conditions hindered re-growth, while grazing birds may have further inhibited recovery. While the Wye has a Public Right of Navigation, other rivers with no access rights have also lost Water crowfoot, which suggests that recreational activity may not be significant driver of loss. However evidence from drone surveys, the [Big Ranunculus Watch](#) and anecdotal observations by canoeists and anglers suggest that Water Crowfoot has made modest recoveries in the last 18 months.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team are supporting the Friends of the River Wye on a project to investigate the decline of Water Crowfoot. Friends of the River Wye have secured a grant of £175,600 from the Nature Networks Fund, from the Heritage Fund on behalf of the Welsh Government, for the project on both the Wye and the Usk. The Wye Valley National Landscape Team are providing match funding from their DEFRA allocation to enable investigations on the English stretch of the Wye as well. Citizen scientists will be trained to survey the presence of water crowfoot in the rivers over the next three summers, starting this year. The project will commission drone surveys as well as using ground observations, building on last year's pioneering work by Dr Fleur Visser of the University of Worcester, the Wye Valley National Landscape Team and Friends of the River Wye. Natural Resources Wales and Environment Agency will also be advising and collaborating on the project. Information will be shared publicly through an open-access archive. The project intends to research the conditions necessary for Water Crowfoot to thrive and investigate what could have caused its catastrophic decline.

The Wye Catchment Management Plan (CMP) is being produced by Haskoning Ltd on behalf of the Wye Catchment Partnership. Work has commenced with an Evidence Review, to be followed by Options Appraisals and drafting of an Action Plan, by late summer, and Stakeholder engagement and consultation on the draft Wye CMP later in the year. Haskoning are contracted through Herefordshire Council and report to a Task & Finish Group of Wye Catchment Partnership members. For further updates from the Wye Catchment Partnership see <https://wyecatchmentpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Wye-Catchment-Partnership-Newsletter-June-2026.pdf>

The latest **Wye Nutrient Management Board (NMB)** meeting is on Monday 6 July at 2pm. Details of the meeting and the recording are available here: <https://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1161&MIId=10044&Ver=4> Item 9. Contains an update from the Environment Agency on Project TARA (Testing Approaches to Regulating Agriculture) focusing on Poultry Manure Regulation (see <https://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/s50134603/Environment%20Agency%20Updates%20-%20Project%20TARA.pdf>)

The next NMB meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 7th October 2026, 2.00 pm.

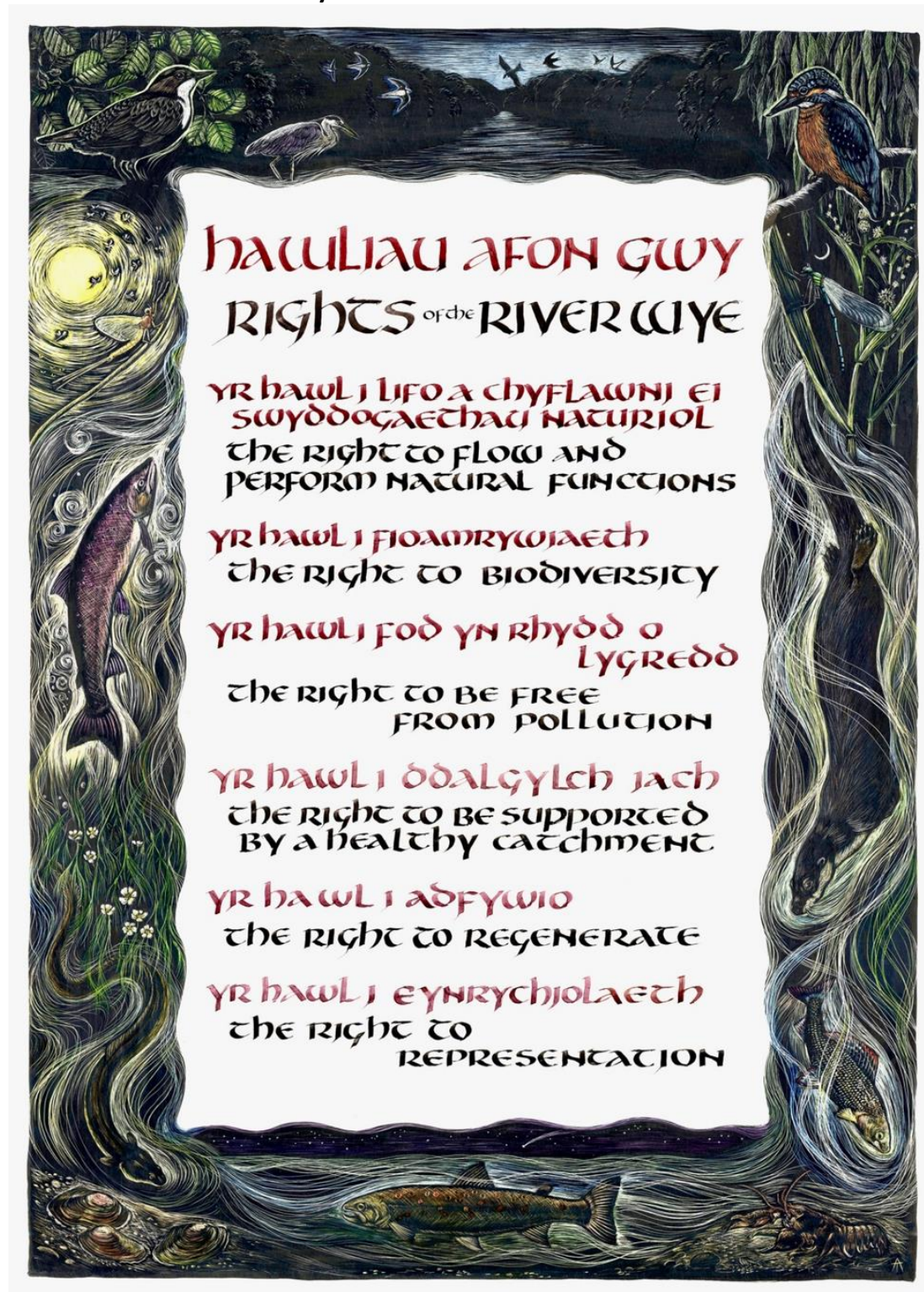
The **Wyescares Landscape Recovery** Project Development Phase Proposal has been submitted to DEFRA. It is anticipated that ongoing review by DEFRA will take until the autumn before a confirmed outcome. The Wyescares Landscape Recovery programme incorporates 49 land holdings across 5,125ha between Leominster and Goodrich. For further information see <https://herefordshireruralhub.co.uk/wyescares/> .

The Wye & Usk Foundation are developing the **Monnow Resilient Rivers** programme, working together with nature to safeguard water. It is a landscape-scale project partnering with businesses, the public sector and farming communities to reduce flood risk, protect water supplies, benefit nature and restore rivers. For more information see <https://resilientrivers.co.uk/> .

For the latest news on activity at the other end of the Wye, Natural Resources Wales has published the most recent newsletter on the **Upper Wye Catchment Restoration Project**, see <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKNRW/bulletins/41eb03c>

Background

The Wye Valley National Landscape covers about one third of the River Wye in length, the lower reaches, and only about 8% of the Wye Catchment. The River Wye and its tributaries are a Special Quality as identified in the statutory Wye Valley AONB Management Plan. Most of the nutrients and contributing conditions for the algal blooms originate outside and upstream of the National Landscape.



For further details see:

<https://friendsoftheriverwye.org.uk/wye-river-charter>

<https://savethewye.org/charter-launch-of-the-rights-of-the-river-wye/>

<https://wyecatchmentpartnership.org/the-charter-for-the-river-wye/>

For adoption by partners see:

[Herefordshire Council](#)

[Monmouthshire County Council](#)

[Forest of Dean District Council](#)

[CPRE Herefordshire](#)

Charter for the River Wye Our Pledge

The River Wye and its tributaries are a Special Quality of the Wye Valley National Landscape, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, that covers one third of the lower reaches of the River Wye, but only 8% of the Wye Catchment. The Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership pledges to work with all partners to restore the River Wye - improving water quality, reducing excess nutrients, and supporting collaborative action across the catchment to conserve and enhance its outstanding natural beauty.



Dyffryn Gwy
Tirwedd Cenedlaethol
Wye Valley
National Landscape

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Data Analysis Report for 2025

Our River Wye Data Analysis Report is released annually. The report captures our monitoring data in the Wye Management Catchment, helping to improve our understanding of the causes of changing conditions in the Wye. Our first report was published in 2022 and all reports can be found [here](#).

The 2025 report currently concludes the following:

- In 2024, average water temperatures stayed below 20°C, with only short periods above 20°C during June to August. In contrast, 2025 saw higher temperatures, with average levels exceeding 20°C at all Wye sites in July and maximum temperatures rising above 25°C during the summer months.
- Conditions in 2025 were closer to those present in 2022 (another hot and dry summer). However, mean and maximum temperatures recorded in July 2025 slightly exceeded those recorded in 2022. Despite elevated temperatures, prolonged blooms of planktonic algae did not occur in 2025, this is potentially due to reduced runoff of nutrients in spring, and no summer storms occurring.
- Ongoing work suggests that water temperature has a greater influence upon algal communities and blooms in the River Wye than nutrient pollution.
- In 2025 the Environment Agency received six reports totalling 8 or 9 dead Atlantic Salmon in the Wye catchment. No dead salmon were recorded in 2024, 2 in 2023 and 64 in 2022. Salmon angling effort in 2025 was low because of high river temperatures and voluntary cessation of fishing due to fish welfare commitments by salmon anglers. Reductions in angling will be contributing to reduced observations and catches of salmon, and not solely due to decreasing salmon populations.
- Atlantic salmon populations are declining across much of their range and declines in population are not confined to the Wye catchment. Widescale issues such as reduced survival of salmon at sea and climate change are impacting the species in addition to localised impacts upon habitat and water quality present within parts of the Wye catchment.
- Phosphate levels within the main River Wye in England are meeting their target for Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) compliance. However, the River Lugg continues to exceed its target.

Between the 2022 and 2025 Water Framework Directive (WFD) classification periods, 8 waterbodies within the English Wye Management catchment have deteriorated in phosphate status and 10 have improved in status; including parts of the upper Lugg and the Arrow improving in status. For ammonia status one WFD waterbody has deteriorated in status from High to Good, all

other catchments have retained their previous status. No waterbodies have improved in ammonia status.

- Water quality data collected by the Wye Alliance citizen scientist groups has been compared with EA data, and although there are some differences, similar phosphate, and nitrogen 'hotspots' have been identified with both datasets.
- The Wye supports a highly significant aquatic macroinvertebrate community in terms of biodiversity and conservation value. With a high diversity of species present, containing many rare and localised species.

Following on from our 2025 report we continue to:

- Work with the farming community, agricultural supply chain and partners to reduce nutrient input. Significant reduction in nutrients from all sources is required across the whole catchment to contribute to the recovery of river.
- Carrying out targeted and evidence-based farm inspections and ensure compliance with the regulations.
- Work with the Wye Alliance to inform our priorities and regulatory activity within the catchment.
- Work with partners on projects to improve river health and water quality, including, research, education, collaboration and delivery across the catchment.
- Monitor algal blooms in the Wye using sonde data and monitor for any signs of impact on the environment.

Wye Valley
National Landscape

Water Crowfoot

Ranunculus aquatilis

Species Action Plan 2026 - 2031



To Accompany the
Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan



Dyffryn Gwy
Tirwedd Cenedlaethol

Wye Valley
National Landscape

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1. Background

In 2019, set against a backdrop of unprecedented concern for the future of the natural world, the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) set in motion plans to significantly increase the scale and pace of nature conservation activity in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). The Wye Valley AONB Partnership, along with AONBs across the UK, signed up to the Colchester Declaration. This is an ambitious plan to recover nature in and beyond protected landscapes, build climate resilience and enhance engagement with people. Rebranding has since taken place and AONBs are now known as National Landscapes and the NAAONB the National Landscapes Association (NLA).

As part of this effort, each National Landscape has committed to adopting an IUCN threatened, or locally threatened, species and preparing and delivering a Species Action Plan, in the hope that by 2030 at least 30 species relevant to National Landscapes can be removed from the threatened list (NAAONB, 2019). The Wye Valley National Landscape has committed to adopting 5 locally significant species or assemblage of species, each of which represent one of the National Landscape's Special Qualities, and/or indicate the health of a well-connected landscape. To represent the River Wye and its Tributaries, Water crowfoot was chosen as a characterising feature of the river, threatened by water quality issues and low and high-water events.



Figure 1. Drone footage of Water crowfoot in the River Wye near Fownhope.

2. Introduction

Water crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*) is a submerged aquatic plant belonging to the buttercup family. It is native to Europe and common in the UK, and thrives in well-oxygenated, moderately fast-flowing freshwater habitats such as chalk streams, rivers and clear ditches. It prefers gravelly or sandy substrates where it can anchor its roots and avoid being smothered by sediment. Light availability is also crucial, as it thrives in open, unshaded conditions where sunlight can penetrate the water column. Recognised by its delicate white flowers and trailing stems, it plays a key ecological role by stabilising sediment, improving water quality, providing habitat for invertebrates and offering refuge and spawning grounds for fish. It can form mats in rivers and streams during spring and summer. The environmental preferences of Water crowfoot make it especially vulnerable to changes in water quality, flow and habitat structure.

Water crowfoot can be an annual or short-lived perennial plant, and has floating, lobed leaves and solitary white flowers, about 2cm across. Water crowfoot can be a challenging group to identify, as several closely related species share similar features and often cross-breed. *Ranunculus aquatilis* flowers have five rounded petals and a bright yellow center, with the plant displaying two types of leaves; floating leaves that are rounded and lobed, typically with three to seven lobes, and submerged leaves that are finely divided into thread-like segments. Water crowfoot typically grows to a height of 10-50cm and can spread up to 0.5 meters, forming low, trailing mats across the surface of streams and rivers.



Figure 2. *Ranunculus* mat, Monmouth in 1993 (Guy Mawle).

These floral carpets are not only ecologically important, but also contribute significantly to the aesthetic appeal of river landscapes- drawing in photographers, walkers and nature lovers. For those hoping to see it in bloom, later spring to early summer is the best time to visit watercourses known to support healthy populations of *Ranunculus aquatilis*. Flowering typically occurs between May and July, when water temperatures rise and daylight increases. In rivers like the Wye, this plant has historically been a cornerstone of riverine biodiversity and function.

Water crowfoot is recognised as an important indicator species of good ecological status under the Water Framework Directive. Its presence in a river system often reflects high water quality, suitable flow conditions and relatively low nutrient pollution, making it a useful species for environmental monitoring and conservation. In recent years, the abundance of Water crowfoot in the River Wye has declined dramatically. Although the exact causes of this decline remain uncertain, several contributing factors are believed to be at play. Coupled with well document water quality issues, major flooding events between 2018-2020 physically scoured the riverbed, removing large stands of the plant. In the seasons that followed, hot and dry conditions hindered re-growth, while grazing birds may have further inhibited recovery (Bailey, 2021).

3. Current Status

3.1 Ecology and habitat requirements

The presence of Water crowfoot creates habitats for other flora and fauna. The plant helps to reduce water velocity within and immediately down-stream of the plant stands, whilst increasing velocity elsewhere by directing water around its cover, thereby altering flow dynamics within the river. The reduction in flow results in an increase of fine sediments being deposited downstream of the plant structure. This encourages growth of other macrophyte species, such as watercress and starworts that may otherwise be unable to establish themselves due to a lack of organic material or high flow rates. Conversely, increased flow elsewhere keeps gravels free from fine silts.

This results in the creation of more complex habitats within the river which, in turn, is linked to the abundant and diverse invertebrate communities that are present by providing diverse food sources and refugia. For example, the submersed parts of macrophytes provide a large surface area for suspension-feeding invertebrates, such as black fly larvae and certain caddis fly larvae, to attach to and feed on organic particles. The mosaic of macrophyte species provides suitable habitat for many different insects during their larval stage, such as damselflies and dragonflies (Marsh, 2018).

3.2 Population and distribution

Historically, Water crowfoot has been recorded across the UK, with specimens dating back to the 19th century. For example, a specimen was collected in west Gloucestershire in 1865, and another in Herefordshire in 1853, indicating its long-standing presence in these regions. These records demonstrate the plant's historical abundance and wide distribution (Herbarium United, 1853).

Today, Water crowfoot continues to be found throughout the UK, although its distribution is influenced by environmental factors (Preston, Pearman and Dines, 2020). It is more prevalent in southern and eastern England, particularly in areas with chalk substrates, which provide alkaline conditions favourable for its growth. Globally, Water crowfoot has a broad distribution, extending beyond Europe to parts of North Africa, Asia and North America (Lansdown, 2014). Its presence is closely tied to specific environmental conditions, and ongoing monitoring is essential to understand and preserve its populations.

3.3 Legislation

While native species of Water crowfoot are not individually protected under UK law, their habitats are safeguarded through broader environmental legislation and designations. The Water Resources Act 1991 and Water Framework Directive set legal standards for water quality, making it an offence to discharge pollutants into rivers. The River Wye is a designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), offering strong protection for aquatic habitats under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The Wye is an SAC partly because of its Water crowfoot populations, with *Ranunculus fluitantis* and *Callitriche-Batrachion* vegetation listed as a qualifying feature; the species therefore acts as a key benchmark for the health and management of the river (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations, 2017).

These designations require public bodies to take steps to avoid damage to the river's ecological features, including key species like Water crowfoot. National initiatives such as the River Wye Action Plan (2023) and the River Basin Management Plans, published by the Environment Agency, have highlighted the urgent need to reduce nutrient inputs, particularly from agriculture and wastewater. Elevated nutrient concentrations can threaten the ecological balance of chalk and lowland river habitats.

Historic practices such as excessive cutting of aquatic vegetation have been reduced due to the recognised ecological value of plant species like Water crowfoot, with the Environment Agency now managing vegetation where necessary for flood risk. These combined legal protections and action plans aim to restore the health of the Wye and safeguard vital aquatic flora for the long term.

3.4 Summary of important sites

In 2025, Friends of the River Wye launched the Big *Ranunculus* Watch, a citizen science initiative aimed at improving understanding of the distribution and status of water crowfoot (*Ranunculus* spp.) across the River Wye catchment. The project encourages members of the public, river users, and local communities to submit photographs of water crowfoot from along the river and its tributaries, including both recent sightings and historical images where available.

By collecting these observations, the project is building a growing evidence base that helps identify known locations of water crowfoot within the Wye Valley National Landscape (WVNL) and the wider catchment. The information gathered is used to create a mapped record of water crowfoot presence over time, allowing trends in distribution to be explored. This approach helps to highlight areas where the species may be recovering, persisting, or declining, providing valuable insights that can inform river management, habitat restoration, and conservation efforts. Citizen contributions

therefore play an important role in filling knowledge gaps and supporting a clearer picture of how this important aquatic plant is responding to changing environmental conditions in the Wye.

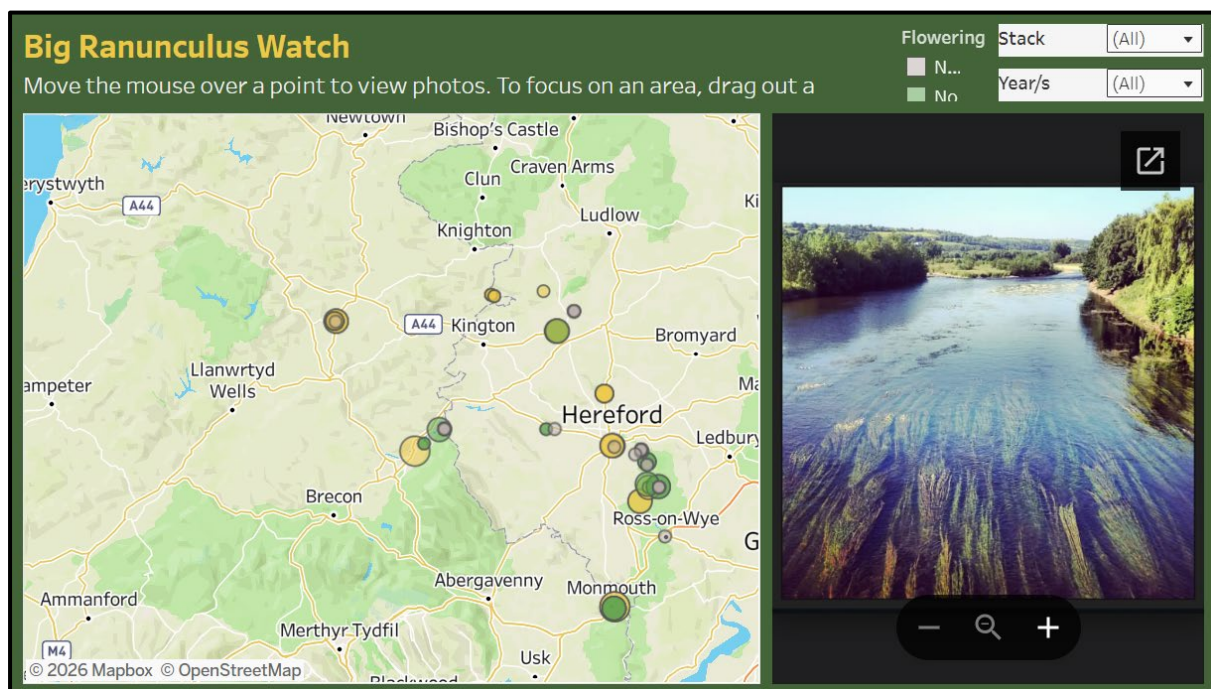


Figure 3. The Big Ranunculus Watch Photo Map (Friends of the River Wye, 2025).

Looking specifically at the Lower Wye Valley downstream of Hereford, the Big Ranunculus Watch map shows that the main concentrations of water crowfoot are found along the main River Wye channel rather than in tributaries. The largest clusters of records appear between Hereford and Ross-on-Wye, suggesting this stretch supports some of the most consistent patches of water crowfoot in the lower catchment. There are also several records further downstream through the Wye Valley around Symonds Yat and Tintern, although these tend to be more scattered and occur as smaller patches. Very few sightings are recorded closer to the tidal section of the river near Chepstow, which likely reflects the reduced suitability of habitat as the river becomes slower and more influenced by tidal conditions.

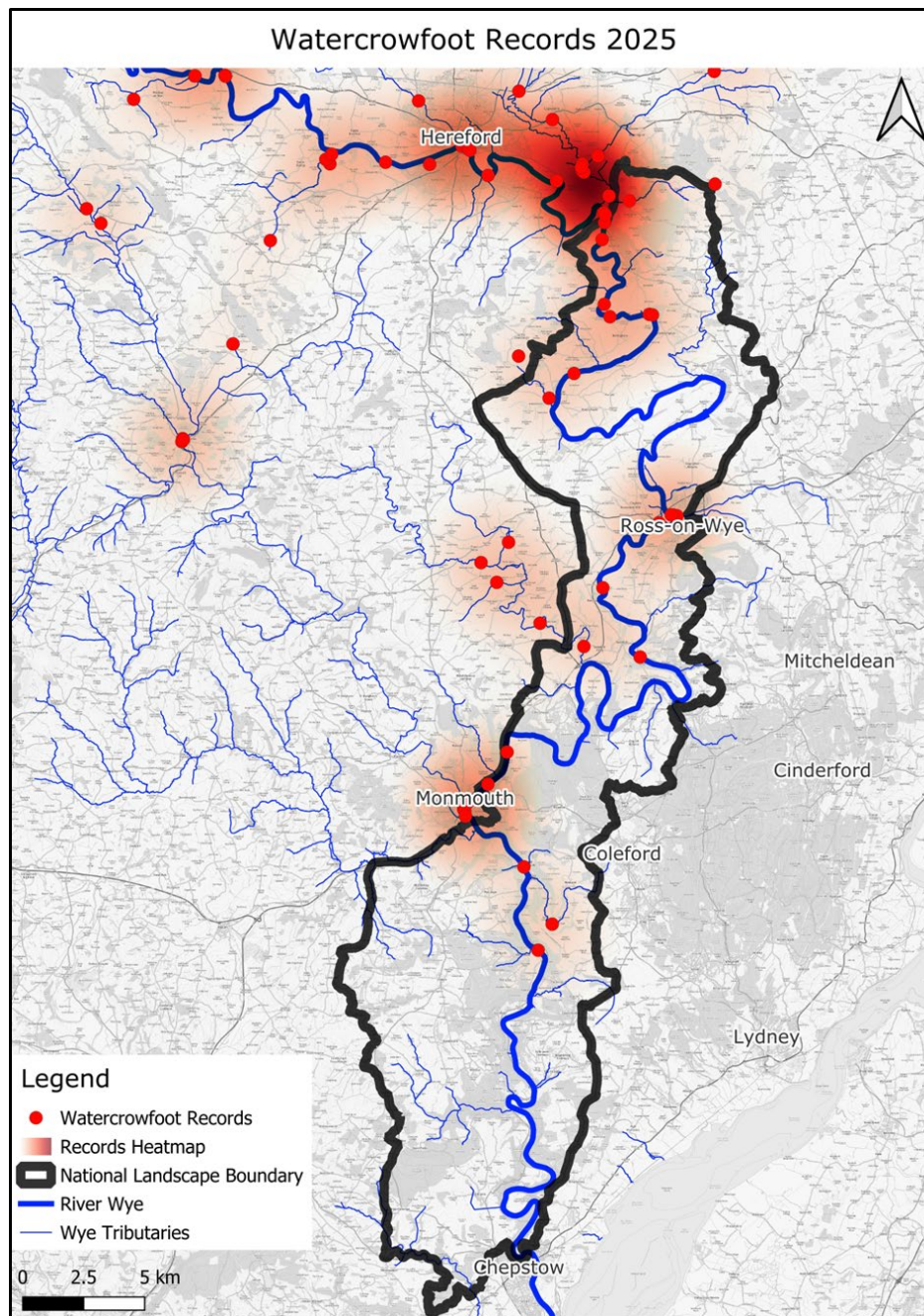


Figure 4. Distribution of water crowfoot records across the Lower Wye Valley (2025).

Figure 4 shows the distribution of recorded water crowfoot observations across the Wye Valley National Landscape in 2025. Red points represent individual species records, while the heatmap illustrates areas of greater record density and concentration. Records are predominantly associated with the main River Wye corridor and connected tributaries, particularly around Hereford, Ross-on-Wye, and Monmouth, highlighting the species' strong association with clean, well-oxygenated, fast-flowing river systems. The distribution pattern also demonstrates the ecological importance of the River Wye catchment and its tributary network in supporting water crowfoot populations throughout the National Landscape.

4. Current factors affecting the species

4.1 Threats

4.1.1 Water Quality

Poor water quality poses a major threat to *Ranunculus* in the Lower Wye Valley, where this species depends on clear, oxygen-rich conditions. Elevated phosphate and nitrate levels from intensive agricultural practices, and outdated sewage treatment works have driven eutrophication. Climate Change is also driving greater extremes in low and high-water levels and changes in water temperature. The exact cause is unsure, but it is likely that one or a combination of these causes algal blooms that deplete dissolved oxygen, reduce water clarity and smother crowfoot beds by obstructing light and oxygen supply.

Modelling shows around 66-73% of nutrient pollution in the lower Wye originates from diffuse agricultural sources, while a significant portion stems from sewage effluent (Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, 2022). Early efforts such as the River Wye Nutrient Management Plan, established under the Water Framework Directive and SAC obligations aimed to bring phosphate levels within targets of 0.05mg/l for the Lower Wye through regulatory review and catchment controls (Environment Agency, 2014). More recently, the River Wye Action Plan (April 2024) introduced concrete measures including a £35 million grant programme for poultry manure management, catchment-wide river buffer zones, and manure export mandates to reduce nutrient surplus (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2023). However, enforcement difficulties and diffuse pollution complexities have limited effectiveness so far.

Citizen science initiatives and catchment partnerships have improved monitoring of phosphate and nitrate concentrations, but the river's ecological status remains 'unfavourable-declining', with water crowfoot beds already diminished by over 90% in some stretches (Environment Agency, 2024). Interventions need to be scaled up and better coordinated across farming, wastewater and regulatory sectors to ensure water crowfoot and its supporting habitat do not remain at serious risk.

4.1.2 Climate change

Water crowfoot in the River Wye is increasingly threatened by extreme hydrological events, with both droughts and floods destabilising the conditions it requires to persist and support riverine biodiversity. Severe low-flow conditions intensify pollution impacts, concentrate nutrients, and raise temperatures. In 2022 the Wye at Ross-on-Wye fell to just 8 cm, coinciding with sharp declines in crowfoot beds (Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, 2022). Similar findings from chalk rivers show that drought reduces *ranunculus* growth and coverage, though populations can recover rapidly when winter flows return (Environment Agency, 2004).

Conversely, floods uproot plants, bury them under sediment, and alter the gravel substrates needed for attachment and nutrient access. Post-flood monitoring in the Wye has shown gravels smothered with sediment, reducing light penetration and suppressing regrowth (Monmouthshire County Council, 2022). Prolonged high flows also increase turbidity, preventing photosynthesis and recolonisation, while repeated scouring strips beds and fragments populations (Poynter, 2013). Storm-driven floods in 2020 and 2021 caused widespread erosion and vegetation loss in Monmouthshire and Ross-on-Wye, with flood-driven siltation and nutrient loading contributing to an

estimated 90% decline in crowfoot cover across some monitored stretches over the last decade (Met Office, 2020; Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, 2022).

With climate change projected to bring longer droughts, hotter summers, and more frequent high-flow extremes (Parry et al., 2024), these pressures are likely to intensify, increasing risks of habitat contraction, fragmentation, and reduced flowering. To help mitigate impacts, management actions include: tightening abstraction controls and securing environmental flow releases; protecting key beds with boulder clusters, coarse gravels, or submerged wood to reduce scouring; avoiding in-channel works during stress periods; monitoring macrophyte health; and implementing catchment-scale measures such as natural flood management, riparian buffers, and improved land use practices.

4.1.3 Invasive non-native species

Invasive non-native species (INNS) are a major driver of habitat degradation in UK freshwater systems, often competing with, over-shading or physically displacing native plants such as water crowfoot. Excess sediment and turbidity reduce light and smother plants, impairing growth and recovery (Jones, 2012). The Wye's management plans reference maintaining these plant communities and controlling pressures, including invasive species (Natural Resources Wales, 2023).

- **Floating pennywort**
Floating pennywort grows rapidly, forming dense mats that smother native plants like Water crowfoot by blocking light and reducing photosynthesis (NNSS, 2022). These mats slow water flow, trap fine sediments, and lower dissolved oxygen through respiration and decomposition. Management is difficult as mechanical removal fragments the plant, aiding spread; best practice involves early hand-pulling, containment, repeated sweeps, and strict biosecurity (NNSS, 2016).
- **Giant hogweed**
Giant hogweed destabilises riparian zones by shading vegetation in summer and leaving bare, erosion-prone soil in winter (Welsh Government, 2022). Resulting sediment smothers Water crowfoot, while its phototoxic sap poses risks to public safety, complicating management (NIEA, 2025).
- **Japanese knotweed**
Japanese knotweed forms dense thickets that displace native vegetation, reduce light to marginal habitats, and leave banks exposed to erosion after winter dieback. Invaded banks show higher erosion rates, especially where stem density is greatest (Matte, Boivin and Lavoie, 2022). The loss of varied root systems further reduces stability, intensifying sedimentation pressures on Water crowfoot.
- **Himalayan balsam**
Himalayan balsam rapidly colonises riverbanks, outcompeting native plants and shading near-bank habitats (Clun Catchment Partnership, 2024). Winter dieback and shallow roots expose soil to erosion, while explosive seed dispersal drives rapid spread, threatening sensitive aquatic habitats.

Management and prevention

Preventing further spread of invasive non-native species along the River Wye is critical to protecting Water crowfoot and associated habitats. The 'Check, Clean and Dry' methodology is a simple but highly effective approach. Equipment, footwear, boats and clothing should be checked for plant fragments, mud or animals, cleaned thoroughly on site or before moving to another waterbody and dried completely to kill any residual organisms. Mitigating the impacts of INNS requires a

combination of early detection and rapid response to new incursions, coordinated eradication or control programmes, and restoration of native riparian vegetation to stabilise banks and reduce sediment inputs. Integrating biosecurity training for volunteers, contractors and recreational river users will help reduce the risk of inadvertent spread and support the long-term recovery of sensitive species such as Water crowfoot.

4.1.4 Recreational disturbance

Recreational activities- particularly boating, paddling and access infrastructure- can significantly disturb submerged aquatic vegetation. Boats and paddles create waves and turbulence that can uproot or damage plants, while infrastructure like docks, moorings and launching sites often result in sediment disturbance and habitat loss.

A systematic review found that areas used for boat mooring or under docks had just 18% of macrophyte cover compared to undisturbed zones, and regions frequented by boat traffic had only 42% of submerged vegetation remaining (Sagerman et al, 2019). Similarly, a focused study reported that paddling significantly reduces the abundance of submerged plants, affecting species composition more than emergent vegetation (Wegner et al, 2023).



Figure 5. Water crowfoot beds along River Wye

Even 'low impact' pleasure boating has measurable effects. A study of canal systems revealed an opposite relationship between boat movements and macrophyte abundance, with higher boat traffic corresponding with lower plant presence (Murphy and Eaton, 1983). These findings are consistent across multiple aquatic systems, with recreational boating and associated infrastructure leading to reduced species richness, altered biological communities and decreased water clarity (Iburg et al, 2021).

There are several management measures that could be put in place to protect Water crowfoot, including:

- Restricting motorized boat use in sensitive Water crowfoot areas, especially during growth and flowering seasons.
- Designing low-impact access points with floating boardwalks or soft entry zones that avoid trampling or direct disturbance.
- Public education initiatives encouraging visitors to avoid shallow plant rich areas and to understand the ecological sensitivity of water crowfoot habitats.
- Ongoing monitoring such as before and after surveys of plant cover and species composition in high-use areas to guide adaptive management.

4.2 Barriers to conservation

4.2.1 Diffuse pollution complexity

A key barrier to conservation in the River Wye catchment is diffuse pollution- a complex and persistent challenge that undermines aquatic plant communities, particularly for sensitive species like Water crowfoot.

Diffuse pollution arises from widespread, loosely managed landscape activities that collectively cause substantial harm, yet are individually hard to pinpoint and regulate. For the River Wye this is especially problematic with around 70-73% of phosphate loading stemming from agricultural diffuse pollution, primarily as nutrients leaching from livestock manure. An additional portion originates from sewage treatment works and other minor sources like roads and industry (Environment Agency, 2022). This diffuse nature makes it challenging to attribute responsibility and implement effective measures. The cumulative effect of numerous minor pollution sources complicates mitigation and regulatory enforcement.

The Wye catchment has suffered from a sustained phosphorus surplus, estimated at around 2000 tonnes annually, accumulating in soils over decades. Local soil types are less capable of holding onto added phosphorus from manure and fertiliser, making runoff into watercourses more likely (Environment Agency, 2022).

The consequences are stark for native aquatic vegetation. Water crowfoot beds, once abundance have been decimated, with losses tied directly to nutrient pollution (Monmouthshire County Council, 2022).

4.2.2 Insufficient baseline data and monitoring

Conservation of Water crowfoot in the River Wye is significantly constrained by the lack of comprehensive baseline data and long-term monitoring. Historical research on *Ranunculus* has often been fragmented, with few coordinated and quantitative studies available for many catchments. A review conducted by the Environment Agency in 1999-2000 highlighted that while factors such as flow velocity, substrate quality and nutrient levels are critical to *Ranunculus* success, robust, long-term data on many of these are scarce or non-existent (Environment Agency, 2001). This makes it

difficult to establish clear cause and effect relationships or to develop evidence-based flow prescriptions and restoration actions.

Initiatives such as the Greater Cambridge Chalk Streams Project have introduced science-led, data driven baseline assessments and monitoring regimes, enabling evidence-based interventions and adaptive management of aquatic habitats. This includes those supporting macrophytes like water crowfoot (University of Cambridge, 2023). However, no such approaches have been established in the Wye catchment so far.

This deficiency in both historical and ongoing data severely limits the ability to monitor changes in Water crowfoot communities, evaluate management efficiency and respond adaptively to threats. Without reliable data, conservation remains reactive rather than proactive, with key questions - such as how flow dynamics, nutrient input, channel morphology and sediment dynamics together affect Water crowfoot viability – left unanswered (Wye Valley National Landscape, 2024).

4.2.3 Conflicting land uses and priorities

Conserving Water crowfoot in the River Wye is made difficult by the competing demands placed on the catchment. The river is expected to support agriculture, recreation, navigation, and development, but these land uses often conflict with the ecological conditions required for Water crowfoot—namely clean, fast-flowing, low-nutrient waters with stable gravels. The River Wye Action Plan highlights how agriculture contributes to excessive phosphate inputs, and over 75% of sediment in the catchment, driving algal blooms and smothering aquatic plants. Climate extremes further intensify this pressure as droughts and floods both damage sensitive habitats (Defra, 2024).

Recreational use of the river also acts as a barrier to conservation. The Wye Waterway Plan and Wye Valley AONB Management Plan (2021-26) highlight how increased boating pressure, poorly designed launch sites and channel engineering can erode banks and increase sediment delivery. These processes undermine macrophyte habitat by burying Water crowfoot stands and reducing light and flow conditions needed for growth (Environment Agency, 2023; Wye Valley National Landscape, 2021–26).

At a broader scale, land use policy itself remains fragmented, with no overarching framework to balance the needs of farming, housing, energy, climate and biodiversity. This lack of integration means that short-term production or access priorities often override long-term ecological needs. National reviews argue that a multifunctional land-use framework is essential to mediate these conflicts, but until such governance is in place, the conservation of water crowfoot will remain constrained by competing land use demands (House of Lords, 2022).

4.2.4 Limited awareness and understanding

A further barrier to conserving Water crowfoot in the River Wye is the low level of public awareness and understanding of its decline. Once carpeting the river in spring and summer, *Ranunculus* has been reduced substantially in just five years, yet this loss is often hidden beneath the surface and overshadowed by the river’s outward scenic appeal (Wye Valley National Landscape, 2025).

Community-led initiatives have stepped in to fill some of this gap. The Friends of the River Wye's 'Big Ranunculus Watch' invites the public to record sightings of water crowfoot, while wider citizen science projects monitor phosphate, nitrate, turbidity and temperature using open-access apps. These efforts generate valuable baseline data and help to raise awareness of Water crowfoot in the public eye (Friends of the River Wye, 2025).

Despite such projects, broader understanding remains limited. Campaigns from groups like the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) Herefordshire and Revive the Wye emphasise that without wider recognition of the species' importance, conservation relies heavily on volunteers and niche interest groups. This lack of mainstream awareness weakens public pressure on policy makers and constrains long term funding and support (CPRE Herefordshire, 2024; Revive the Wye, 2013). In effect, Water crowfoot's decline is not just ecological, but also social. Without stronger awareness and cultural recognition, its conservation struggles to gain the momentum needed to overcome multiple pressures facing the River Wye.

4.2.5 Fragmented governance and coordination

The River Wye crosses the England–Wales border, meaning the catchment is managed under multiple jurisdictions, designations and regulatory frameworks. The river is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) across its length, but responsibility for conservation objectives and management is split between authorities in England and Wales. For example, the Core Management Plan produced by Natural Resources Wales applies to the Welsh sections of the SAC, while conservation objectives and regulatory oversight for the English sections are set by Natural England. This shared governance structure can make it more challenging to develop and enforce a consistent, catchment-wide approach to river management (Natural Resources Wales, 2022).

The Wye Catchment Partnership unites over 50 organisations- from Natural Resources Wales and the Wye & Usk Foundation to local councils, NGOs and Citizen Scientists, under a catchment scale plan. Although collaborative, the broad membership brings challenges in coordination, shared vision and consistent delivery. Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been secured by Catchment Partnership members for restoration, nutrient reduction and natural flood management, but maintaining coherence amid diverse stakeholders and funding streams remains a barrier to aligning efforts specifically for Water crowfoot conservation (The Wye Catchment Partnership, 2020).

Environmental governance research confirms the risks of fragmented institutions. Multiple overlapping jurisdictions and agencies often lead to coordination challenges, inefficiencies and ineffective delivery of environmental public goods (Kim, Keane and Bernard, 2015).

5. Current initiatives

1. River Wye Citizen Science Monitoring (CaSTCo Programme)

Citizen science plays an increasingly important role in monitoring river health and informing management across the River Wye catchment. Through the Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative (CaSTCo) programme, led by the Wye & Usk Foundation and supported by partners

including Save the River Usk, Gwent Wildlife Trust, the Wye Alliance, and Friends of the River Wye, a large volunteer network collects regular water quality and habitat data across the river system.

More than 400 trained volunteers now contribute weekly monitoring, generating over 1,000 water quality samples. Data collected includes key indicators such as phosphate, nitrate, turbidity, conductivity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, and river depth, helping to assess conditions that influence aquatic species such as water crowfoot. Monitoring often takes place before and after on-farm interventions to evaluate improvements to water quality and habitat.

All results are uploaded through Epicollect and visualised via the Wye Viz platform, producing spatial outputs such as phosphate hotspot maps. The Environment Agency increasingly uses this citizen science data alongside statutory monitoring to identify pollution sources and inform management responses. Initiatives led by Friends of the River Wye, including the Big Ranunculus Watch, also contribute species-specific observations that help build a clearer picture of water crowfoot distribution across the catchment.

2. Friends of the River Wye Big Ranunculus Watch

Friends of the River Wye (FoRW) are leading the Big Ranunculus Watch, a catchment-wide initiative designed to track the presence and condition of Water crowfoot across the River Wye. This project invites volunteers to record sightings, abundance and habitat characteristics using a simple survey protocol, generating the first coordinated dataset on the distribution of this declining macrophyte. By mobilising communities and integrating observations into the wider Wye Citizen Science program, the initiative raises public awareness while providing ecological data that can inform restoration efforts and monitor long term trends in Water crowfoot recovery (Friends of the River Wye, 2025).



Figure 6. David Nicholls. Croft Pasture, 09 May 2014

3. Upper Wye Catchment Restoration Project (Natural Resources Wales)

Funded through the Welsh Government's Water Capital Programme, the Upper Wye Catchment Restoration Project focuses on improving river and riparian habitats in the upper Wye catchment, an area that supports important populations of water crowfoot. The project uses nature-based approaches to restore natural river processes and improve water quality, including establishing riparian buffer zones through tree planting to reduce nutrient and sediment runoff, reconnecting rivers with their floodplains to restore natural flow and sediment dynamics, and introducing large woody material to increase channel complexity and habitat diversity.

The project also works with landowners to reduce sediment and pollutant inputs from surrounding land. These actions aim to enhance resilience to extreme weather by slowing runoff and targeting invasive species such as Himalayan balsam and American skunk cabbage.

4. The Environment Agency monitoring

The Environment Agency undertakes ongoing ecological monitoring across the River Wye catchment to track river health and inform management decisions. This programme includes monthly water chemistry sampling, which measures key nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen to assess pollution pressures and nutrient enrichment. Alongside this, seasonal biological monitoring is carried out through macroinvertebrate and diatom surveys, providing important indicators of ecological condition and water quality.

The Environment Agency also conducts annual macrophyte surveys, which record aquatic plant communities and capture the presence and distribution of species such as water crowfoot. During the warmer months, growing-season algae monitoring helps identify potential eutrophication issues and excessive algal growth linked to elevated nutrient levels. In addition, fish populations are assessed using methods such as electrofishing and seine netting, allowing scientists to evaluate fish community structure and overall river ecosystem health.

Together, these monitoring programmes provide a comprehensive evidence base that contributes to integrated catchment understanding and helps guide river management, restoration priorities, and regulatory action.

5. Drone Surveying

Working alongside the Friends of the River Wye's Big Ranunculus watch, the Wye Valley National Landscape team have facilitated work to establish a methodology for large scale surveying of Water crowfoot through the use of drones. Methodologies were developed by three drone operators over the summer of 2025, with the aim of carrying out a larger scale survey in 2026. This work will provide a more detailed understanding of baseline data, with a view to restoring Water crowfoot to the river in the future.



Figure 7. Drone footage of Ranunculus near Fownhope (2025).

6. Conservation visions

To enhance opportunities for Water crowfoot across the Wye Valley National Landscape:

- Working with partners, landowners and river managers to ensure that Water crowfoot habitat is considered within all watercourse and catchment management decision making.

Expand the current extent of Water crowfoot within the Wye Valley National Landscape through habitat creation:

- Collaborating with stakeholders to restore river and stream habitats, improve water quality and ensure suitable flow and riverbed conditions that support thriving stands of Water crowfoot.

To see a sustainable increase in Water crowfoot populations across the Wye Valley National Landscape:

- Encouraging and supporting regular surveys and monitoring to assess the extent and health of Water crowfoot beds, track changes over time, and guide future conservation action.

7. Conservation actions

ACTION	HOW
Raise awareness of the decline of Water crowfoot and the potential for recovery through appropriate action.	-Host events and workshops with the general public. -Promote good practices relating to habitat management for Water crowfoot. -Work with partners to create promotional and informative materials.
Monitor the presence and abundance of Water crowfoot	-Encourage partners, volunteers and the general public to carry out surveys (at known established sites and potential new sites) -Add to established datasets and submit records to the relevant local environmental records center. -Support data collection and ongoing citizen science projects and promote to encourage participation. -Conduct drone surveys to build a baseline of Water crowfoot populations.
Encourage responsible recreational use of the River Wye- specifically Water crowfoot habitats	-Produce and distribute promotional material about sustainable and appropriate recreational use of the river. -Signpost the general public to information sources. -Work with partners to host educational events and workshops.
Nurture and encourage citizen science and action groups	-Provide support through funding where available -Assist with funding applications. -Facilitate meetings and promote the work of groups
Encourage habitat enhancements through natural flood management and water quality improvements	-Work with farmers and landowners to encourage good land management practices to improve habitat and reduce diffuse pollution. -Continue to work with partners by supporting and promoting their work. -Encourage farmers and landowners to create natural buffer zones. -Provide funding support, where available, for the delivery of river friendly farming actions
Encourage Water crowfoot reintroduction in suitable locations.	-Work with stakeholders to establish reintroduction methodologies and suitable locations. -Develop projects and source funding for reintroduction work, working with riparian landowners to implement

8. Role of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team

- Support, advise, facilitate and co-ordinate conservation action for Water crowfoot, either as lead or through partnerships with other stakeholders.
- Engage with and support landowners and land managers, encouraging best practice in managing riverine habitats and river friendly farming practices.
- Promote Water crowfoot conservation in partnership with other conservation organisations.
- Provide and encourage the provision of advice to the general public and practical support for landowners.
- Enthuse the general public to take part in surveying and providing records of Water crowfoot.
- Facilitate the monitoring of habitat and Water crowfoot populations, to enable progress reporting.

9. Marking progress

We will mark progress through:

- Water crowfoot records: When there are widespread records of water crowfoot in the National Landscape, indicating population increase, or an improvement in survey efforts.
- Water crowfoot habitat: When there is more suitable and available habitat in the National Landscape, where water crowfoot is being recorded, indicating a population increase, an expansion in range or an improvement in survey efforts.
- Water crowfoot understanding and conservation efforts: When information about water crowfoot is widely available to everybody, and Water crowfoot habitat in the National Landscape is being enhanced.
- Water crowfoot extent: When monitoring and recording can demonstrate an increase in extent and a sustainable population throughout the National Landscape

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TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

13th July 2026

UPDATES ON FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES (FIPL), FFERMIO BRO, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND (SDF) AND HEREFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (HCF) WYE VALLEY NATIONAL LANDSCAPE FUND

Purpose

To update 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).

Recommendation

That the JAC

- A. endorses the recent allocations of FiPL, Ffermio Bro and SDF grants.
- B. Welcomes the new Wildlife Rich Habitat Fund allocation from DEFRA

Key Issues

- 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 have 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 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 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.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)

Wye Valley National Landscape FiPL allocation for 26/27 is £345,389 including advice & guidance and administration. DEFRA have indicated similar indicative levels for 2027/28 and 2028/29. The Wye Valley FiPL Officer, Richie Alford, has hosted two FiPL Panel meetings since the last JAC and grants totalling £89,981.50 awarded initially and a further 5 projects assessed at the most recent Panel meeting on 2nd July with the final offers still being negotiated (see table below). Applications under £10,000 may be determined by the National Landscape Manager.

WV 129	Clay Estate, Perrystone	£50,000.00
	Butchery unit (2 nd year of 2)	
WV A&G	Herefordshire Rural Hub	£20,000
	Farm Advice & Guidance collaborative service with Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF), Pastures for Life (PfL), Herefordshire Meadows (HM) & Herefordshire Wildlife Trust (HWT).	
WV 160	Great Trewen Farm, Whitchurch	£6,766.40
	Yoghurt Pasteuriser to augment dairy processing and local sales	
WV 161	Ragmans Lane Farm, Lydbrook	£2,215.10
	Market Garden Regenerative Organic Infrastructure Improvements for Sustainable Market Garden Production	
WV 163	Model Farm, Hildersley	£11,000.00
	A2 Milk Vending machine to help with sales, particularly with farm shop currently closed due to Enterprise Park construction. A2 milk has a specialised market for people with a dairy intolerance.	
	TOTAL	£89,981.50
	<i>Projects approved on 2nd July: grant values to be finalised</i>	
WV 162	Warslow Farm, Checkley	TBC
	The Hedgerow Hut: establishment of an honesty box hut for walkers on the Mordiford Loop Walk	
WV 164	Much Fawley Farm	TBC
	Compost Loo for riverside walkers, canoeists and visitors to Much Fawley Chapel, to replace use of farm diversification Glamping facilities	
WV 165	Langstone Mill, Garren Brook	TBC
	Biosecurity, natural flood management and climate adaptation improvements for pedigree sheep enterprise	
WV 167	Grazing Management Ltd	TBC
	Livestock trailer; hurdles and portable shelter to facilitate handling of expanding goat herd for conservation grazing across the National Landscape	
WV 168	Alfords Mill, Woolhope	TBC
	Traditional orchard planting and wildflower meadow creation	

Wildlife Rich Habitat Fund

The Wildlife-Rich Habitat Fund was announced by Nature Minister Mary Creagh on 25th May, with £30 million, £10 million per financial year, from 2026 to 2029. The Wye Valley National Landscape is one of 36 of England's 44 Protected Landscapes participating in the first year. The Wildlife-Rich Habitat Fund is delivered through the existing Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme infrastructure, with every project prioritised in line with Protected Landscape Management Plans and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The fund is from DEFRA's National Biodiversity Division and is separate from and does not affect the farming budget or the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. But it forms part of the government's broader programme of action to restore nature, alongside the Environmental Improvement Plan, the Land Use Framework and new legislation to strengthen the purposes and powers of National Parks and National Landscapes.

Rhydicar Farm	£1,236.00
Establishment of a one-acre species rich grassland meadow	
Stowe Court	£25,567.60
Creation of wildflower rich meadows, woodland pasture, attenuation bunds to slow the flow of flood water across fields and planting of hedgerows and a shelterbelt for connectivity of habitats.	
TOTAL to date	£26,803.60

Ffermio Bro

Welsh Government's Ffermio Bro programme has an allocation for the Wye Valley National Landscape in 2026/27 of £195,312 for grants for farmers in the Welsh part of the National Landscape, along with £39,945 for administration, advice and guidance.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Ffermio Bro Local Assessment Panel met on 1st July however no formal grant offers have been made yet but are currently being negotiated. The Ffermio Bro Officer, Chris Knight, is working with numerous farmers and landowners on project proposals, including several pending applications in development.

Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

Welsh Government allocated £95,000 of SDF in 2026/27 for the Welsh part of the Wye Valley National Landscape. Programme funding ring-fences 60% for projects that further the objectives of tackling the Biodiversity and Climate Emergencies. Lucinda James, Wye Valley National Landscape Community Links Officer works with potential and successful applicants and the SDF Assessment Panel to achieve this objective. The total grants awarded by the SDF Assessment Panel in 2026/27 equals £19,468.23 (see table below). Applications under £3,000 are determined by the National Landscape Manager.

Code	Applicant	Project Title	SDF Grant
WV02 YR26W	Wye Valley River Festival CIC	Rare Earth Festival 2026	£12,500.00

WV03 YR26W	Transition Monmouth	New Management Plan for Wyesham Community Woodland	£2,017.03
WV04 YR26W	Dôl-Wen One Planet	Biochar Training Course	£976.20
WV05 YR26W	Vey Straker	Signs of Connection – river crossing signs	£2,475.00
WV06 YR26W	Garthr, The Narth	Veteran Oak Pollarding	£1,500.00
		TOTAL this period	£19,468.23

Wye Valley National Landscape Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF)

The Wye Valley National Landscape Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) was established with a £50,000 Endowment Fund. Project grants are awarded from the interest and any growth or donations above that base Fund.

The HCF Wye Valley National Landscape Fund had a balance of £60,963.13 as of the last statement dated 31st March 2026. The fund is currently restricted to allow the value to grow. Opportunities need to be sought to augment the National Landscape Fund further. When funds allow, the National Landscape Team assists and comments on applications to the National Landscape Fund to advise HCF on determining grant allocations.

Background

For more details on grants and the application process see <https://www.wyevalley-nl.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/grants/> .

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

13th July 2026

GRANT FUNDING IN THE SETTING OF THE WYE VALLEY NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Purpose

To adopt a process for awarding grant funding in the setting of the Wye Valley National Landscape.

Recommendations

That the JAC endorses 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.

Key Issues

- 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 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'.

Reasons

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team are increasingly receiving requests from landowners outside the boundary of the Wye Valley National Landscape for grant funding to support project work.

Current guidance differs slightly in England and Wales for funding schemes and grant programmes that the Wye Valley National Landscape Team administers:-

- For the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), and subsequently for general Capital budgets from Welsh Government and DEFRA, the 'rule of thumb' adopted with applications & projects outside the boundary is that 'the majority of the benefit must be within the National Landscape'.
- DEFRA Capital funding guidance states that funds may be used for activity outside the boundary of a Protected Landscape, where that activity can demonstrate benefit to the Protected Landscape, or the Protected Landscape organisation's objectives or partnership initiatives.
- Similarly the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme allows the funding of projects outside the National Landscape in England where "it is clear the project will benefit the Protected Landscape, or the Protected Landscape body's objectives or partnership initiatives". No maximum distance from the National Landscape is set.
- Welsh Government's guidance for Ffermio Bros is that "Projects can include holdings outside the Designated Landscape (DL) Boundary, where the project is part of a specific thematic collaborative project in which other holdings sit within the DL, and which is materially enhanced by the inclusion of land outside. Other than in exceptional circumstances (which must be approved by WG and the Programme Manager in advance) all activities must be within 1km of the boundary of the DL."

It is therefore currently a judgement call on a case-by-case basis as to whether to fund works or not in the setting of the National Landscape. With increased interest in National Landscape funding, the Wye Valley National Landscape Team believe there is a need for a more robust and evidence-based approach to the level of support we can offer when granting work outside the National Landscape.

In 2025/26 habitat conservation and enhancement work was funded and delivered on 74 holdings. 78% of these were inside the National Landscape and 14% were within 1km of the boundary. In the wider setting of the National Landscape the remaining 8% (6 holdings) were beyond 1km from the boundary.

Implications

Funding allocations to the Wye Valley National Landscape must support outcomes that further the conservation and enhancement of the outstanding natural beauty of the National Landscape. However, project work does not necessarily have to be confined to within the National Landscape boundary, so long as the benefit to the designated landscape can be demonstrated.

When considering benefit to the National Landscape the primary ways this can be achieved are:

- Bigger, better, more joined up habitat connectivity extending through the National Landscape boundary (as outlined in The Lawton Review 'Making space for nature': a review of England's wildlife and how to protect it, led by Professor Sir John Lawton, published in 2010.)
- Through improvements in water quality &/or quantity, including reducing soil erosion and silting of water courses and tributaries &/or reduced or slower peak flows reaching the National Landscape, including from the tributaries and sub-catchments surrounding the National Landscape.

These benefits tend to reduce with distance from the National Landscape boundary.

To provide clarity to officers and landowners, it is proposed the following parameters be set for Grant Funding in the setting of the Wye Valley National Landscape (NB – consideration should be given to the location of the work, not where the landowner / applicant lives):

- Offers of funding made to landowners outside the National Landscape boundary follow a graded approach, with the level of funding decreasing with distance from the boundary.
- A buffer of 1km around the whole of the National Landscape be considered the same as work within the boundary, as work here can demonstrate direct benefit both through habitat connectivity and water quality.
- Beyond the 1km buffer, only projects in the Wye catchment are considered suitable for funding, based on the benefit the work can provide in terms of water quality and quantity.
- To reflect the gradual reduction in benefit, the further away from a tributary's confluence with the River Wye in the National Landscape that the works are proposed, funding offers decrease with every further 1km from the National Landscape boundary up the Wye and respective tributaries and their sub-catchments.
- To reflect the importance of working on some tributaries and their catchments where significant benefits can be achieved for the River Wye and the National Landscape, the whole of these sub-catchments are included in the outermost buffer, for example the Garren and Gamber sub-catchment.
- Where projected work straddles a buffer boundary, the higher rate is to be used.
- Where a landholding has a number of activities which fall into 2 or more buffer bands, each activity is considered within the buffer in which it is located.

These parameters can be seen visually on the Setting Grant Funding Guide 2026 map below.

The process should be kept under annual review. An alternative 'Option B' could be considered, with a more generous / less steep gradation, with 5% reductions per kilometre. This would result in an offer of 95% between 1 and 2km, 90% between 2 and 3km and so on down to 80% from 4 to 5km from the National Landscape.

The initial / steeper Option A would most likely lead to a lower uptake from landowners outside the boundary, leading to more money being invested closer to and within the National Landscape. However this may mean losing some highly beneficial work slightly further afield and more importantly losing the goodwill of landowners which may need to be nurtured for future wider project involvement.

Option B would be a more gradual approach, offering the opportunity to 'test the water' in relation to this new approach, secure wider landowner engagement, spend the Capital

grants budget more easily and deliver more biodiversity enhancement projects, albeit potentially in the wider setting of the National Landscape.

To provide consistency with other schemes, beyond 1km from the National Landscape (the 100% rate), grant offers would be for a proportionately reduced quantity if using standard rates or offer the reduced % of bespoke items associated with each zone.

The proposal is to establish a clearer, evidence-based approach for awarding grants to projects outside, but within the setting of, the Wye Valley National Landscape. The key criteria is that funding must support the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape, but some beneficial work may occur beyond its boundary.

The Wye Valley National Landscape covers 328 km² and the wider eligible area would increase the fundable area to 725 km².

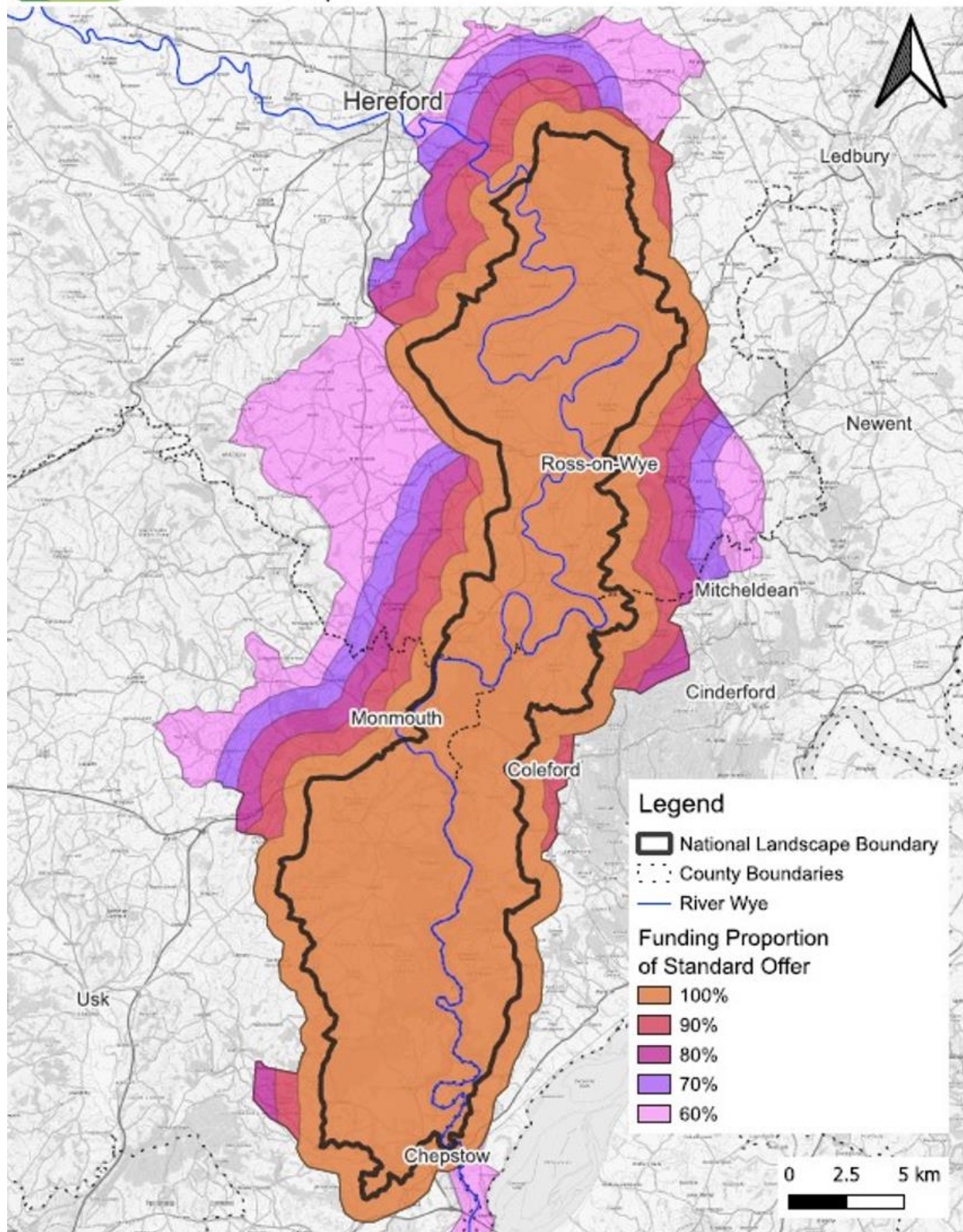
Wye Valley National Landscape Team have developed the proposed methodology using the various grant guidance criteria above as a foundation for based on these principles and in discussion with the Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP), the FiPL Local Assessment Panel and Herefordshire Council's Natural Environment Team.

Background

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team administer a number of grants and funding programmes for DEFRA and Welsh Government. These include:-

- The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme – for farmers and land managers in the English part of the National Landscape with a focus on Nature, Climate, People & Place,
- The Ffermio Bro programme – for farmers and land managers to collaborate on nature recovery and farm sustainability in the Welsh part of the National Landscape,
- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) – for community projects and initiatives in the Welsh part of the National Landscape, with a predominant focus on nature recovery and decarbonisation,
- The Wye Valley National Landscapes Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) – for small projects anywhere in the National Landscape,
- The Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places programme, from Welsh Government, focusing on nature recovery and decarbonisation projects,
- DEFRA Access for All funding.
- DEFRA Wildlife Rich Habitat Fund,
- DEFRA and Welsh Government general Capital funding,
- Natural Resources Wales Strategic Allocated Funding.

Grants and projects are funded where work specifically benefits the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the outstanding natural beauty of the nationally designated protected landscape. The Wye Valley National Landscapes Team also provides advice on other funding and grants that may be available.



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FIELD TO FLOW LANDSCAPE CONNECTIONS LOTTERY BID

Purpose

To seek members' 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.

Recommendations

That the JAC endorses 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.

Key Issues

- 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 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 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 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.

Reasons

The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) 'Landscape Connections' is a grant programme open to those who care for or partner with National Landscapes and National Parks. Projects can be up to 10 years with a development phase of up to 2 years and subsequent 8 years of project delivery. Grants can be between £250,000 up to £10million. Funding is to:

- Support long-term projects which boost nature recovery and connect more people to our most treasured landscapes,
- Drive systematic change across the UK's Protected Landscapes,
- Put Landscapes into recovery; supporting habitats and species alongside rich cultural heritage in better connected, working landscapes,
- Landscapes strengthened as working landscapes, alive with nature and providing space for people to relax and connect with the environment.

Lottery guidance advises that projects:

- Have a Protected Landscape body as a key partner and have a core area of the Protected Landscape at their heart.
- Deliver work over a contiguous landscape, not on a theme over a wider area.
- Delivery for Nature Recovery, following the 'protect the environment' investment principle.
- Area can be any size but advised to focus on impact rather than scale.
- Address a problem and support systematic change.
- Farm advice as well as capital work is viable.
- NLHF want to see demonstrable change, where they can go to a project area at the end of the project and see lasting change.

The successful Field to Flow Expression of Interest identified that:-

Lower Wye Valley faces urgent environmental and social challenges that threaten its natural and cultural heritage. The River Wye suffers from declining water quality and pressures from unsustainable land management. Family farms, central to the character and economy of the valley, are under increasing strain, while connections between producers, consumers, and the wider community have weakened. These issues have created a disconnect between people and the landscape, reducing local understanding of how food, farming, and nature are interdependent.

There is a clear need for coordinated, long-term action to restore the health of the river and surrounding habitats while supporting the people who care for the land. It is recognised systems change is required. By working collaboratively with farmers, landowners, communities and partner organisations across England and Wales, this project will address systemic problems at a landscape scale. It will deliver river-friendly farming embedded within sustainable farm businesses, enhance biodiversity, and strengthen local food networks, helping to create a more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive Lower Wye Valley. This project will provide the catalyst for measurable change, reviving the landscape's natural systems, reconnecting communities with their environment, and ensuring the Wye Valley National Landscape continues to thrive for future generations.

Implications

The Lower Wye Valley's heritage is a tapestry of river, farmland, woodland, and communities shaped by centuries of farming and human connection to the landscape. The Wye Valley National Landscape is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, at its core the River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Wye was voted UK's favourite river in 2010. This heritage faces pressures from declining water quality, habitat loss, and weakening ties between people and place. It is a working landscape where nature, culture, and livelihoods coexist, offering powerful foundations for restoration and reconnection.

The successful Field to Flow Expression of Interest stated that:-

The Field to Flow – Lower Wye Valley Landscape Connections project will be a long-term, cross-border initiative working with farmers, landowners, and communities to strengthen connections between people and their landscape, restore nature and improve water quality.

Building on existing schemes such as Wyescapes, Farming in Protected Landscapes and Ffermio Bro, the project will focus on sub-catchments feeding into the River Wye, tackling ecological degradation and social disconnection. The project will help reconnect people with the land and food production, and consolidate and celebrate links between sustainable environmentally sensitive farming, local economies, and healthy river systems in and around the Wye Valley National Landscape.

We will deliver community engagement, connecting communities with local food production on farms working in harmony with the environment, through schools, citizen science, and local food initiatives and festivals, over an eight-year delivery phase.

We will support farmers and land managers to co-create and implement nature-based and river-friendly farming practices, enhance wetlands and woodlands, and pilot species reintroductions.

We will deliver measurable improvements in water quality, habitat connectivity, and embed river friendly farming approaches into sustainable farm business models. Sharing achievements will act as a catalyst for wider landscape recovery and systemic change across the Wye catchment.

The NLHF Strategy ‘Heritage 2033’ contains four investment principles that guide all their grant decision making. The successful Field to Flow Expression of Interest addressed these as follows:-

Saving Heritage - The Field to Flow project conserves the Lower Wye Valley’s distinctive natural and cultural heritage, and the Wye Valley National Landscape’s Special Qualities, by restoring habitats, improving water quality and supporting traditional family farms as integral parts of the outstanding landscape. It protects designated sites and species and fosters community pride in the area’s rich farming heritage. Knowledge sharing and community engagement will celebrate the connection between people, place, produce and landscape.

Protecting the Environment - Through advice and capital works grounded in River Friendly Farming standards and delivered with sustainable farm businesses, the project delivers tangible environmental outcomes: reduced nutrient and sediment runoff, increased biodiversity, species reintroduction and enhanced ecosystem resilience. Creation of wetlands, woodlands, and habitat corridors contribute to Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Wye Catchment Plan and Wye Valley National Landscape Management Plan, providing measurable improvements in river health and climate adaptation.

Inclusion, Access and Participation - The project reconnects communities with the landscape and farming through re-establishment of local markets, learning, participation and celebration. Schools, local residents, and volunteers will join farmers in citizen-science monitoring, farm visits, food education activities and festivals. By linking food production to place, it promotes access for people of all ages and backgrounds, focussing

on those less engaged with the countryside, ensuring everyone can benefit from and contribute to nature recovery and community cohesion.

Organisational Sustainability - Partnership working across the public, private, and voluntary sectors strengthens organisational resilience and shared capacity. The project will embed sustainable delivery models, co-create, nurture and develop nature friendly farm businesses, local food supply chains, farm networks, and community monitoring groups, that endure beyond grant funding. Utilising existing schemes and initiatives and green/private finance, the project ensures efficient use of resources, long-term legacy, and a financially and environmentally sustainable approach to managing the lower Wye Valley landscape.

The outline costings in the Expression of Interest are as follows:

The total project cost is estimated to be £13,140,654 over 10 years.

The estimated Lottery grant request to cover both Development and Delivery phases is £9,973,362 at 76% of the total project cost.

Match funding in the Development Phase is Officer in kind contributions from the Wye Valley National Landscape Team and Partner organisations. In the Delivery Phase, match funding will be in-kind through officer and volunteer time, as well as £2.88million to be secured through Private Finance and other public/private/3rd sector funds for Capital works on farm.

Development Phase [2 years]:

National Lottery Heritage Fund request = £406,000 (86.9%)

Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership in-kind = £61,000 (13.1%)

Staff Costs	£318,000
Consultant Costs	£80,000
Contingency	£8,000
In kind officer costs	£61,000
TOTAL	£467,000

Delivery Phase [8 years]:

National Lottery Heritage Fund request = £9,567,362 (75.5%)

Private Finance & other public/private/3rd sector funds = £2,880,000 (22.7%)

Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership in-kind = £226,292 (1.8%)

Staff Costs	£2,203,362
Capital costs – on farm habitat enhancements	£8,000,000
Local Supply chains / markets development (Capital)	£575,000
Vehicle	£80,000
Events, upskilling, education	£60,000
Consultant costs – Farm business planning	£400,000
Branding, marketing and supply chains	£125,000
Product Development	£50,000
Contingency	£929,000
Evaluation costs	£25,000
In-kind officer costs / hosting	£226,292
Delivery Phase TOTAL	£12,673,654

Since the success of the Expression of Interest, discussions have been held with Lottery staff, who will help guide the application process up to the submission deadline in April 2027. The application will then be assessed over a 3 month period, when further clarification may be sought. It will then be presented to both the Midlands and Wales Regional Committees before going to the Lottery Board of Trustees for determination.

It is proposed that a consultant is appointed to assist the Wye Valley National Landscape Team to collate the Field to Flow application over the next 9 months. This process will include refining the Field to Flow outputs through liaison and workshops with key partners and stakeholder including the Wye Catchment Partnership, Farm Herefordshire, Wye & Usk Foundation, Wyescapes Project Board, the Wildlife Trusts, local Food Partnerships, NFU, FUW, CLA and other interested farmers and land managers. The project area (map attached below) may also be refined.

There is an evolving range of supporting evidence and projects that lay excellent foundations for the proposed Field to Flow project, through scientific data, landowner engagement and identification of opportunities. These include the Wye Catchment Management Plan, Wye Living Labs research and local Citizen Science, the Wyescapes programme, the Wye & Usk Foundation's Resilient Rivers project, Farming in Protected Landscapes and Ffermio Bro programmes, the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) and the Wye Adapt to Climate Change project. Field to Flow will learn from, complement and augment these projects, rather than duplicate or compete with them.

Background

'Field to Flow' was chosen as the title for the Lower Wye Valley Landscape Connections project as Field to Flow represents a journey from the rooted strength of the land to the ever-moving currents of connection:

Fields are more than soil, they are stories of nourishment, tradition and care.

Flow is movement of water, from clouds & rain, across fields, crops and drains to streams and rivers out into the ocean, it is also the flow of blood through our bodies and hearts — the lifeblood that carries stories of water and land forward, weaving people, farms, and communities into a living, breathing whole.

'Field to Flow' is therefore about transformations: from harvest to table, from individual to collective, from land to river, and from past to future. It is a vision of community and landscape where food, water, and people are inseparably linked in abundance and reciprocity, where we cultivate not only what sustains us, but also the connections that allow us to flourish.

Field to Flow envisions a future where thriving farms, flowing rivers, and resilient communities are inseparably linked; where landscapes sustain and communities grow. By connecting land, water, and people, we will cultivate nourishment, strengthen relationships, build resilience in the land and water and create abundance that flows across generations.

For further information see:-

[Landscape Connections](#)

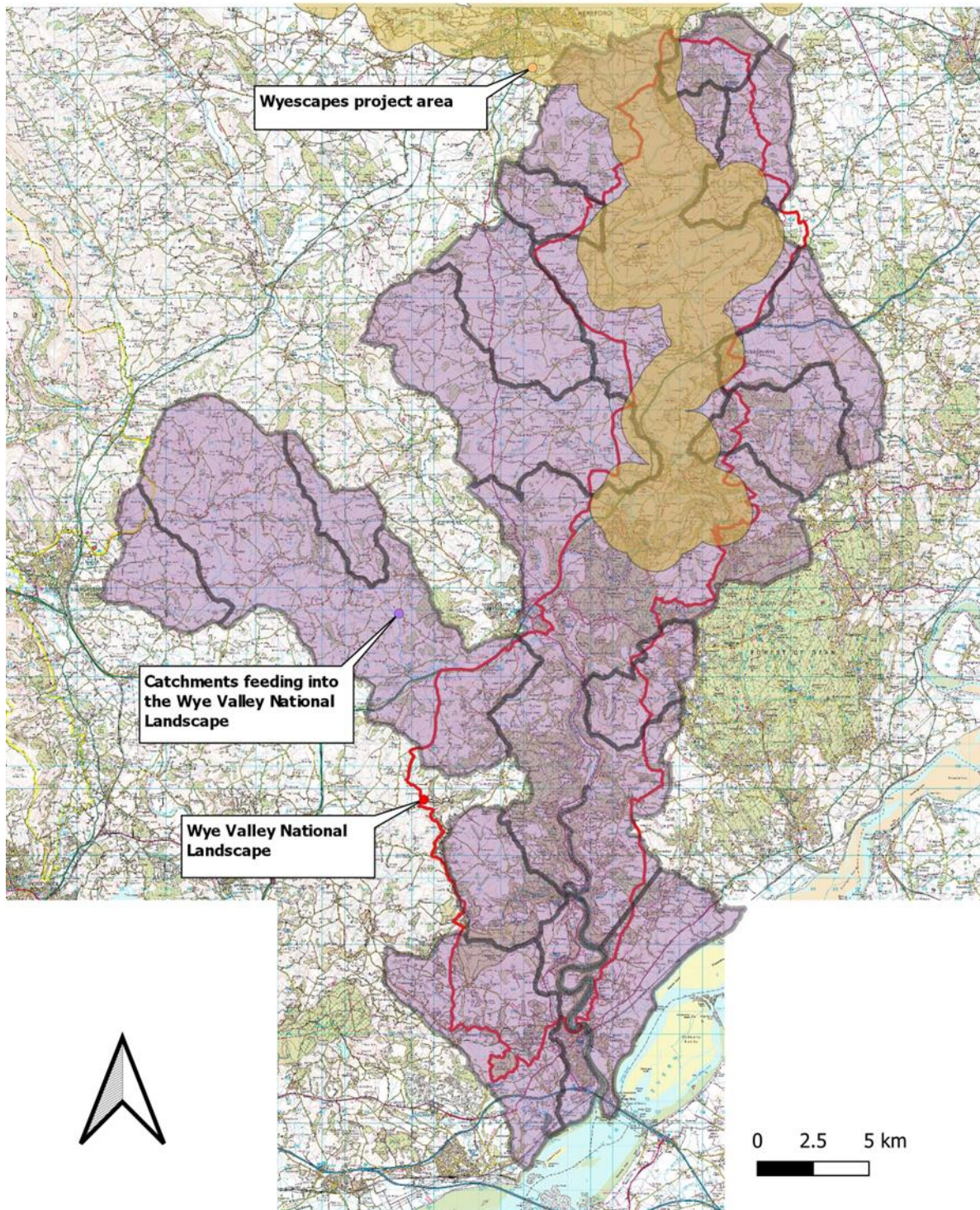
[National Lottery Heritage Grants £250,000 to £10million](#)

[Application questions: £250,000 to £10million](#)

<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/good-practice-guidance>

Landscape Connections

Catchments where confluence with the Wye is within the National Landscape boundary



TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

13th July 2026

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL STUDY TOUR

Purpose

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

Recommendations

That the JAC

A. 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.

B. 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.

Key Issues

- The Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership Annual Tour will be held on Friday 25th September.
- 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.

Reasons

The Annual Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership Tour is hosted by the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and has a good reputation as both an information exchange and networking opportunity, with good attendance from the wider National Landscape Partnership. The invitation to attend the Tour is extended to all members of the JAC, to Senior Officers and County and District Councillors whose wards fall within the Wye Valley National Landscape along with representatives from all the constituent Town/Parish/Community Councils. It is thus a key tool in the transfer of information to the wider partners and interested parties in and around the National Landscape.

Implications

The date of 25th September is proposed for the 2026 Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership Tour. In the interests of wider collaboration invitations will be made to other appropriate partner organisations and neighbouring Designated Landscapes; including the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, the Malvern Hills, Shropshire Hills and Gower National Landscape Partnerships, the National Landscapes Association, Welsh Government and DEFRA.

The programme for the Tour is still being finalised, but will include visiting Ffermio Bro sites, Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) and Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) projects, INNS control and Species Action Plan achievement and Lower Wye Tracks & Trails.

The event reaches a wide audience of National Landscape partners and interested parties and always proves to be very popular and informative for those who attend. Lunch and transport will be included in the modest charge to attendees.

Background

Each year the JAC hosts the Annual Study Tour.

In 2025 the Tour focused on the Goodrich area, between Ross and Monmouth. Sites and issues visited included: Bishopswood Village Hall, and undergrounding of electricity lines; Kerne Bridge Canoe launch site, and canoe hire operations and site management issues; Hen and Dot café, Flanesford Priory, for refreshments and farm diversification in action; Priory Farm, with work planned under the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) and Wyescapes project. Ashe Farm, Pencraig, with irrigation reservoirs and Floodplain meadow restoration; finally, further LEI work with creation of ponds, scrapes & leaky dams, meadow restoration and eDNA monitoring at Brelston Green.

In 2024 the tour focused on Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) projects and land management issues in the Herefordshire part of the National Landscape. Visits included looking at a free-range egg production enterprise; maize undersowing & Natural Flood Management (NFM) projects; agroforestry, orchards, solar panels, beef & arable production, an anaerobic digester, barn restoration & glamping; DEFRA Access for All projects including Ross Riverside & Willow Walk with new disabled parking & bridges.

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY NATIONAL LANDSCAPE
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

13th July 2026

PARTNER AND NATIONAL LANDSCAPE TEAM PROGRESS REPORTS AND UPDATES

Purpose

To advise members of activity of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team and other local and national partners.

FOR INFORMATION

Below are update reports on the following National Landscape Team other local and national partner initiatives: -

1. National Landscapes Association
 - National Landscape Annual Conference, Norwich [7th-9th July]
 - Protected Landscapes APPG
2. Young Adventurers
3. Wye Valley National Landscape Volunteers
4. Priority Species Update
5. Wye Adapt to Climate Change project
6. Lower Wye Tracks & Trails Steering Group
7. Conservation Grazing

1. National Landscapes Association (NLA)

- **National Landscapes Annual Conference 2026, Norwich [7th-9th July]**

The 2026 conference theme is 'Vitality of Place', exploring the role of National Landscapes as drivers of vitality in their areas. Natural beauty, biodiversity, and cultural heritage of our finest landscapes underpin thriving, resilient communities.

A strong contingent from the Wye Valley National Landscape are attending. The full programme is available here: <https://www.national-landscapes-conference.org.uk/programme>.

Presentations and discussions will revolve around how National Landscapes are not only places of outstanding natural value; they are also economic systems, supporting livelihoods, attracting investment, and shaping the wellbeing of millions of people. The conference will be an exploration of the opportunity and challenge of creating vitality whilst navigating competing priorities and the trading of short-term gains against the wellbeing of future generations.

- **Protected Landscapes All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)**

Westminster hosts a wide range of All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs). The Protected Landscapes APPG met on 1st July 2026 with the NLA's Bruce Winney, Head of Policy, and Ruth Colbridge, Communications Manager (Public Affairs) in attendance.

Ensuring the Protected Landscapes duty is robust and not watered down was raised as a key priority, with Parliamentarians pressing for examples of where it has helped. Examples were given of work with a water company in Yorkshire Dales National Park, and what happens when it is not followed such as the Manningtree railway station car park in Dedham Vale National Landscape. Other topics that came up from the MPs were governance, with DEFRA committed to legislative change but also looking at other things, such as diversity that don't need legislation, and an Access Green Paper.

Campaign for National Parks service the APPG and brought with them four youth ambassadors who discussed barriers to access, which focused on lack of public transport and lack of familiarity with Protected Landscapes.

The NLA have produced an update Briefing on the Protected Landscapes duty (appended below) and also provided MPS with information about Generation Green and Nature Calling, demonstrating how National Landscapes are supporting more young people to access these outstanding places.

2. Wye Valley National Landscape Youth Adventurers

Lucinda James, Wye Valley National Landscape Community Links Officer, organised a range of activities over the past couple of months with many children attending who have Special Educational Needs (SEN):-

- **March - Bush Craft at Wyesham Community Woodland, Monmouth.**



This session we worked with Wyesham Community Woodland Project to use their campfire and shelter, which as we have a very wet start to the year, was very much needed! The children whittled mushroom keyrings and prepared a vegetable stew for lunch, this followed by chocolate bananas and hot chocolate.

- **April - Bush Craft session at Beares Farm, St Briavels.**



For this session we were whittling hazel walking sticks and learning about the different uses of sticks and how we coppice trees. We also made savoury and sweet toasties on the fire.

- **May - Bird Box Making with Chepstow Artspace at the Babington Centre, Trellech.**



During this activity the children built their own bird boxes, learnt some helpful tips to encourage birds into their own gardens. Once the birdboxes were built the children had the opportunity to decorate them ready to be erected at home.

- **June - Wildlife ID Walk with Gwent Wildlife Trust @ Pentwyn Farm Nature Reserve.**



For this activity we took a relaxed stroll through the meadows at Pentwyn Farm looking at different species of wildflowers, insects and trees on the reserve. The children were encouraged to identify each species using ID sheets and phone apps (seek and Obsidentify).

3. Wye Valley National Landscape Volunteers

Our volunteers have been busy over the past couple of months tackling a variety of different tasks and projects. We have run 6 volunteer task days and 1 training day which has clocked up **387 hours of volunteer** work in just 4 month!

- **March 26th- Staunton Meend Common- 14 Volunteers**



Our volunteers were out clearing birch which has established due to the lack of management over the recent years. The Staunton Meend Restoration project is now tackling the birch and bracken to help restore the heathland.

- **April 9th Bendith, Brampton Abbots- 7 volunteers**



A small group of volunteers helped the WVNL team in planting of a shelter belt which comprised of 312 trees (see SAP update below)

- **April 16th, St Marys Church, Tintern- Graveyard Restoration- 17 volunteers**



This was our second year helping the Lower Wye Valley Building Preservation Trust manage and maintain the graveyard area at St Mary's, Tintern. This included rebuilding 4 sections of fallen drystone wall, removing saplings and clearing overgrown areas.

- **April 30th, Prickly Patch Hedgehog Rescue Centre- Painting- 4 volunteers.**



Our volunteers answered an SOS call from the Prickly Patch team to get the rescue centre treated following a dry period and before the official launch on the 8th May.

- **May 14th, Beacon Hill- Nightjar Monitoring Training- 8 volunteers**

This year we have launch a Nightjar monitoring project at Beacon Hill, 8 volunteers we trained on listening and identifying Nightjars and monitor their behaviour. The project is led by Nightjar enthusiasts Ben Locke and Hugh Mainstree who have been monitoring Nightjar activity in the Forest of Dean for many years. Volunteers learned how to identify Nightjars and record their movements and behaviour to try and identify nest locations at Beacon Hill. The monitoring takes place at dusk from late May until mid/ late August. Once a nest site is located, trained ringer Rob Husband will attempt to catch, ring and attach a GPS device to track their movements. Audio Moth devices are also used to record any churring from dusk and until dawn. Monitoring continues throughout the summer until August, when Nightjar chicks fledge.

- **May 21st, Angidy Pools- Scything- 20 volunteers**



Volunteers were split between the 2 pools, taking it in turns to scythe the area and remove the cuttings to reduce the nutrients returning to the soil. There was a noticeable increase in wildflowers following years of management.

- **June 18th, Brockweir- Himalayan Balsam Control- 17 volunteers**



This was our 4th year of pulling Balsam at the Brockweir site, it was noticeable that the amount of Balsam had reduced enabling us to tackle a second section which we have been unable to tackle in the past on the same day.

4. Priority Species Project updates

Over the past few months, the WVNLC team has made significant progress across the Priority Species Project, delivering the 4 adopted Species Action Plans (SAPs) through a range of habitat creation, monitoring, education, and community engagement activities throughout the Wye Valley National Landscape.

Orchard SAP - Habitat creation and enhancement

- **Bendith tree planting and orchard creation**



Habitat enhancement works at Bendith have now been successfully completed. A new shelter belt has been created, consisting of 312 newly planted trees, protected by 120 metres of sheep-netted fencing and an aluminium access gate. Volunteers supported the planting effort, contributing their time and enthusiasm to establish this important new habitat feature. Alongside the shelter belt, members of the WVNLC team planted a new traditional orchard, comprising 25 mixed apple trees. This orchard will provide valuable habitat, supporting a wide range of species including pollinators, birds, and small mammals, while also contributing to the conservation of traditional landscape features.

Hedgehog SAP - Conservation and Community Engagement

- **Hedgehog House Building Workshop- The Narth:**

The WVNLC team hosted a successful hedgehog house building workshop in The Narth, engaging local families in practical conservation action. A total of 14 families attended, resulting in 14 new hedgehog habitats being created within gardens across the local area.

The workshop provided an opportunity to educate families about the challenges facing hedgehogs and share practical actions they can take at home and within their communities to support hedgehog recovery, including improving habitat connectivity and creating wildlife-friendly gardens.



One attendee shared their experience of the workshop through a blog post:

<https://www.thewildlifenomad.com/blog/building-homes-a-hedgehog-workshop-in-the-wye-valley>

- **Hedgehog Monitoring – Howle Hill, Ross-on-Wye**

The WVNLT team worked with a local landowner to carry out a hedgehog monitoring project at Howle Hill, Ross-on-Wye. Monitoring equipment was deployed across the site, including 3 wildlife cameras and 9 hedgehog tracking tunnels, to investigate potential hedgehog presence.

Unfortunately, no hedgehog evidence was recorded during the monitoring period. However, the project has provided useful baseline information, supported wider understanding of local hedgehog distribution, and helped build relationships with landowners interested in supporting priority species conservation.

- **Little Dewchurch Primary School Hedgehog Monitoring Project**

In May, the WVNLT team delivered a hedgehog monitoring project with Little Dewchurch Primary School. A classroom session was provided to educate students about hedgehog ecology, conservation, and practical actions they can take to help protect the species.

The school then received hedgehog monitoring equipment, allowing pupils to collect data and investigate hedgehog activity both on school grounds and within their own gardens in the surrounding community. The project directly engaged with 50 children at Little Dewchurch Primary School, with the impact extending further into the local community through families participating in hedgehog monitoring at home, reaching an estimated additional 20 family members and encouraging wider awareness and action for hedgehog conservation.

The project proved a success, recording evidence of 4 hedgehogs. The work concluded with a celebration assembly, with Lorraine from the Monmouth Hedgehog First Response Unit attending as a guest speaker to celebrate the students' achievements and contribution to conservation.



Bumblebee SAP - Pollinator Engagement and Monitoring

- **Wye Valley River Festival – Telling the Bees Partnership:**

The WVNL Team attended the Wye Valley River Festival in Monmouth, working in partnership with Telling the Bees to promote the importance of wildflowers and pollinator conservation.

The team hosted wildflower seed bomb making, engaging festival attendees in a hands-on activity to support pollinators. Locally sourced Herefordshire wildflower seeds were also donated to Telling the Bees, who distributed seed packets alongside instructions for making seed bombs following their performances, helping extend the reach of the project and encouraging people to create pollinator-friendly spaces at home.

- **Bumblebee Refresher workshop- Bartonsham Meadows**

The WVNL team hosted a bumblebee refresher workshop at Bartonsham Meadows in May, led by Richard Comont from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

Members of the Friends of Bartonsham Meadows attended the session to refresh their identification skills and learn new techniques for safely catching and identifying bumblebees in the field. The event strengthened local recording skills and will support ongoing pollinator monitoring efforts across the Wye Valley.



Woodland Butterfly SAP - Walk and talk

- **Little Doward Wood**

The WVNL team hosted a woodland butterfly walk and talk session at Little Doward Wood, led by Toby Fountain from Herefordshire Wildlife Trust. The event was well attended, with participants identifying 9 different butterfly species during the session. Toby shared extensive knowledge about woodland butterfly ecology, the importance of appropriate woodland management for supporting butterfly populations, and ways people can encourage butterflies and other wildlife into their own gardens.

The session successfully combined species identification, habitat management advice, and public engagement, increasing awareness of the importance of managing woodland habitats for priority butterfly species.



5. **'Wye Adapt to Climate Change?' Project Update**

Over the past few months work has continued to build a strong pipeline of natural flood management and habitat restoration projects across the Wye catchment, with a focus on engaging landowners and progressing projects towards delivery.

Holly Williams is the Wye Adapt to Climate Change Project Officer, seconded to the Wye Valley National Landscape from Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, as part of the 3 year project supported by the National Lottery Climate Action Fund.

A total of 13 farm visits have been completed, including visits to both new holdings and existing project sites. These visits have been used to identify opportunities for climate resilience and habitat enhancement, strengthen relationships with landowners, and progress the design and implementation of on-farm interventions. Several habitat creation projects are expected to be delivered over the summer, including the creation of 16+ ponds, and current activity is mostly focused on securing the necessary consents and permissions required for the work to take place. The ponds will deliver multiple benefits by creating valuable wetland habitat for wildlife while also contributing to natural flood management by increasing water storage within the landscape.



A cross-slope hedge was planted in March in the Monnow catchment, which will contribute to Natural Flood Management through intercepting water and increases habitat connectivity.

6. Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails Project

The Tracks & Trails Steering Group met on 15th April with a site visit to Tintern Road on Friday 22nd May. The group agreed on 4 priority routes out of the Route Audit of Unclassified County Roads (UCRs) conducted in 2025. These are Grove Road (Whitebrook), the Maypole Road cluster (Whitebrook), Tintern Road (Tintern), and Chapel Hill Road (Tintern), largely based on route condition but align with concerns raised by local residents.

A monitoring trial project is being investigated using AI cameras on Tintern Road and Grove Road to gather objective usage data, which will differentiate between user types and direction of travel. New signage will also be progressed on the four priority routes to help clarify user rights and enforcement. The sign designs are largely complete and the exact sign locations and installation requirements are being determined.

A new UCR information hub is in development to be hosted on the Wye Valley National Landscape website. This will provide clear, accessible information on UCRs, their history, legal status, and how to report issues.

A 12 month Action Plan is also being finalised in advance of public workshops proposed after the summer holiday period to update residents and gather support for future management actions.

The site visit to Tintern Road, one of the priority UCRs, allowed Steering Group members and local councillors to walk from the north (Whitelye) south, finishing at the Wye Valley Hotel in Tintern. They viewed the varying condition and width constraints of the route and discussed the types of mitigation measures that could be put in place if funding was available, they were also able to speak with a local resident about usage, the impacts of flooding and recent mitigation work.

7. Conservation Grazing on Cleddon Bog and Beacon Hill

Cattle are back on Cleddon Bog SSSI and Beacon Hill heathland in Monmouthshire, lending a helping hoof to restore and protect these special landscapes.

On Beacon Hill 8 Australian Lowline cattle arrived on site on May 8 and will spend the spring and summer months grazing the heathland as part of the ongoing conservation project in partnership with Natural Resources Wales. Now in its fourth year, the conservation grazing project is proving a natural and effective way to manage the heathland habitat.

Heathlands like Beacon Hill are rich in biodiversity but need active management to survive. Without grazing, scrub can quickly encroach, shading out smaller plants and reducing the diversity that makes these habitats so valuable. By nibbling away at fast-growing invasive plants, the cattle help prevent these species from taking over, allowing a wider variety of plants and wildlife to thrive.



This year's team of Lowline cattle – including Hamish, Onyx, Geoff, Sam, Banana and Tuesday – are perfectly suited to the job. Originally from Australia, Lowline cattle are hardy, docile and well adapted to conservation grazing. Their smaller size reduces the risk of soil compaction and damage to sensitive soils, while their varied grazing habits help create a more diverse mix of vegetation and ensure the site is not overgrazed.

Grazing Management Ltd, run by Alex and Emily Crawley, provide the grazing services at both Beacon Hill and Cleddon Bog SSSI. For more info on our management of Cleddon Bog

see <https://www.wyevalley-nl.org.uk/conservation-grazing-at-cleddon-bog/> and for info in Grazing Management Ltd see <https://grazingmanagement.co.uk/> .

Grazing Management Ltd also have grazing agreements with a range of landowners covering about 175ha, in and around the Wye Valley National Landscape, including:-

- Staunton Meend, Gloucestershire for Staunton Parish Council
- Parkend Community Orchard, Gloucestershire
- Various private landowners in Hewelsfield & St Briavels, Gloucestershire and Old-Lands Estate, Dingestow, Monmouthshire.

Briefing

Protected Landscapes Duty - briefing for MPs



2 July 2026

This document is designed to brief MPs and other decision makers on the current situation with the Protected Landscapes Duty, introduced as part of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act in December 2023.

Why this is important

We are keen advocates for the vitality of National Landscapes, actively working to help them be places that are climate adapted, nature rich, welcoming and inclusive, with prosperous and resilient communities. Achieving this is a shared endeavour and this is the real potential and value of the Protected Landscapes Duty; bringing together all of a place's key players to shape meaningful, long-term decisions which can bring about the vitality of place. It is not a blocker. Done right, as parliament intended, it is a powerful enabler.

Protected Landscapes Duty

Passed in December 2023, Section 245 of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act amended Section 85 of the Countryside and Right of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act). This sets out that relevant authorities, in exercising or performing any functions that affect National Landscapes in England, "must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty."

Since 2000, each National Landscape has been governed by a Management Plan, whose production is a legal duty on local authorities and which is prepared by the National Landscape team and reviewed every five years. This statutory document sets priorities for the whole area, and as such is ideally positioned as area-specific guidance for relevant authorities on how to comply with the Duty.

National Landscapes and their partner relevant authorities are asking government to implement the Duty as intended by Parliament; for Defra to provide greater clarity to relevant authorities on the Protected Landscapes Duty and introduce the regulations through secondary legislation to ensure its full and proper implementation.

Priority 1: Drafting and passing of secondary legislation to strengthen and clarify the Duty and the binding weight of Protected Landscape Management Plans.

- Parliament made provisions for regulatory powers as part of the implementation of the Duty, recognising this was critical to the support and clarity needed to deliver its intention. This secondary legislation must set out a

clear, structured process for how relevant authorities (including local authorities, strategic authorities, public bodies, and statutory undertakers) are required to implement the Duty across their functions. It must also establish that these bodies are legally obligated to “seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty”.

- Secondary legislation should establish that relevant authorities are legally obligated to take account of, and actively contribute, to the objectives of the Protected Landscape Management Plan, including requirements to conserve and enhance natural beauty alongside other government policies. Critically, it should define the statutory weight of Management Plans and establish their relationship to other strands of strategic planning.

Priority 2: Proactive Defra engagement to co-produce clear, authority- and area-specific guidance on implementing the Duty.

- Ahead of secondary legislation, Defra should proactively engage other government departments and, via MHCLG, local government to co-produce tailored guidance on implementing the Duty.
- This co-production process would generate practical, on-the-ground insight that directly informs the design of secondary legislation, strengthening its effectiveness before it is enacted.

Why action is needed now:

Defra has stated that [National Landscapes and National Parks will form the backbone of the UK's nature and climate objectives](#). Covering 25% of the land area of England and with existing Management Plans and strong local partnerships in place, they are well placed to deliver this. There is increasing recognition by Government and business that the traditional economy and our national security sit on a bedrock of irreplaceable natural assets, a significant amount of which is within protected landscapes.

However, the current lack of policy coherence means these places are continually being damaged and degraded, stripping our nation of critical infrastructure and leaving us increasingly vulnerable to the crises identified in the [Climate Change Committee's May 2025 report](#), the [Joint Intelligence Committee's 2026 National Security Assessment](#), the [Environmental Improvement Plan \(2025\)](#), and the [National assessment of flood and coastal erosion risk in England 2024](#). Secondary legislation supporting the implementation of the Protected Landscapes Duty would be a strong lever to help halt and reverse this trend, ensuring Protected Landscapes are valued appropriately across all government sectors and boosting our economic, agricultural, and environmental resilience as a nation.

Inadequate implementation has been the main barrier to realising the benefits of the Duty - most notably, greater policy cohesion and cross-sectoral collaboration in support of Protected Landscapes. Properly implemented, the Duty will open new conversations at the early stages of projects, raise awareness, and create concrete opportunities for stakeholders to work towards shared goals. The challenges we are facing are well-established and the role of Protected Landscapes in addressing them is clear. Through the provision of secondary legislation and clarifying guidance Defra would be greatly supporting us in delivering the changes needed.

The Duty has already made a difference in bringing nature around the table early as in the case of the Sea Link NSIP project. AECOM, the consultant working on behalf of National Grid adopted an open process of consultation and discussion with the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscapes team. As part of meeting the 'enhancement' element of the duty, AECOM has actively engaged with landowners to find suitable sites for the creation of new acid grassland within the National Landscape.

Specialist staff from National Landscapes, working together in communities of practice have drafted initial guidance for [public authorities](#) and [local authorities](#) to support them in complying with the Duty, which could be used as a basis for Defra guidance. Additionally, teams could provide valuable input and real-world learnings to support Defra in developing appropriate secondary legislation.

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