

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
6th November 2017

LOCAL AUTHORITIES' CONTRIBUTIONS AND AONB MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING 2018 - 2021

Purpose

To request contributions from the four constituent local authorities to the budget for the Wye Valley AONB Partnership for 2018/2019, 2019/20 and 2020/21 to be included in the AONB Memorandum of Understanding between the four local authorities for this period.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. request from the constituent local authorities the agreed financial contributions for the Wye Valley AONB for 2018/2019, 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- B. encourages the constituent local authorities to renew the AONB Memorandum of Understanding for 2018 - 2021

Key Issues

- The AONB Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is intended to give medium term security and commitment to the AONB Partnership.
- The current MoU ends in March 2018 and the next version is proposed to run until 2021.
- Prior to the MoU the JAC annually recommended to the constituent local authorities the contribution required for the continued effective operation, management and governance of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership.
- Gloucestershire County Council have already confirmed their financial contributions for the Wye Valley AONB until 2020/21. Other funding partners are requested to make similar 3 year commitments where possible.
- The contributions from the local authorities form the foundation to the budget managed by the AONB Unit.
- DEFRA and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are not signatories to the MoU but are party to the negotiations and their funding offer letters are appended to the MoU. The DEFRA grant offer currently extends until 2020. NRW will issue a new offer in 2018.
- For every £1 of Local Authority contribution the AONB Unit has levered in over £8 on average in recent years.

Reasons

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides a framework for the delivery of duties and obligations in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) arising from

Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 including the operation and management of the AONB Partnership and the AONB Unit. The MoU is intended to give medium term security to the AONB Partnership and sets out a shared vision for, and commitment to, AONB management by the funding local authority partners. The MoU outlines the functions of the AONB Unit and the expectations on all parties to achieve the shared vision, which includes the understanding that:

- AONB management structures should be strongly supported by partners and relevant authorities.
- the statutory requirement to produce a Management Plan provides an important opportunity to strengthen partnerships and achieve better outcomes.
- security of funding and flexibility of funding for the AONB will deliver better outcomes.
- there should be a “can do” culture which is not risk-averse but where lessons from novel approaches are encouraged and learnt from, in both success and failure.
- monitoring of environmental outcomes is essential and needs to be undertaken to develop a sound, spatially-relevant evidence base.
- opportunities should be taken to maximise the synergies between the outcomes of the Management Plan with the plans of other Parties, and of the wider Protected Landscape network.

The MoU complements the JAC Agreement, which constitutes the JAC, signed between the four local authorities.

Implications

The following Local Authority partner contributions are proposed for the MoU 2018-2021, with a 0% flat rate. They are based on land area in the AONB in an established historical formula. The local authorities retain the discretion to index link contributions, if or when appropriate.

Funding Partner	<i>2017/18</i>	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Herefordshire Council	<i>£23,860</i>	£23,860	£23,860	£23,860
Monmouthshire County Council	<i>£15,716</i>	£15,716	£15,716	£15,716
Forest of Dean District Council	<i>£5,826</i>	£5,826	£5,826	£5,826
Gloucestershire County Council	<i>£3,600</i>	£3,600	£3,600	£3,600
Total LA contributions	<i>£49,002</i>	£49,002	£49,002	£49,002

The proposed base budget for the AONB Unit for 2018/19 is £285,725 (down from £317,538 in 2013/14 when the LA contribution was £73,414). The local authority contributions receive up to 75% match-funding for core AONB initiatives from DEFRA and Natural Resources Wales (NRW). The NRW grant was £52,210 in 2017/18 and they are currently working with their Finance and Partnership Funding colleagues on securing budgets for AONB funding and hope to have confirmation of arrangements in due course. DEFRA has provided a funding offer up until 2020 with £128,405 for 2018/19. The remainder of the Wye Valley AONB budget is made up from income from other sources.

During 2017/18 the AONB Unit has been managing partnership projects totalling £65,905 primarily funded from other sources. Projects include mindSCAPES, the Wye Valley River Festival (Research & Development), ex-LEMUR+ Surveyors contracts and the AONB Youth Rangers programme. These externally funded projects extend the work of the AONB Unit and allow project investment as well as some elements of cost recovery. The contracts for the two ex-LEMUR+ Surveyors are about to come to an end having been extended with funding from

Natural England and the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) for project work on the Garren and Gamber brooks, works on Ross riverside with Ross Town Council and an options & opportunities assessment of views along the A466. The development and delivery of externally funded projects will continue into 2018/19 and beyond. In addition 2018 will see the delivery of the third Wye Valley River Festival with a budget of about £170,000. Over recent years for every £1 of Local Authority contributions the AONB Unit has levered in more than £8.

The AONB Unit is constantly reviewing the structure and delivery of services in the AONB alongside income streams. Two members of staff work reduced hours. However, without growth in core income on current projections the AONB Unit will need to downsize during 2019 from 5 core posts to 4. It is hoped that growth of core and project development will mitigate this change but the necessity of reduced staffing cannot be ruled out. The AONB Steering Group ensures that staff and resources are maximised and operational structures are fit for the future in the face of ongoing budgetary pressures. The focus remains on consolidating the activity of the core AONB Unit to maximise the leverage and spend on the delivery of initiatives that fulfil the statutory purpose of the AONB designation and benefit the landscape and local communities in the Wye Valley.

Background

Each Local Authority has a statutory Duty of Regard towards the purposes of AONBs under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. A considerable amount of the AONB Unit's core and project work (planning / promotion / advice / preparation & delivery of the Management Plan etc.) goes towards supporting each Local Authority in fulfilling its Duty of Regard. Through project delivery the AONB Unit also supports the Local Authorities' Statutory Duty for biodiversity under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006.