

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'  
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB  
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
6<sup>th</sup> November 2017

## **AONB & PARTNER REPORTS**

### ***Purpose***

To advise members of activity of the AONB Unit and Partners, relating to:-

- a. Lydbrook Bridge
- b. mindSCAPE Conference
- c. Youth Rangers
- d. Venison Processing and Marketing Feasibility Study
- e. Wales NPs Seminar & hosting BBNPA event/visit 2018

FOR INFORMATION

### **a) Lydbrook Bridge**

Following the release of the Feasibility Study by Gloucestershire County Council for the Lydbrook Bridge / Black Bridge / Stowfield Viaduct, the AONB Manager submitted a 'Project Enquiry Form' to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). This was an outline 'expression of interest' and is (according to HLF guidance) "a good way of getting feedback from us [HLF] before you start work on a full application. The Project Enquiry was based on the bridge restoration costs of £1,246,650 from Option 6.4 of the Feasibility Study. Further elements were based on other figures from the 2013 HLF bid submitted for Redbrook Bridge. The project total was estimated at £1,710,775 with the request for 85% funding from HLF of £1,457,075.

The HLF have responded that the project appears to have the potential to achieve the Heritage Grant outcomes to a good standard. However they highlighted that there is considerable competition for HLF grants and at present the success rate for Heritage Grant applications is running at around 27%. Consequently it needs to be recognised that even good projects are being rejected through lack of funds. HLF also raised a number of points for clarification and advised that the budget and project plan should only include items that are really crucial to deliver a good quality, rounded and value-for-money project. Decision makers will need to be comfortable that National Lottery money would not be used to fund something that is a statutory responsibility and as half the bridge is a public right of way it needs to be clarified why the highway authority maintenance had not prevented its closure. HLF would also want to know why is it now reasonable for National Lottery good causes money to be invested in this project. Similarly, the long term plans and commitments need to be demonstrated for maintaining the bridge after an HLF funded project is complete. Maximising the amount of partnership funding will also help strengthen the value-for-money case and evidence that other organisations are committed to the project.

The AONB Manager is now liaising with Gloucestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council, who have shared ownership of the Bridge, over how best to progress a full application to HLF. The local community Black Bridge Steering Group is also involved and a wider public campaign will be needed to secure widespread support.

**b) mindSCAPE Conference**

On 5<sup>th</sup> October, 54 delegates including dementia professionals and carers, artists, environmentalists and volunteers, came together to share best practice and raise awareness of the mindSCAPE project. The events was also a celebration of the success of mindSCAPE which is now in the fourth and final year of Big Lottery funding, led by the AONB Unit. MindSCAPE works to reconnect people with dementia and their carers to the landscape of the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean. Numerous studies have shown that spending time in the natural environment and connecting with nature have an extremely positive effect on our general well-being and physical health. As part of mindSCAPE people with dementia and their carers to take part in stimulating and enjoyable activities, inspired by the natural environment, devised and co-ordinated by ArtSpace Cinderford and local artists.

The mindSCAPE conference brought together inspiring speakers to show how the project has made such a huge difference to patients and their families at crucial times in their lives. Speakers included Helen Vaughan - NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group Health Policy and Activity in Older People, Tina Kukstas - 2gether NHS Foundation Trust, Hannah Elton-Wall - ArtSpace Cinderford & mindSCAPE manager, Liz Lavender - a mindSCAPE carer and Julie Hammon - Dorset AONB, Stepping into Nature project. Surrounded by the stunning scenery of Lindors Hotel in the heart of the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean, afternoon workshops introduced delegates to mindSCAPE type activities, including Willow Weaving with Lin Powell, Poetry with Roger Drury and Watercolours with Mariette Voke.

**c) Youth Rangers**

The next cohort of Wye Valley AONB Youth Rangers has begun with a Celebration and Recruitment event at Biblins Youth Camp on 30<sup>th</sup> September. The Youth Rangers programme is now part of the Foresters' Forest Landscape Partnership, with HLF funding. Over 60 young people have become Youth Rangers to date and enhanced their knowledge, experience and skills in all matters that fall within the countryside management sector; including drystone walling, hedgelaying, coppicing, wildlife survey, farm visits, recreation, rural craft skills, bushcraft and heritage interpretation. Taking part in Youth Rangers counts towards the Duke of Edinburgh voluntary activity, the John Muir Award and a host of other new skills.

**d) Venison Processing and Marketing Feasibility Study**

The study is nearing completion and a final report should be available early in the New Year. The Venison Marketing and Supply Feasibility Study is being funded through Monmouthshire LEADER, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Natural England. The Deer Initiative have been working over the last six months carrying out surveys

of stalkers, butchers, restaurateurs and the general public to investigate the production, marketing and sale of locally produced wild venison in and around the Wye Valley AONB. It is investigating where wild venison is processed and sold, and how it is marketed. Also whether there is an opportunity to develop local marketing for wild venison and what gaps need to be covered to ensure the venison can be sourced, processed and marketed locally, using as a marketing tool the benefit to woodland habitats.

Recommendations produced within the study will inform future work on the local wild venison supply chain. Further applications are likely to be necessary for funding to enable this work which will enhance the economic benefit locally to all those within the venison supply chain, including woodland managers, stalkers, butchers, distributors, retailers and consumers.

The objectives of the study are to:

- Investigate the current situation with venison supply and distribution of carcasses across the area and by whom the venison is being supplied by.
- Research the potential demand for locally sourced wild venison.
- Investigate the opportunities for supplying wild venison into local outlets including butchers, restaurants and pubs and food hubs and distribution centres.
- Determine the interest among Lower Wye Valley Deer Group (LWVDG) members and other local venison suppliers, to supply wild venison into the local food chain.
- Establish the location and availability of facilities for the storage, butchery and distribution of carcasses and determining if there is an opportunity for linking with or cross promoting the supply of other local meat products, both farmed and wild, including wild boar.
- Establish the steps necessary to fill gaps in the existing local supply chain to include but not restricted to butchery skills, distribution and seasonality of supply.
- Raise awareness of the marketing opportunities to suppliers and sales outlets and outline the brand values.
- Make recommendations as to future steps needed to ensure sustainable supply and sales of locally sourced wild venison (LWG), including branding opportunities.

#### **e) Wales National Parks Seminar & hosting BBNPA event/visit 2018**

The AONB Manager attended the National Parks Wales Seminar on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> October 2017. The event was hosted by Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. Speakers included Baroness Eluned Morgan AM (on The economic challenges facing Rural Wales, the changing agricultural situation and post Brexit) and Andrew Slade, Director, Agriculture, Food & Marine, Welsh Government (on Delivering on Welsh Government Priorities). Workshops were also held on ‘The Wellbeing of Future Generation Act: Compliance Reporting’, ‘Working in Partnership: Partnership approach to the Management Plan’ and Future Landscapes Wales.

The AONB Manager and Brecon Beacons National Park Authority staff and members reiterated the ambition for a shared event, recognising that this is likely now to be in first half of 2018.