

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held
at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford. on Monday,
5th March, 2018 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor P. Cutter (Chair) (Herefordshire Council)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: D. Dovey and M. Lane

Gloucestershire County Council

County Councillor T. Hale

Herefordshire Council

Councillor E.J. Swinglehurst

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillor G. Davies

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

Local Wildlife Trusts - Mr. A. Nixon

Technical Advice Officers

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

Gloucestershire County Council – Mr. R. Niblett

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: A. Webb, B. Durkin, J. Hardwick and B. Hogan

Mr. B. Nash, Mr. M. Price, Mr. D. Price, Mr. A. Lee, Mr. D. Broadbent, Mr. J. Bisset,
Councillor G. Powell and Mr. R. Gething

1. Declarations of Interest

The following Councillors declared interests as Planning Committee Members of their respective authorities in matters that might arise relating to development control issues:

Councillor P. Cutter

Councillor E.J. Swinglehurst

County Councillor D. Dovey

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2. Public Question Time

There were no members of the public present.

3. Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee meeting dated 6th November 2017 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

4. AONB Unit 2018/19 Work Programme

We received a report regarding the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit during the forthcoming financial year.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The table, as set out in the report, establishes the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit in the form of the Work Programme 2018/2019.
- This is focused on delivering the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 and appraising the future prospects for the River Festival, commencing the review for the AONB Management Plan for 2020-2025 and continuing other existing activities while retaining flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.
- Welsh Government has confirmed that the allocation of the Sustainable Development Fund will remain at £55,000 for 2018/19 and 2019/20.
- The budgets in the Work Programme have been approved by the Wye Valley AONB Steering Group and DEFRA, and are being negotiated with Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

We resolved that the Joint Advisory Committee:

- (i) endorses the AONB Unit Work Programme 2018/2019;
- (ii) welcomes the Welsh Government two-year allocation of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF);
- (iii) notes the various additional project funding bids submitted by the AONB Unit in support of the AONB Work Programme.

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5. AONB Good Governance review with Gower AONB Partnership

We received a report regarding the outcome of the recent Task Group with Swansea City Council and Gower AONB Partnership on the review of the 'Principles of Good Governance for Designated Landscapes'.

Unfortunately, due to adverse weather conditions, the Task Group meeting scheduled to be held on 1st March 2018 had to be postponed.

The Task Group meeting will shortly be re-convened and any outcomes / recommendations arising from this meeting will be presented to the next Joint Advisory Committee meeting in July 2018.

6. Wye Valley River Festival 2018 update

We considered a report regarding the developing programme and sponsorship for the Wye Valley River Festival 2018.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The programme of events for the Wye Valley River Festival is being finalised for the main festival fortnight between 5th & 20th May 2018 based on the theme of 'Woods & Trees'.
- About 300 people will be engaged in a range of school and community workshops planned for the run up to the Festival to create props and build engagement.
- AONB Volunteers and the AONB Youth Rangers have been working in the woods making hurdles and walking staves for the Festival.
- The Arts Council of Wales grant aid has been approved and a number of sponsorships have been secured and further opportunities are being negotiated.
- A new Wye Valley River Festival website is about to go live and tickets for events will be available through the TicketSource website.

Having received the report, it was suggested that the Wye Valley AONB Manager could liaise with appropriate bodies with a view to lighting up Chepstow Castle during the River Festival.

We resolved:

- (i) to welcome the sponsorship and funding secured to date for the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 and endorse the developing programme and the work of the AONB Unit and Festival Team.

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- (ii) that the Wye Valley AONB Manager liaises with appropriate bodies with a view to lighting up Chepstow Castle during the River Festival.

7. Lydbrook Bridge

We received a report regarding the bid by Gloucestershire County Council to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for restoration of Lydbrook Bridge.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Lydbrook Bridge is one of the three remaining former railway bridges spanning the River Wye in the AONB that provides a strategic crossing for walkers, including the Wye Valley Walk.
- Gloucestershire County Council had to close Lydbrook Bridge in February 2016 due to safety issues with the structure.
- The Wye Valley AONB Manager has been assisting Gloucestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council (joint owners of the bridge) with a Heritage Grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the restoration of Lydbrook Bridge.
- The Heritage Grant application totals £1,687,000 and requests 84% support from HLF up to April 2021.
- The AONB Unit is committing £5,000 towards the project, alongside anticipated contributions of £250,000 from Gloucestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council.
- In the meantime, essential safety work will be carried out to the bridge structure this summer to ensure there is no threat to users of the navigation on the river and the footpath that both pass under the bridge.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- County Councillor Hale thanked the AONB Manager for the work that he has undertaken in supporting the HLF bid.
- Phase 1 will commence shortly. This will be to ensure that the structure is made safe, at a cost of £300,000.
- The bridge spans two counties (Gloucestershire and Herefordshire). Both authorities have budget pressures across their respective authorities making it difficult to find appropriate funding for this project.
- The safety works will involve the removal of corroded material and loose material that might cause damage / risk to the public.

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We resolved to support Gloucestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council in the Heritage Grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the restoration of Lydbrook Bridge.

8. Wild Venison Marketing Feasibility Study

We considered a report regarding the outcomes of the Feasibility Study Investigating the production, marketing and sale of local wild venison in the Lower Wye Valley and southeast Monmouthshire.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- It is widely accepted that deer are more abundant and widespread in the wild now than at any time in the past 1000 years.
- The 'Feasibility Study Investigating the production, marketing and sale of local wild venison in the Lower Wye Valley and southeast Monmouthshire' has been concluded and published on-line.
- The Deer Initiative undertook the study, interviewing nearly 500 people, and proposed eight recommendations.
- The situation regarding feral wild boar was also included in discussions in the report.
- Funding is now being sought to implement some of the recommendations outlined in the feasibility study.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The Forestry Commission and Natural Resources Wales employ wildlife rangers and venison is processed through centralised contracts. Venison could be released into the local supply chain if the demand was available.
- Training of deer stalkers is key to supply good quality venison.
- There is scope for venison to be used more widely in animal food products, dried meat products and in ready meals.
- Concern was expressed that currently, there was little opportunity to purchase venison locally.
- It was noted that meat handling legislation is complex and abattoirs that handle farm animals cannot process game.

We resolved to welcome the 'Feasibility Study Investigating the Production, Marketing and Sale of local Wild Venison in the Lower Wye Valley and southeast Monmouthshire' and endorse the conclusions and recommendations.

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9. A466 River Views Feasibility Report

We considered a report regarding the outcomes of the A466 River Views Feasibility Study.

- The Joint Advisory Committee had received requests for roadside and riverside vegetation to be managed along the A466 to open up lost views of the river.
- The 'A466 River Views Feasibility Report' has been concluded and published on-line.
- The AONB Trainee Ecological Surveyors undertook the study, identifying 18 places along the A466 where enhancements to views could be made.
- Separate to the report, the section of the A466 between Bigsweir Bridge and The Florence has recently had tree work undertaken which has opened up the views.
- Highway departments, roadside landowners, and other stakeholders should be encouraged to have regard to the report when considering works along the A466.

On behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee, the Chair thanked County Councillor A. Webb and Mr. A Thomas (Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire) for their input to the report.

We resolved to:

- (i) welcome the 'A466 River Views Feasibility Report' and the identified areas where views could be opened up.
- (ii) encourage landowners, Highway departments and other stakeholders to have regard to the report when considering works along the A466.

10. Local Wildlife Trusts' Beavers report

We received a report regarding the latest position in respect of the reintroduction of beavers in the Wye Catchment.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- In the spring of 2018, Forestry Commission England will be releasing a family of beavers into a secure enclosure in the Forest of Dean just outside the AONB boundary near Lydbrook.

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- Andrew Nixon, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, provided a brief verbal update on the position statements from the local and national Wildlife Trusts on the general approach to beaver releases.
- There are anecdotal stories of beavers already having been present in the Wye Catchment.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- There are reports of beavers being in the Wye catchment in sufficient numbers to be breeding.
- There is support to return beavers to the Wye catchment in a coordinated and licensed way and this is being pursued.
- A meeting is being held with statutory bodies to discuss a way forward for releasing beavers into the Wye that will be properly surveyed and assessed.
- The Forest of Dean beavers will be released in the spring into a 16 acre enclosure, near Lydbrook and will be closely monitored and surveyed.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

11. Pine Marten reintroduction feasibility study update

We received an update report regarding the two year feasibility study into whether pine martens should be reintroduced to the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Pine martens are one of Britain's rarest mammals, and are predominantly restricted to Scotland with low numbers in Wales and South Shropshire.
- In March 2017 the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) received a presentation by Dr Andrew Stringer, Pine Marten Project Manager, on the feasibility study into reintroducing pine martens to the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley.
- The feasibility study is being drafted and current findings indicate that up to 40 Pine Martens could be released over a two year period under the reintroduction proposals.
- A decision on the reintroduction of pine martens to the area will be made later in 2018.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

12. National Association for AONBs

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We received a report outlining the activity through the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) Chairman's Conference and Annual General Meeting (AGM) was attended by the AONB Manager.
- The 2017 Annual Report for the NAAONB has been published as well as the Latest News bulletin.
- The NAAONB has welcomed the UK Government's 'A Green Future - 25 Year Environment Plan' and is working with DEFRA on implementation.
- The NAAONB has been in discussion with DEFRA around how AONB partnerships and Management Plans can support agri-environmental delivery post Brexit. This was also the focus of the AONB Lead officers' meeting in Birmingham in February 2018.
- The Landscape for Life 2018 National Conference is likely to be held in Kent in late July 2018.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

13. Partner and AONB Unit progress reports and updates

We received a report regarding the activity of the AONB Unit and partners, relating to:

- Undergrounding update.
- Offa's Dyke Collaboratory. Leaflets were available for Committee members to take away on:
 - Lancaut investigations & Day School.
 - Knighton & Oswestry events.
- Youth Rangers 4th cohort with Foresters' Forest. This was progressing well.
- mindSCAPE with Foresters' Forest.
- Ross Riverside enhancements with Ross Town Council. Ross Town Council were pleased with the progress being made.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

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14. Dates of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Group Meetings for 2018/19

Future meetings of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee will be held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford, on the following dates:

Monday 2nd July 2018

Monday 5th November 2018

Monday 4th March 2019

The meeting ended at 3.28 pm.