

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
2nd July 2018

WYE VALLEY RIVER FESTIVAL 2018 INITIAL EVALUATION

Purpose

To inform members of the achievements and the initial evaluation of the third Wye Valley River Festival.

Recommendations

That the JAC welcomes the success of the Wye Valley River Festival 2018

Key Issues

- The third Wye Valley River Festival journeyed between Hereford and Chepstow during 5th & 20th May 2018, celebrating nature, culture, landscape and life along the River Wye, and the woods and trees of the Wye Valley.
- There were about 30,000 visits or acts of engagement in 30 Wye Valley River Festival events at 25 different venues and only one outdoor event had any rain.
- The Welsh Government Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport, Lord Elis-Thomas, opened the Museum of the Moon at Cadw's Tintern Abbey.
- This third Festival was organised by the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit and the professional Festival Management team with an overall budget of nearly £200,000 working with arts professionals in collaboration with local communities and conservationists.
- A wide variety of organisations and communities supported the Festival including many hours of volunteer time and sizable financial contributions from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), Arts Council of Wales, Arts Council England, Forestry Commission and Foresters' Forest Landscape Partnership, Shire Hall Monmouth, Cadw, Environment Agency and a significant range of smaller donations and in-kind contributions.
- A great many people dedicated a huge amount of time and energy to making the Wye Valley River Festival such a broad, innovative and enjoyable series of events.
- A full evaluation of the Festival is being undertaken to appraise lessons learned as well as a review of the three Festivals held in line with the original business plan.
- Once the evaluation is complete future prospects for any further Wye Valley River Festivals will need to be determined.

Reasons

The main theme of the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 was 'Woods & Trees'. The Festival aimed to inspire and challenge, to change the way we look at ourselves and how we relate to our environment, locally and globally. The programme of events created spaces for celebration, wonder and entertainment and to provoke thought regarding our precious River Wye and its connections through woods and trees across the globe.

Implications

Generally the consensus and anecdotal feedback is that the Festival was a phenomenal success. It managed to spread an inspiring and entertaining message about the importance and complexity of the Wye Valley woodlands, using innovative and creative outdoor art. During the second week the Museum of the Moon in Tintern Abbey became a national sensation. Meanwhile artists have worked with 11 Primary Schools and about 500 children in preparing artworks for the Festival. A care home and 2 school worked on an inter-generational project.

Over 150 singers, musicians and amateur actors came together from riverside communities to perform at the events alongside seasoned professionals. About 30,000 people were engaged in Festival events where people were entertained by local youth theatre and circus groups, choirs and bands and a range of professional and local artists. Two world premieres were performed on the first day of the Festival. Over 300 torchbearers from the local communities joined together to celebrate their place, in Monmouth and Llandogo. The overall budget was about £200,000 and the new Festival website was created www.wyevalleyriverfestival.co.uk. There was plenty of social media activity on Twitter: @wyebeauty #wyevalleyriverfestival; and Facebook: www.facebook.com/wyevalleyriverfestival, which now has 2,625 followers. Also the Festival Documenter website <http://www.mywye.co.uk/> has a range of short videos from the Festival and a gallery of great images <http://www.mywye.co.uk/festival-18-photos.html> .

The Welsh Government Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport, Lord Elis-Thomas, attended the launch of Like Jerram's Museum of the Moon at Cadw's Tintern Abbey and spoke to the assembled 100 invited guests. Two legacies remained after the end of the Festival; Marchant Barron's poems at The Kymin (until 30th June) and the Arborealists Exhibition in Monmouth Museum (until September 2018).

A full evaluation of the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 is underway. About 300 audience feedback forms are currently being analysed by Fuze Research. Meanwhile 50 Festival performers, participants and crew have also responded to a formal survey. These will be combined into the Festival Evaluation Report, which will be presented to the JAC, probably at the next meeting in November. The report will also compare the three Wye Valley River Festivals (2014, 2016 & 2018) against the original objectives in the 3-Festival Business Plan.

Background

The Wye Valley River Festival 2018 is a Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership initiative with funding from the Sustainable Development Fund, a Welsh Government Initiative in the Wye Valley AONB, Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales, supported by the Welsh Government and the Heritage Lottery Fund, Visit Wales, Forestry Commission, Foresters' Forest Landscape Partnership with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Environment Agency, Cadw, Ross Town Council and Monmouth Town Council. In-kind support from Cadw, Hereford River Carnival, The Shire Hall, Monmouth, Natural Resources Wales and numerous volunteers & local communities. Sponsorship from County Marquees, Severn Area Rescue Service (SARA), Griffiths Engineering, Eat Sleep Live Herefordshire, Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Tourism Association, Hillside Brewery, Green Man at Abbey Mill, the aMazing Hedge Puzzle & Wye Valley Butterfly Zoo, Wild Trail bars. Special thanks to land owners at Symonds Yat Rock, Lydbrook Tump, Shire Hall, Monmouth, Tintern Abbey and Llandogo Riverside who granted access to make these events possible.