

TECHNICAL OFFICERS’
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
2nd July 2018

PROJECT GRANT APPLICATIONS

Purpose

To inform members of the latest situation with regards to three grant applications submitted on behalf of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership.

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have approved funding for a Natural Flood Management and Green Infrastructure project covering 4 Wye tributaries in the Monmouthshire part of the AONB.
- Gloucestershire County Council submitted a Heritage Grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the restoration of Lydbrook Black Bridge totalling £1.5million.
- The Wye & Usk Foundation submitted an application for the Water Environment Grant, entitled Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) which includes most of the English part of the AONB.

Reasons

In 2017 Natural Resources Wales (NRW) launched a collaboration funding stream up to December 2019 to support the sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR). The AONB Unit worked with Monmouthshire County Council, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Monmouthshire Meadows, National Farmers Union (NFU) Cymru, Woodland Trust and NRW to develop a project covering 4 catchments of the Lower Wye Valley between Penallt and St Arvans. The project will take a catchment approach, over 54km² of the Wye Valley AONB, developing practical sustainable solutions addressing land management, water run-off, access and invasive weed issues through an Integrated Natural Flood Management and Green Infrastructure Strategy. A key focus is on resolving where surface water run-off and flooding impact on people’s ability to access and enjoy the countryside. Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam also dominate in some places.

The JAC has previously endorsed its support for Gloucestershire County Council’s Heritage Grant application for the restoration of Lydbrook Black Bridge, also known as Stowfield Viaduct. The AONB Manager had worked closely with GCC staff and the local Black Bridge Steering Committee in drafting the bid.

The Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF), Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and the AONB Unit worked on a Water Environment Grant partnership bid covering most of the catchment of the River Wye in England. WUF submitted the application, entitled Restoring Our Amazing

River (ROAR) in May 2018. The Water Environment Grant (WEG) was launched by DEFRA, the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Rural Payments Agency under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). The scheme will fund up to 100% multi-year projects that start in 2018/19 and run to March 2021. WEG will provide support to restore habitats, landscapes and other features (including river and water), address diffuse and other water pollution, and recover species populations including the threat from non-native species. It is aimed at a wide range of potential projects from river restoration and in-river barrier removal through to advice for landowners and control of invasive species through to work which improves water quality. It can support feasibility studies, information sharing and delivery of catchment scale improvements. Projects need to demonstrate they meet Water Framework Directive objectives as set out in river basin management plans, including those for water dependant protected sites (such as the River Wye SAC and SSSI).

Implications

The Lower Wye Valley Catchments Green Infrastructure and Natural Flood Management project has secured £68,000 from the NRW SMNR Collaboration Funding towards a total project of £136,400 until December 2019. The Natural Flood Management and Green Infrastructure project will focus on the 4 Wye tributaries in the Tintern area and is a partnership between the AONB Unit and MCC with NFU Wales, Gwent Wildlife Trust, NRW, Monmouthshire Meadows and the Woodland Trust. The aim is to work with landowners, land managers, interested parties and the public to develop practical sustainable solutions to address land management, water run-off, countryside access and invasive weed issues. MCC will have inputs from countryside access, biodiversity, highways and local flood management teams. A project officer will be employed by MCC and seconded to the AONB Unit until Dec 2019. Recruitment will proceed as soon as possible. Once an officer is appointed there will be full local consultation as community involvement is central to the scheme. The project also builds on discussions with NRW's local forestry team about how to deliver a more joined up approach to resolve some of these issues. It is anticipated that the project will deliver smaller scale actions during the project and be a pilot which is intended to identify agreed solutions to some of the bigger issues which may lead to subsequent bids for capital grants etc.

The Lydbrook Bridge HLF application was submitted by Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) in March. The AONB Manager had worked closely with GCC staff and the local Black Bridge Steering Committee in drafting the bid. Following negotiations subsequent to the application submission the total bid has reduced to £1,468,500 on account of the safety works currently being undertaken by Gloucestershire County Council. The application is due to be determined at the HLF Board meeting on 26th June, therefore the result of the application may be announced by the time of the JAC meeting. If the application is not successful a revised approach will need to be taken to the conservation of all the former railway bridges over the River Wye in the AONB.

The Wye & Usk Foundation, working with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and the AONB Unit, submitted an application for the Water Environment Grant, entitled Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR). The bid is for £1,188,905 which includes most of the English part of the AONB as well as the adjacent Garren & Gamber catchment. The overall project is based on the work of Wye Catchment Partnership, the Site Improvement Plan for the River Wye SAC and the River Restoration Plan for the Wye and Lugg SSSI's. Through targeted farm advice, ROAR aims to encourage more sustainable agricultural land use in south Herefordshire and

address the issue of excess soil loss from farmland, fragmented habitats and unfavourable pollution levels in the lower Lugg, Garren & Gamber and the Wye Valley AONB. The project aims to further extend the area of the River Wye SAC able to support successful salmon spawning from upstream of Ross-on-Wye to the junction with the Lugg. The project will also address the need to increase levels of sensitive and sustainable tree management along the banks of the River Wye and its tributaries. A further outcome is to enhance the extent of floodplain meadow habitat along the Lugg and the Wye. DEFRA is expected to make an announcement on successful WEG schemes in August 2019.

Background

Further detail on the HLF & WEG applications can be found through the links below.

Lydbrook Bridge

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/roads-parking-and-rights-of-way/major-projects/lydbrook-bridge/>

HLF Heritage Grants

<https://www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding/our-grant-programmes/heritage-grants>

Water Environment Grant (WEG): guidance and forms

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-environment-grant-weg-handbooks-guidance-and-forms>