

WYE VALLEY RIVER FESTIVAL 2018 EVALUATION AND 2020+ PROPOSALS

Purpose

To present the Evaluation reports for the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 and seek endorsement on the future development of the Wye Valley River Festival.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. welcomes the evaluation reports for the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 and the conclusions and lessons learned
- B. endorses the development process for the future of the Wye Valley River Festival.

Key Issues

- The full evaluation reports of the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 have been completed and are available on-line at [Wye Valley River Festival 2018 Evaluation & Reflection Report](#) and [Audience Event Evaluation 2018](#) (NB these are 55 pages and 42 pages respectively).
- There are a number of lessons learned and conclusions in the reports that are being assimilated by the AONB Unit and the Festival Development Team.
- The original Business Plan to run a biennial Wye Valley River Festival in 2014, 2016 and 2018 has been delivered with most targets achieved or exceeded.
- The general consensus is that all three Wye Valley River Festivals to date have been a success, raising the appreciation of the landscape with innovative and entertaining outdoor art.
- The Wye Valley River Festival won The Bowland Award at the national Landscapes for Life conference, voted on by AONBs across England and Wales.
- There is widespread local support to continue with the Festival, although constraints with the current format are recognised. Therefore discussions are being held with key partners and funding organisations looking at the future of the Wye Valley River Festival.
- Visit Wales 'product development' funding has enabled the commissioning of a study on governance options, audience demographics and funding models to inform a new 5 year business plan to take the Wye Valley River Festival forward to 2024.
- The theme of 'Time' is proposed for a Wye Valley River Festival 2020, reflecting the palimpsest nature of the landscape and past, present and future forces for change.

Reasons

The Evaluation and Reflection Report of the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 was compiled by the Festival Director and AONB team (weblink above) and concludes that the Festival exceeded its targets and overall was a considerable success. Fuze Research Ltd undertook the independent Festival audience evaluation (Event Evaluation – weblink above). They obtained 356 responses predominantly through face to face interviews at specific Festival events using

iPads and a questionnaire. There were 27 questions with close correlations to the 2014 & 2016 Audience Feedback forms to enable some comparison of data.

Overall 'Good' ratings were given for the following:-

98% for the 'overall visitor experience'

92% for the 'Quality of the art work programmed'

70% "Learnt more about the Wye Valley Landscape",

70% "Been inspired to visit the countryside more" and

65% "Learnt more about woods and trees" which was the theme of the Festival,

This suggests a huge success in achieving a high quality arts & environment festival.

92% of visitors were aware of the Wye Valley being an AONB

The 'Summary of Feedback and Evaluation' is contained in the main Evaluation and Reflection Report (pp36-40).

There are many lessons to be learned, outlined in the evaluation reports. Importantly, the capacity of the Festival team was once again stretched during the Festival fortnight. However, as with the previous Festivals, many of the best innovations were in the engagement processes with local community groups and collaborations with local partners, creating inclusive artistic experiences embedded in the landscape and the place. Greater use of social media also helped build anticipation, awareness and enhanced the local and regional audiences through attracting 'family & friends' to attend.

There is widespread encouragement for the Wye Valley River Festival to continue after the original 3 biennial Festivals. The general feeling is that the momentum and inspiration generated by the Festivals to date should not be lost at this stage. However it is recognised that the management, governance and funding of the 3 Festivals is not a sustainable model that can be carried forward indefinitely. Consequently a tendering process is underway to produce a study of governance, audience demographics and funding models to inform a new 5 year business plan taking the Wye Valley River Festival forward to 2024. The Festival team are simultaneously beginning to explore proposals for a Festival in 2020. Both these pieces of work are enabled by some of the Visit Wales funding granted to enhance the product development of the 2018 Festival.

The Wye Valley River Festival received the national Bowland Award in July 2018 at the annual AONB 'Landscapes for Life' conference. The Award recognises a best project, best practice or outstanding contribution to the wellbeing of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There were 6 projects nominated and voted on by the Family of AONBs. Several other AONBs have become involved in and hosted landscape scale outdoor arts events and commissions, including with artists that have participated and performed in the Wye Valley River Festivals. The Festival team consider this Award a great vindication of their hard work over the 3 Festivals <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/eventreport/bowland-award-2018-winnerswye-valley-river-festival/>.

Implications

Discussions are taking place with key funders such as Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales, Creative Canopy, Herefordshire's a Great Place and Visit Wales about the research and development phase that needs to start as early as possible and build up to the main Festival funding applications and the Festival itself.

The proposed theme for a Wye Valley River Festival 2020 is 'Time'. The AONB Management Plan 2015-2020 emphasises that the landscape is the result of the interaction and integration *over time* of people and nature. Hence this relates to all 27 of the identified AONB Special Qualities. The Management Plan uses the word 'time' in 16 places, 'ancient' 42 times, 'historic' 60 times, 'change' 62 times and 'future' 30 times. It is likely the next edition

of the Management Plan, due in 2020, would be equally focused on the palimpsest nature of the landscape and past, present and future forces for change. Therefore the River Festival in 2020 would be an opportune moment to celebrate the significance of ‘time’ in the nature, culture, landscape and life of the Wye Valley.

The Festival team have identified the need to address future sustainability and governance if the Festival is to move forward. Also a new 5 year business plan would need to be produced. Utilising the Visit Wales ‘product development’ funding, a contract is being tendered to deliver work in the following areas to inform the new 5 year Business Plan 2019-24:

1. Undertake a study of the audience demographics of the Wye Valley River Festival, covering the current audience and future potential audiences, with recommendations for developing audiences reflecting the priorities and strategies of key funders.
2. Economic impact analysis to evaluate the net additional spending into both the Welsh and the ‘Wye Valley’ economy as a result of the River Festival, evidenced in line with Visit Wales requirements using the economic calculator.
3. Identify and research a range of models of governance suitable for the Wye Valley River Festival. This will include a critical analysis of the structures, resourcing and accountability of these models, pros and cons and recommendations with a realistic timetable towards attaining any adopted model. The models of governance need to offer realistic alternatives for the Festival and offer best opportunity to maximize future funding opportunities. Case studies of similar work undertaken by other festivals will provide a useful means of comparison.
4. A desktop study of income streams and finance options looking at sources of funding beyond already identified grant funders, and relating to governance models with advice on implanting key recommendations.

This work will include a workshop with key partners and will result in the Wye Valley River Festival becoming more resilient and effective, with a clear road map to navigate the next 5 years of operation. Moving towards and working within a new governance model will create a greater clarity around what the Festival offers partners. Further workshops will be held with partners and participants in developing the 2020 Festival. It is also anticipated that it will move towards the creation of a new management team &/or structure that supports and delivers the Festival beyond 2020.

Background

The Wye Valley River Festival is a Wye Valley AONB Partnership initiative. The Festival is a biennial festival focused on arts & environment with landscape at its heart. The Festival has taken place over 2 weeks and 3 weekends in early May in 2014, 2016 & 2018 and includes a community engagement programme of workshops in the run up to May. By staging magnificent outdoor arts events that captivate and engage, the Festival has celebrated and interpreted the River Wye, the countryside and its communities, using the arts to develop thinking, imagination and understanding, building new audiences and strengthening the vital role that culture plays in the future development and ‘place making’ of this AONB.

The Visit Wales ‘Product Development’ funding was via the Regional Tourism Engagement Fund (RTEF), supported through the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the Welsh Government, to improve the visitor experience and create stronger destinations by working together.