

WYE VALLEY RIVER FESTIVAL 2020

Purpose

To inform members of the current situation with the Wye Valley River Festival 2020.

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- Grant applications to Arts Council of Wales and Arts Council England for the Research & Development phase of the Wye Valley River Festival 2020 have been unsuccessful.
- An initial Creative Camp one-day workshop for the Wye Valley River Festival 2020 attracted nearly 40 people and generated many good ideas around the theme of 'Time'.
- The final report is awaited on a study of governance options, audience demographics and funding models to inform a new 5 year business plan to take the Wye Valley River Festival forward.
- Further opportunities and funding bids are being investigated.

Reasons

There has been widespread support and 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, as previously recognised, the current management, governance and funding of the 3 Festivals is not a sustainable model that can be carried forward indefinitely.

A study has been commissioned of governance, audience demographics and funding models to inform a new 5 year business plan to take the Wye Valley River Festival forward to 2024. This was made possible with Visit Wales 'Product Development' funding, 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.

Implications

Initial grant applications to Arts Council of Wales and Arts Council England for the Research & Development (R&D) phase of the Wye Valley River Festival 2020 have been turned down. This is unfortunate but the Festival team continue to explore proposals for a Festival in 2020. A range of additional funding opportunities are being investigated.

Under the Visit Wales RTEF, a ‘Creative Camp’ workshop was held at Wyastone Leys on 31st January. Nearly 40 people attended from a wide range of interests including both artists previously involved in the River Festival and local community representatives from Hereford, Ross, Lydbrook, Monmouth, Llandogo, Tintern and Chepstow. A great many ideas were generated around the theme of ‘Time’. These are being rationalised and prioritised to feed into future funding bids and a nascent potential programme, the outreach engagement with local communities and promotional campaigns.

Discussions are planned with both Arts Council England and Arts Council of Wales on whether funding applications for the main Festival, as opposed to the R&D, are likely to be considered favourably.

Meanwhile the final report on the governance, audience demographics and funding models is awaited. The consultant has been working with the Festival Team through the winter on a range of proposals and possibilities.

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 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. 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.