

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT EMERGENCY

Purpose

To advise members that local authorities covering the whole of the Wye Valley AONB have declared a Climate Emergency, as has Welsh Government.

Recommendations

That the JAC, as an organisation long aware of the significant climate and ecological challenges facing the natural environment, welcomes the recognition of the climate and environment emergency now being declared at all levels of government in and around the AONB.

Key Issues

- The United Nations says we could have just 11 years left to limit a climate change catastrophe.
- Local authorities covering the whole of the Wye Valley AONB have declared a Climate Emergency, as has Welsh Government.
- The UK Parliament have also declared an environment and climate emergency.
- The new AONB Management Plan (about to go out for public consultation) continues to emphasise the adaptation and mitigation measures required to address the environment and climate emergency.
- The AONB Unit will continue to collaborate with the local authorities and other public, private & 3rd sector interests to help deliver sustainable mitigation and adaptation solutions in and around the AONB.

Reasons

Forest of Dean District Council, declared a Climate Emergency on 6th December 2018 Herefordshire Council, on 8th March 2019, Welsh Government on 29th April and Monmouthshire County Council on 16th May. Ross-on-Wye Town Council (Ross being the only town in the AONB) also declared a Climate Emergency on 10th June 2019.

On 1st May MPs approved a motion to declare an environment and climate emergency. This demonstrates the will of the Commons but is not currently government policy. The government is considering changes to include setting a new target of reaching net zero emissions by 2050. The current target is to reduce carbon emissions by 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 under the Paris Agreement. Gloucestershire County Council endorsed this motion on 15th May.

The United Nations Environment Programme recognises that even with the pledges made under the Paris Agreement, global temperatures could still rise by up to 3.4°C this century, forcing people and the natural environment to adapt to extreme new weather patterns.

Sir David Henshaw, Chairman of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) recently said, “The Climate Emergency declaration is a critical challenge to us all and should acknowledge the wider environmental emergency, particularly that of biodiversity loss.”

A recent report from the Institute for Public Policy Research says human impacts have reached a critical stage and threaten to destabilise society and the global economy, with a potentially deadly combination of factors. These include climate change, mass loss of species, topsoil erosion, forest felling and acidifying oceans.

Implications

The Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, of which the latest draft will shortly go out for public consultation, continues to emphasise the adaptation and mitigation measures required to address the environment and climate emergency. These include action around ecological connectivity - benefiting biodiversity; land management and farming - benefiting carbon storage and resilience to water; and people’s understanding and appreciation of the natural environment - re-wilding minds & bodies.

The AONB Unit will continue to collaborate with the local authorities and other public, private & 3rd sector interests to develop and deliver sustainable mitigation and adaptation solutions in and around the AONB. Current initiatives include the Lower Wye Catchments Natural Flood Management and Green Infrastructure Project, various woodland management projects and partnerships, the Restoring Our Amazing River project and farm Catchment Advisors, various grassland management projects and partnerships, the AONB Youth Rangers programme and the Wye Valley River Festival. However, there is more work to be done on reducing the carbon footprint of the AONB Unit operations to net zero emissions. Both the Forest of Dean District Council and Monmouthshire County Council aim to reduce their carbon emissions to net zero by 2030.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has identified priority actions to support the Welsh Government’s declaration of a Climate Emergency. NRW’s Board has committed to go further and faster to develop a range of decarbonisation, adaptation and behaviour change measures, including:

- Improving the management of forests and peatlands so that they store more carbon;
- Being more energy efficient and generating renewable energy where possible at offices;
- Rapidly increasing use of electric vehicles;
- Exploring more opportunities to generate renewable energy on NRW managed land;
- Giving more consideration to the use of carbon in everything purchased;
- Sharing NRW’s experience of managing carbon emissions with other public-sector bodies to help bring about a greener public sector.
- Factoring in the inevitable global warming in all that we do and helping Wales adapt to the changes ahead.

The UK government is committed to leaving the environment in a better state than they inherited it, through the 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) and the forthcoming Environment Bill. Over the 25 years it will replenish depleted soils, rid the seas and rivers of the rubbish trashing our planet, cut greenhouse gas emissions, cleanse the air of toxic

pollutants, and develop cleaner, more sustainable energy sources. The 25YEP makes the case for landscape-scale restoration to develop a robust and resilient Nature Recovery Network. The Environment Bill will also create a new environmental body, the Office for Environmental Protection, to hold government to account on this commitment.

The National Association for AONBs will be discussing and declaring its ambition and intent around nature recovery within the context of climate change mitigation and adaptation at the national Landscape for Life Conference in Colchester on 9th -11th July.

Background

Below are extracts of a speech by Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, given on 16th April 2019: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/climate-change-turning-emergency-into-opportunity>

Climate change is happening: the evidence is compelling and no serious scientist denies it. There has always been climate change: almost since the Earth formed, natural processes have driven cycles which cause ice ages and global warming. We wouldn't be here if this hadn't happened.

However the climate change we are now experiencing is different, because this time it's being caused by humans – by the emissions from fossil fuels since the start of the industrial revolution which have greatly increased the amount of carbon dioxide and similar gases in our atmosphere.

These gasses are creating a greenhouse effect around the planet which means temperatures are increasing. This has two major effects. It is making the world's seas rise, as landlocked ice melts. And it's making the world's weather more extreme.

And this, ladies and gentlemen, is a bad thing. The result will be (and already is) more frequent and more extreme flooding; faster and more extreme coastal erosion; more frequent and more extreme droughts, water shortages and fires; more pollution; and potentially existential damage to habitats, plants and wildlife.

We are already seeing all of these effects. Unless we tackle them, they will have profound and potentially terminal consequences for everything that matters to us. Some parts of the planet, including in this country, may become unliveable. While you can recover from a flood, there is no recovery from a rising sea: it takes land, communities, infrastructure and everything else away forever.

The business models of many companies will cease to work...our wider economy may cease to function.... Our world may become more dangerous, as conflict over water and other scarce resources escalate. At worst, our planet may simply become unviable as a place for the species who caused all this: us.

That is why climate change is simply the biggest issue there is. It is the biggest threat out there to our economy, environment, health, way of life, our country, our world, and our future.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be like this. We can tackle climate change successfully if we act now and act together. We know what we need to do: mitigate and adapt.

We need to mitigate the causes of climate change, by cutting our emissions of greenhouse gases. Most of the UK's emissions come from the way we produce and consume energy – from heating our buildings, driving our cars, manufacturing goods, watching our TVs or boiling our kettles. We can lower our emissions by becoming more energy efficient and switching to renewable or low-carbon fuels...

A truly successful response to climate change requires us not just to change our technology but to change our whole way of living and of thinking. We need a revolution in the head. This is about much more than just cutting emissions – it's about turning our thinking on its head to plan for a sustainable future in which we are responsible consumers of stuff and responsible custodians of the planet's future. We don't yet have all the answers, and we should recognise that. But we do know that by radically changing the way we live, think about and plan for the future we can build a thriving economy, vibrant communities, and a more resilient world...

Perhaps we should stop talking about climate change and call it what it now is: a climate emergency. Better still, let's use language that lifts our emotions up rather than drags us all down. Let's talk about what the right response to climate change will give us: sweet water, clean air, safe homes, a planet that stays blue and green not brown and grey.