

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held
at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford. on Monday,
1st July, 2019 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor A. Webb (Vice-Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: D. Dovey, M. Lane and A. Webb

Gloucestershire County Council

Councillor T. Hale

Herefordshire Council

Councillor Y. Watson (observing)

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillors: C. McFarling and D. Wheeler

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers

HALC – Mr. R. Gething

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Gloucestershire – Dr. G. Peterken

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire – Mr. B. Nash

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

Country Land and Business Association – Mr. R. Goodwin

National Farmers Union – Mr. M. Price

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

River Wye Preservation Trust – Mr. R. Hesketh

Technical Advice Officers

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

APOLOGIES:

Mr. D. Price, Mr. R. Niblett, Ms. H. McDowell and Councillor G. Powell

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1. Election of Chair

As Herefordshire Council had been unable to appoint its membership to the Joint Advisory Committee in time for today's meeting, it was agreed to delay the Annual General Meeting to the next meeting in November 2019 in which the election of Chair and Vice-Chair would be agreed.

Therefore, County Councillor A. Webb, as current Vice-Chair, chaired today's meeting.

The Vice Chair, on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee, thanked the former Chair Councillor P. Cutter for all the work that he has undertaken in his capacity as Chair, noting that his contribution has been greatly appreciated and will be missed.

We resolved that a letter of thanks be sent to Councillor Cutter expressing the Joint Advisory Committee's gratitude for the work that he has undertaken in support of the Committee and the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

2. New Members / Introductions

We welcomed to the meeting Councillors D. Wheeler and C. McFarling who had been appointed by Forest of Dean District Council to serve on the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

The Joint Advisory Committee had not yet received formal notification of the four representatives from Herefordshire Council who would be serving on the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee. However, Councillor Y. Watson attended the meeting as an observer and was welcomed to the meeting by the Joint Advisory Committee.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest raised.

4. Public Question Time

Councillor Y. Watson from Herefordshire Council raised the following issue:

Lack of signage entering the Wye Valley AONB

In response to a question raised regarding the lack of signage entering the Wye Valley AONB, it was noted that there is a sign located near Chepstow Race Course which is very faded and in need of replacement.

Some years ago, a study had been undertaken regarding gateway signage. It had been identified that there were a number of roads that formed the boundary of the Wye Valley AONB with one side of a road being located within the AONB whilst the other side was not. It had been difficult to identify the locations for 'gateway' signs including on the A40 and A49 which enter and leave the AONB at various points. It had therefore been decided not to pursue a systematic gateway signage strategy for the Wye Valley AONB.

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In response to an issues raised regarding a report by Highways England in respect of a number of incidents on the A40 in which vehicles had been driven in the wrong direction and therefore appropriate signage was needed to address this issue, the AONB Manager would discuss this matter with Councillor Watson after the meeting.

5. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 4th March 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Vice-Chair.

6. AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 Review

We received the pre-consultation draft Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 and the revised programme for the preparation and publication of the Management Plan.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) previously endorsed a balanced and proportionate review of the current Wye Valley AONB Management Plan (2015-2020).
- The pre-consultation draft Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 was attached to the report.
- Members can provide comments to the AONB Manager on this pre-consultation draft before Thursday 18th July 2019.
- The Management Plan review programme proposes a 10 week public consultation period commencing in late July 2019 for the draft Wye Valley AONB Management Plan.
- The Scoping for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessments (HRA) will run concurrently with the public consultation.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The final version of the document will be available in March 2020.
- Two public meeting events are being established to be held in September 2019. One event being held in the north of the AONB with the other event being held in the south of the AONB.
- The draft Management Plan will be available to view on the Wye Valley AONB Unit's website and in public libraries by the end of July 2019 before launching the public consultation process.

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- Changes to the Management Plan should be highlighted to identify where the changes are being made.
- Remove unnecessary acronyms from within the report and include a glossary.

We resolved to endorse the 10 week public consultation period for the draft Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2020-2025.

7. Annual Report 2018/19

We received the annual report for 2018/19 on the achievements of the Wye Valley AONB Unit and the contracted Planning consultants for the AONB Unit.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The 2018/19 Annual Report on the Work Programme for the AONB Unit was attached to the report along with a summary financial report.
- High standards of achievement were maintained by the AONB Unit and staffing was augmented with the Lower Wye Catchment NFM&GI Project Officer.
- The AONB Unit has levered in over £10 for every £1 of local authority contribution during 2018/19.
- Worcestershire County Council Planning Department continued to provide strategic planning advice to the AONB Unit on development issues, preparing appropriate responses where necessary. The annual report for the contracted work was attached to the report.
- The AONB Manager, on behalf of the AONB Partnership, has made a limited number of comments on planning applications, including on two adjacent to the AONB, and has been involved in more pre-application enquiries and Neighbourhood Development Plans.

We welcomed the Annual Reports of AONB achievements for 2018/19.

8. Wye Valley River Festival 2020

We received the Five Year Business Plan for the Wye Valley River Festival 2019-2024 and the five tests for the future development of the Wye Valley River Festival.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Arts Council England funding is supporting the Research & Development phase of the Wye Valley River Festival 2020.

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- Two weeks of Creative Laboratory workshops have involved over 30 people, generating a range of exciting proposals and ideas around the Festival theme of 'Time'.
- The Five Year Business Plan for the Wye Valley River Festival, covering 2019-2024, has been produced and submitted with grant applications to Arts Council of Wales and Arts Council England.
- The Business Plan was informed by the governance options study and includes five tests for the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) to approve to take the Wye Valley River Festival forward into a proposed Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).
- Currently, £186,800 has been secured for the 2020 River Festival and further opportunities and funding bids are being pursued including a grant application to Arts Council England.
- The Bowland Award, won by the Wye Valley River Festival last year, will be returned at the forthcoming national Landscapes for Life conference for a 2019 winner to receive.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The Committee congratulated the AONB Manager and his staff for the last three River Festival events, all of which had been very successful.
- Over this period the AONB Unit has built up a Festival team to take each event forward. The establishment of a CIO in the coming years is intended to enhance future River Festivals, going forward.
- It is anticipated that by the 2024 River Festival, the CIO will be virtually leading on the development and management of this festival.
- With regard to the 2020 River Festival, the AONB Unit is looking to bolster the number of staff available, as well as looking at other opportunities to help run the festival.
- The cost of running the River Festival has increased each year. Future Festivals will remain predominantly free of charge. However, it will be necessary to ticket some events. Discussions with the Hay Festival organisers have been held with a view to obtaining the right balance for future River Festivals.
- A good working relationship between the AONB Unit and the CIO will need to be established with the CIO being legally and financially robust enough to become a stand-alone charity.

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- The Vice-Chair encouraged the Committee to engage with their respective community councils with a view to obtaining support for future River Festival events.

We resolved that the Joint Advisory Committee:

- (i) welcomes the Business Plan for the Wye Valley River Festival 2020 and subsequent proposals for future Festivals over the next five years.
- (ii) supports the on-going funding applications for Wye Valley River Festival 2020.
- (iii) endorses the five tests identified to secure the future of the Wye Valley River Festival.

9. AONB Partnership Study Tour - 20th September 2019

We received the date and outline programme for the Annual AONB Partnership Study Tour.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour will be held on Friday 20th September 2019.
- The programme is still being finalised but will focus predominantly on projects and management issues in the southern part of the AONB in Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire.
- Initial invitations for expressions of interest to attend will be despatched shortly.
- Invitations could be extended to representatives from our neighbouring Designated Landscapes and other appropriate partner organisations in the interest of sharing good practice and broadening collaboration.

We resolved to:

- (i) note the date of Friday 20th September 2019 for the Study Tour and encourage a good attendance, at £15 each.
- (ii) Invite representatives from the neighbouring Shropshire Hills and Malvern Hills AONB Partnerships and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and other appropriate partners.

10. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

We received a report regarding the achievements of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in 2018/19 and recent applications in 2019/20.

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In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) is a delegated grant from Welsh Government administered by the Wye Valley AONB Partnership and confirmed for 2019/20 at £55,000 per annum.
- The achievements of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in 2018/19 were set out in the report.
- The current allocation of SDF grants was also set out in the report with £16,100 remaining to be allocated in 2019/20.
- The local government elections created a vacancy on the SDF Assessment Panel for a co-opted public sector representative. Suggestions were welcomed for the AONB Manager to approach. Representatives of the Joint Advisory Committee were asked to submit nominations to the AONB Unit.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that the AONB Unit has worked closely with the Duchy of Cornwall Estate regarding various projects. However, the AONB Unit has not asked for any funding from the Estate but could consider this, going forward.
- The AONB Unit keeps close ties with applicants that have received grant funding, and many of the applicants tend to submit further applications for funding. However, it was noted that new applicants are being encouraged to come forward and submit applications for their various projects.

We welcomed the achievements of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in 2018/19 and 2019/20 to date.

11. Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) Water Environment Grant (WEG) project

We received a report regarding the commencement of the Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) Water Environment Grant (WEG) project with the Wye & Usk Foundation, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and Herefordshire Rural Hub.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye & Usk Foundation, working with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, Herefordshire Rural Hub and the Wye Valley AONB Unit, submitted an application for the Water Environment Grant (WEG) entitled Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR).
- The WEG scheme is competitive and a bid for £1.2million covering the English part of the Wye Catchment was submitted in May 2018.

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- The ROAR project was finally approved in June 2019 with a grant of £672,000 until March 2021.
- The ROAR project includes additional farm Catchment Advisors across the English part of the Wye Catchment.
- Two advisors, covering the English part of the Wye Valley AONB and the adjacent Garren & Gamber catchment, will be employed by the Wye & Usk Foundation and hosted by the AONB Unit.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The main emphasis of the project is located within Herefordshire and on the main tributaries of the River Wye. However, there are tangential benefits for Gloucestershire.
- The AONB Unit had intended to undertake an assessment of the floodplain within the project. Unfortunately, this element was written out of the bid leading to very little monitoring of outcomes.
- The project will support the objective of the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) scheme to reduce the landscape and visual impact of National Grid's existing electricity infrastructure and enhance the quality of the affected designated landscapes. The National Grid is undertaking undergrounding works across four areas within the UK. £25M was available for all National Parks and AONBs across the UK for undergrounding and mitigation works. Lines within the AONB were placed 13th on the list of potential undergrounding works.
- The River Wye is used by Welsh Water and Severn Trent Water for water extraction to be used for drinking water. There are monitoring stations at Redbrook. Due to new extraction rates, there should be more water flowing down the River Wye than in previous years.
- It was noted the River Wye had remained brown for periods and it was not clear what was causing this effect. It was noted that exceptional rainfall and runoff might have contributed to this situation.
- Concern was expressed that the integrity of the River was becoming compromised due to drought and water extraction for irrigation of land. The quantity of water flowing down the river has an effect on water quality and biodiversity. However, it was noted that extraction of water licences can be revoked by the Environment Agency in times of drought.
- There has been large scale investment in irrigation reservoirs. However, issues regarding the planning process for these reservoirs have delayed progress in some instances.

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- There has been a major review of the implementation of water extraction licences over previous years which had led to changes being implemented to ensure more water is able to flow down the River Wye.
- The Joint Advisory Committee agreed that the AONB Manager invites a representative from the Environment Agency to attend the next meeting in November 2019 to discuss water extraction from the River Wye.

We resolved:

- (i) to welcome the collaboration with the Wye & Usk Foundation, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and Herefordshire Rural Hub through the Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) Water Environment Grant (WEG) project;
- (ii) that the AONB Manager invites a representative from the Environment Agency to attend the next Joint Advisory Committee meeting in November 2019 to discuss water extraction from the River Wye.

12. Climate & Environment Emergency

We received a report in which the Joint Advisory Committee was advised that local authorities covering the whole of the Wye Valley AONB have declared a Climate Emergency, as has Welsh Government.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- 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 has also declared an environment and climate emergency.
- The new AONB Management Plan 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 and third sector interests to help deliver sustainable mitigation and adaptation solutions in and around the AONB.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The AONB Unit has been pursuing initiatives in this matter for a number of years with limited resources. However, there is a need to get more people and organisations involved in the process. The National Association for AONBs is currently working with the UK Government.

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- The Forest of Dean District Council is implementing its action plan to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- Herefordshire Council is meeting this month to discuss this matter and to produce a plan, going forward.
- It was suggested that a carbon rating be placed alongside each of the recommendations outlined in the AONB Management Plan 2020 – 2025.

We welcomed the recognition of the climate and environment emergency now being declared at all levels of government in and around the AONB.

13. NAAONB update

We received a report regarding activity through the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB).

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The national AONB 'Landscapes for Life' Conference will take place in Colchester on 9th - 11th July 2019 around the theme of 'Outstanding Beauty, Outstanding Opportunity'.
- The AONB Manager, Development Officer and Community Links Officer will be attending the national conference, where the Bowland Award will be passed to new winners.
- The AONB Development Officer and the AONB Community Links Officer are both participating in the professional training 'Taking the Lead' programme, which is supported by a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Resilient Heritage grant.
- The AONB Manager attended a meeting with Julian Glover, chair of the Review of Designated Landscapes in England, with the NAAONB.
- The NAAONB has appointed a Wales Development Manager and the AONB Manager was on the interview panel.

We noted the report.

14. WyeNAC

We received a report regarding the Wye Navigation Advisory Committee (WyeNAC).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Environment Agency, as the Navigation Authority for the River Wye produces a Calendar of events for the river.

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- The Wye Navigation Advisory Committee (WyeNAC) recently endorsed a dry weather briefing for the River Wye.
- The Environment Agency Wye Navigation Officers co-ordinate a Summer Survey of river users, the results for 2018 were attached to the report.

We noted the report.

15. AONB Unit / Partner progress

We received a report of the activity of the AONB Unit and various partners relating to:

- Lower Wye Catchments Natural Flood Management & Green Infrastructure Project.
- Wentwood to Wyre Endangered Landscapes Programme.
- AONB Farming Awards.
- AONB visits by Welsh Government and DEFRA staff.
- Ross Riverside, with Ross Town Council.
- Youth Rangers – recent activities and what some former Youth Rangers are doing now.
- AONB Volunteers.

We noted the report.

16. Date of next meetings

Future meetings of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee will be held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford, on the following dates:

Monday 4th November 2019.

Monday 2nd March 2020.

The meeting ended at 4.05 pm.