

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, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th November, 2019 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor A. Webb (Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: D. Dovey and M. Lane

Gloucestershire County Council

Councillor T. Hale

Herefordshire Council

Councillors: B. Durkin, J. Hardwick, P. Symonds and Y. Watson

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillors: D. Wheeler and M. Topping (substituting for C. McFarling)

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

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society - Mr. C. Barron

National Farmers Union Wales - Mr. D. Price

Technical Advice Officers

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis

Gloucestershire County Council – Mr. R. Niblett

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

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APOLOGIES:

Councillor C. McFarling and Mr. M. Price (NFU).

1. Election of Chair

We elected County Councillor A. Webb as Chair.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

We appointed Councillor D. Wheeler as Vice-Chair.

3. Introductions and New Members

The Chair welcomed Herefordshire Councillors B. Durkin, J. Hardwick, P. Symonds and Y. Watson to the meeting.

4. Declarations of Interest

None.

5. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 1st July 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

In doing so, the AONB Manager informed the Joint Advisory Committee that a representative from the Environment Agency had been invited to attend today's meeting to discuss water extraction from the River Wye. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the representative had to withdraw from attending today's meeting but would be in attendance at the Joint Advisory Committee meeting in March 2020.

6. Public Question Time

There were no members of the public present.

7. AONB Management Plan public consultation & revised timetable

We received a report regarding the public consultation period for the AONB Management Plan and the revised review programme.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The public consultation draft Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 is available on the Wye Valley AONB website.
- The 10 week public consultation period runs from 23rd October 2019 until 6th January 2020.

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, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th November, 2019 at 2.00 pm

- As part of the consultation process two public meetings will be held in early December 2019.

Having received the report the following points were noted:

- Modifications are being made to the current Management Plan. However, from 2025 onwards, it is anticipated that there will be a need to undertake a thorough review.
- The finalised version of the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 will be presented to the July 2020 Joint Advisory Committee meeting.

We resolved:

- (i) to encourage engagement by all partners and interested parties in the public consultation process that extends until 6th January 2020.
- (ii) to note the revised programme for completion of the AONB Management Plan.

8. Local Authority financial contributions & Memorandum of Understanding

We received a report requesting contributions from the four constituent local authorities to the budget for the Wye Valley AONB Partnership as outlined in the AONB Memorandum of Understanding between the four local authorities for 2018 - 2021.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The AONB Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is intended to give medium term security and commitment to the AONB Partnership.
- The local authorities' financial contributions to the Wye Valley AONB Partnership are outlined in the MoU, which form the foundation of the budget managed by the AONB Unit.
- DEFRA and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are not signatories to the MoU. However, their AONB grant funding offer letters are appended to the MoU.
- The current DEFRA grant offer extended from 2016/17 until 2019/20. A new DEFRA grant offer is anticipated following the publication of the 'Glover' Landscapes Review.
- The NRW grant currently runs from 2018/19 until 2020/21.
- The current MoU ends in March 2021 and a subsequent three year edition would run until March 2024.
- For every £1.00 of local authority contribution the AONB Unit has levered in over £8.00 on average in recent years.

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, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th November, 2019 at 2.00 pm

In response to a question raised regarding local authority contributions being index linked, it was noted that this matter would be discussed during the next period of the Memorandum of Understanding.

We resolved:

- (i) to request from the constituent local authorities the agreed financial contributions for the Wye Valley AONB for 2020/21.
- (ii) to encourage the constituent local authorities to commence a review of the AONB Memorandum of Understanding for 2021 – 2024.

9. Review of Designated Landscapes in England

We received a report regarding the publication of the Landscapes Review of AONBs & National Parks in England.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Review of Designated Landscapes (National Parks and AONBs) in England was launched by Environment Secretary Michael Gove MP last year with a small advisory panel chaired by Julian Glover.
- The 'Landscapes Review' final report was published on 21st September 2019 with 27 'Proposals' for Government.
- The Review identifies that AONBs should be strengthened, with increased funding, governance reform, new shared purposes with National Parks, and a greater voice on development.
- The report references future designation of the Forest of Dean and also stakeholder proposals for the Herefordshire Marches.
- The publication coincided with the 'National moment' by AONBs, including the poem 'Fugitives' by Poet Laureate Simon Armitage, as part of the 70th Anniversary celebrations of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.
- The Wye Valley River Festival is used as a case study in the Report.
- It is believed that the Review has been favourably received by DEFRA and a formal Government response will be provided in due course next year.
- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) has made an initial brief formal response.

Having received the report the following points were noted:

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, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th November, 2019 at 2.00 pm

- Encouraging access and enjoyment is not currently a statutory duty of AONBs, unlike National Parks. The Wye Valley AONB Unit is involved in tourism and recreation issues depending on priorities, capacity and resources. However, reaching out to more diverse communities and hard to reach groups can be expensive and time consuming.
- Publicity is key. The national press and television programmes such as Countryfile have made reference to the Wye Valley in a positive manner. More locally, the Wye Valley River Festival has been very successful in promoting the region.
- In response to a question raised regarding bicycle friendly public transport provision in the Wye Valley area, it was noted that 15 to 20 years ago the Wye Valley AONB Partnership subsidised a Sunday bus service which had some cycle carriage capacity. However, this was stopped when the service was taken over as a commercial service by a main bus provider.
- There is a need to pursue co-ordinated public transport further with strategic linkages being required across counties. Monmouthshire County Council's Strategic Transport Group is looking to pursue cross border working. The Chair of Monmouthshire County Council's Strategic Transport Group (also a member of the Joint Advisory Committee) extended an invitation for a member of the Joint Advisory Committee to join the Strategic Transport Group.
- In response to a question raised regarding responding to climate change, the AONB Manager informed the Joint Advisory Committee that when responding to planning applications as part of the consultation process he recommends that photo voltaic panels be included on properties where appropriate.
- It was noted that the Review is critical of the general lack of collaboration between the National Park and AONBs, although there are some notable exceptions.
- It was suggested that local authorities tend not to have their own aspirations for AONBs although they have a duty of regard to the AONB and provide support for their AONB Units.
- The Review argues that national landscapes have not always had the support within Whitehall. It was suggested that MPs should be lobbied to ensure appropriate support is provided.
- The Review references future designation of the Forest of Dean and also stakeholder proposals for the Herefordshire Marches.
- The Review expressed support for the strengthening of the Duty of Regard. DEFRA is working on how to replace this.

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- It was noted that the Welsh Government Civil Servant leading on AONBs is familiar with the challenges regarding cross border working as he formerly worked on the Arriva Rail franchise. He is establishing a Welsh Government cross departmental Working Group to ensure that the workings of AONBs and National Parks are understood, including the cross border issues being faced.

We resolved:

- (i) to receive the report;
- (ii) that an item regarding transport collaboration be added to the agenda for the next meeting and that appropriate officers be invited to attend.

10. AONB Partnership Study Tour feedback

We received a report regarding feedback on the success of the AONB Partnership Annual Study Tour.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- A total of 28 people attended the annual AONB Partnership Tour on 20th September 2019.
- There was broad representation from throughout the AONB even though the Tour was focused predominantly on the Monmouthshire part of the AONB.
- The tour visited a range of sites primarily associated with the Lower Wye Catchments Natural Flood Management (NFM) & Green Infrastructure (GI) Project.
- The Tour also included a 'heart in the landscape' photo-opportunity in preparation for the 'national moment' on 21st September celebrating the 70th anniversary of the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949.
- Feedback from attendees of the Tour has been extremely positive.

We noted the report.

11. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

We received a report regarding the status of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in 2019/20 and the establishment of the Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation.

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.

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, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th November, 2019 at 2.00 pm

- The agreement with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) has been signed for the establishment of the Wye Valley AONB Fund.
- The current allocation of SDF grants has £8,875 remaining to be allocated in 2019/20.
- There remains a vacancy on the SDF Assessment Panel for a co-opted public sector representative. The AONB Manager asked for nominations to be forwarded to the AONB Unit.

We noted the report.

12. NAAONB update

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

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The national AONB 'Landscapes for Life' Conference, held in Colchester in July 2019, was attended by the AONB Manager, AONB Development Officer and AONB Community Links Officer.
- The Colchester Declaration – a 'declaration for nature' was agreed at the Landscapes for Life Conference.
- The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) Chairperson's Conference and Annual General Meeting (AGM) is on 28th November 2019 and will focus on challenges of The Colchester Declaration and the Landscapes Review. The AONB Manager will attend.
- The AONB Development Officer and the AONB Community Links Officer are participating in the professional training 'Taking the Lead' programme as part of the NAAONB Future Landscapes Programme supported by a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Resilient Heritage grant.
- Landscapes for Life Week (formerly Outstanding Week) was 21st – 29th September 2019 with the National Moment of 'hearts in the landscape' and publication of 'Fugitives' by the poet laureate, Simon Armitage.
- The Glover Landscape Review Final Report was published to coincide with Landscapes for Life Week.

Having received the report the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised about Nature Recovery networks it was noted that an AONB Unit team member sits on a Local Nature Partnership Working Group in Gloucestershire and there is representation on the equivalent group in Monmouthshire.

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, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th November, 2019 at 2.00 pm

- Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre are leading on this matter within Herefordshire.
- The Wye Valley AONB Unit supports Forestry England, its partners and landowners regarding the management and connectivity of forests within the region. However, it was acknowledged that Forestry England and its partners lead on this matter.

We noted the report.

13. Wye Valley AONB 50th Anniversary in 2021

We received a report regarding the forthcoming 50th anniversary of the designation of the Wye Valley AONB in 1971.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of the designation of the Wye Valley AONB.
- An outline programme of events for 2021 is being developed.
- The Offa's Dyke Path National Trail was also created in 1971.

Having received the report it was requested that consideration be given to creating a walled charter to represent the 50th anniversary of the designation of the Wye Valley AONB.

We noted the report.

14. AONB / Partner progress

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

- AONB Farming Awards.
- Gilpin2020 & Launch by HRH Prince of Wales.
- Lower Wye Catchments Green Infrastructure & Natural Flood Management Project.
- Wye Valley River Festival 2020.
- Water Environment Grant Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) & Catchment Advisors.
- Priorities funding opportunity Welsh Government.
- Offa's Dyke Collaboratory.

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, High Street, Coleford, GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th November, 2019 at 2.00 pm

- Ross Riverside.

It was noted that the Prince of Wales is visiting Ross-on-Wye on 5th November 2019 and will officially launch Gilpin2020, to celebrate the town's role as the birthplace of British tourism. His Royal Highness will tour a local producers' market and meet groups representing the strong philanthropic heritage of Ross, including the Wye Valley AONB stand and a range of local community organisations and their local business supporters, around the Old Market, Ross.

We noted the report.

15. Dates of meetings for 2020

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 2nd March 2020

Monday 6th July 2020

Monday 2nd November 2020

The meeting ended at 3.27pm.