

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Microsoft Teams Meeting on Monday, 2nd November, 2020 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor A. Webb (Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: M. Lane

Herefordshire Council

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

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillor C. McFarling

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas
National Farmers Union - Mr. M. Price

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

Technical Advice Officers:

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake
Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis
Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams
Monmouthshire County Council – Mrs. W. Barnard

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: D. Dovey, B. Durkin, D. Wheeler.

Mr. B. Nash, Mr. R. Niblett, Ms. D. Griffiths, Ms. H. McDowell and
Councillor G. Powell

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1. Election of Chair

We elected County Councillor A. Webb as Chair.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

We appointed County Councillor Y. Watson as Vice-Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

None received.

4. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 2nd March 2020 were confirmed and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendment:

Mr. A. Thomas had sent his apologies for this meeting.

5. July 2020 For Information Report

We noted the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee information report.

6. Public Question Time

No questions received.

7. Local Authority Financial Contributions & Memorandum of Understanding

We received the report on Local Authorities' contributions and AONB Memorandum of Understanding 2021 – 2024.

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 current MoU ends in March 2021 and a revised three year edition, until March 2024, is being finalised between the four local authorities.
- The MoU includes the minimum contribution expected from the local authorities 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 anticipated AONB grant funding offer letters, when received, will be appended to the MoU.
- The local authorities' financial contributions to the Wye Valley AONB Partnership are requested with a 1% increase on the current year.

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- For every £1 of Local Authority contribution in 2019/20 the AONB Unit has levered in over £10.

We resolved:

- (i) to request from the constituent local authorities the financial contributions for the Wye Valley AONB Partnership for 2021/22.
- (ii) to encourage the constituent local authorities to finalise and agree the AONB Memorandum of Understanding for 2021 - 2024

8. AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 Post Consultation Draft, SEA & HRA Screening and State of the AONB Report

We received a report regarding the Joint Advisory Committee's endorsement of the Post Consultation Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 and to recommend the Plan for adoption, subject to the Habitats Regulation Assessment modified screening and realigning the Plan period.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Post Consultation Draft of the AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 has been prepared. The Post Consultation Draft (amended) and the version showing the amendments to the Consultation Draft Plan are available on the AONB website:

<https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/management-plans/2020-2025-consultation/>.

- The following documents are also on AONB website:
 - the table of comments received from the public consultation with the formal responses and proposed modifications to the Plan.
 - The draft State of the AONB Report.
 - The Screening Reports for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA).
- The SEA Screening conclusion that the Plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects is supported by Cadw, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales.
- The HRA Screening was partially supported by Natural Resources Wales. Natural England has requested some modifications to the HRA screening which is now underway and needs to be completed before the Plan can be formally adopted by the local authorities and government agencies.

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- The finalised Plan is anticipated before the end of the year with adoption likely early in 2021. Therefore, it would be appropriate to re-define the five year Plan period as 2021-2026.

We resolved to:

- (i) approve the Post Consultation Draft version of the AONB Management Plan and recommend the Plan for adoption by the local authorities and government agencies, subject to the Habitats Regulation Assessment modified screening.
- (ii) endorse the realignment of the five year period of the AONB Management Plan to cover 2021-2026.

9. Wye Valley River Festival 2020

We received a report regarding the achievements and the initial evaluation of the fourth Wye Valley River Festival, re-imagined due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The fourth Wye Valley River Festival had to be completely re-imagined because of the Coronavirus Pandemic, and postponed from an outdoor art & environment festival on 2nd - 17th May 2020 to an on-line festival on 21st - 27th September 2020.
- The theme of 'Time' was retained, celebrating nature, culture, landscape and life along the Wye Valley; past, present and future.
- As with previous Wye Valley River Festivals, this fourth Festival was organised by the Wye Valley AONB Unit and the professional Festival Management team with an overall budget of £200,000 working in collaboration with arts professionals, conservationists and local communities.
- The re-imagined Festival evolved to an on-line, web-based series of live and pre-recorded creations and events that proved both challenging and rewarding for many artists and participants.
- The Festival presented over 90 hours of content, involving 188 paid artists and contributors and 121 new products and commissions.
- Funding for the Festival primarily came from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), Arts Council England, Visit Wales, Arts Council of Wales, Welsh Government, Forestry Commission, Foresters' Forest Landscape Partnership, Environment Agency, Ross Town Council and in-kind support from the AONB Unit.
- A full evaluation of the Festival is being undertaken to appraise lessons learned as well as a review of the on-line data analytics.
- Once the evaluation is complete future prospects for any further Wye Valley River Festivals will need to be determined.

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- The (pre-Covid-19) Business Plan aimed to establish an autonomous body to adopt the Festival and there is on-going interest in pursuing this.

We welcomed the successful accomplishments of the Wye Valley River Festival 2020. The AONB Manager would report back to the next meeting regarding progress.

10. Undergrounding Scheme

We received a report regarding the undergrounding work of overhead power lines.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- Western Power Distribution (WPD) works in collaboration with the AONB Unit on identifying a programme of undergrounding of low voltage electricity power-lines in the AONB.
- WPD require the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) to approve new undergrounding schemes prior to further investigation and evaluation work taking place.
- The new proposed scheme is for power lines across Offa's Dyke Path National Trail on the back of The Kymin.
- A further scheme at Kerne Bridge is with the Gloucestershire WPD team which is progressing the necessary permissions.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- JAC members were asked to provide details of any power lines that were considered to be located in an iconic position in the landscape that required undergrounding. These could then be put forward to WPD for consideration.
- AONB staff would provide Members of the JAC with details of the prioritisation and determination process for undergrounding power lines within the AONB.
- It was noted that the undergrounding process covers the National Parks and AONBs of the Western Power region (Midlands and South Wales Regions).
- The geology of the AONB is more amenable to undergrounding compared to some other areas.
- WPD is looking at low voltage power lines that are in or affect iconic views of landscapes.
- Proposals are put to the regional WPD steering group, which includes a member from each Designated Landscape. The proposals are discussed with a view to prioritising the list of sites for undergrounding.

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- Town and Parish Councils are periodically reminded to also submit details of power lines that are considered to be located in an iconic position in the landscape that require undergrounding.

We resolved to endorse the proposed undergrounding of overhead power lines across Offa's Dyke Path National Trail on The Kymin.

11. **Review of Designated Landscapes in England and Wales**

We received a report outlining progress with the respective Reviews of Designated Landscapes England and Wales.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The 'Glover' Landscapes Review of National Parks and AONBs in England was published a year ago with 27 'Proposals' for Government.
- Proposal 24 states that "AONBs should be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, and renamed as National Landscapes."
- The formal response from Government has yet to be produced but is anticipated over the winter. Meanwhile Natural England, the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) and National Parks England have published a Joint Statement.
- The NAAONB and AONB lead officers are collaborating with DEFRA on the provision of information, statistics and case studies in support of implementing the Glover Review.
- In September 2020 Welsh AONB lead officers met on-line with Deputy Welsh Government Minister Hannah Blythyn and officials to discuss the on-going implementation of 'Valued & Resilient: Welsh Government's Priorities for AONBs & National Parks'.
- The Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) capital funding from Welsh Government has been awarded including a decarbonisation scheme for the AONB Office.
- Welsh Government responsibility for AONBs and National Parks has subsequently moved back to Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- With regard to liaison with Malvern Hills AONB, the Wye Valley AONB office has worked closely with Malvern Hills AONB at officer level. In the past annual study tours have been shared.
- There has been a proposal for a National Park linking the Wye Valley AONB with Malvern Hills AONB but this was not raised in the Glover Review.

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- The AONB Manager would liaise with Councillor Symonds regarding his question in respect of Ross Town Council's views on replacing diesel vehicles with electric vehicles.
- The National AONB budget for DEFRA is in the region of £6 - £7 million. Therefore, doubling the AONB resources in England would equate to in the region of £12 - £15 million. In terms of impact on the national economy, the funding for AONBs is minimal. The National Parks budget equates to around £50 million.
- With regard to the White Paper on Planning for the Future, the Wye Valley AONB office did not submit its views via the consultation process. However, the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) submitted a paper on behalf of all AONBs. The response by NAAONB would be circulated to the Joint Advisory Committee.

We resolved to note the report and that the AONB Manager would circulate to the Joint Advisory Committee the response by NAAONB in respect of the White Paper on Planning for the Future.

12. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & HCF AONB Fund

We received the report regarding the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF).

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) currently has £42,056 allocated from the £100,000 offered by Welsh Government for 2020/21, meaning there remains £57,944 available for applications and projects.
- Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) has produced the latest accounts for the Wye Valley AONB Fund which was established with £10,000 for immediate funding alongside an Endowment Fund of £50,000. Current balances are £6,776.51 and £52,045.26 respectively.
- Applications are welcome for both sets of funding.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Concern was expressed regarding the integrity and sustainability of the River Wye due to phosphate pollution, climate change and the impact of droughts. It was considered that there was a need to address these issues so that we can, as suggested in the 25 Year Environment Plan, leave the river in a better condition than it currently is for future generations. Studies are ongoing with the Environment Agency which suggests that water can be stored in the upper catchments with the use of leaky dams and flood management techniques which would maintain the flow of the river, even in drought conditions.

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- It was noted that farmers in the Wye Valley take their responsibilities seriously and are encouraged to do so by the National Farmers Union (NFU). The NFU is encouraging the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales, the AONB and interested parties to identify where the phosphates are coming from.
- The AONB Manager informed the Committee that the phosphate monitoring system changed four years ago and there hasn't been consistent monitoring undertaken on the river Wye as previously carried out. About half of the issues relate to sewerage whilst the other half are coming from agriculture.
- Farming advice is being administered in Herefordshire supporting farmers and land owners in improving land management techniques to reduce phosphate and water run-off.
- Work is being undertaken to address these issues.
- The nutrient Management Board for the River Wye had recommended that both Monmouthshire County Council, Forest of Dean District Council and the AONB Manager should have some level of observer status, to be kept abreast of developments.
- Natural Resources Wales has been reviewing its phosphate monitoring procedures and will shortly be publishing its review.
- Herefordshire Council is being very proactive regarding this matter. Representatives from Herefordshire Council had met with representatives of Herefordshire NFU and there is another meeting scheduled for Tuesday 3rd November 2020 to continue that dialogue.
- The AONB Manager had planned for a representative from the Environment Agency or Natural Resources Wales to attend previous Joint Advisory Committee meetings to present information on the matter. The AONB Manager will invite a representative to present an update report at the next meeting regarding this matter.

We resolved to receive the report and that the AONB Manager arrange a report to the next Joint Advisory Committee meeting regarding the phosphate monitoring and the condition of the River Wye.

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 information was noted:

- The national AONB 'Landscapes for Life' Conference scheduled for early July 2020 was cancelled due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

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- The Colchester Declaration – a ‘declaration for nature’ - has been progressed through a series of on-line meetings and AONB partnerships refining proposals for their Nature Recovery Plans. A National Landscapes Nature Recovery Coordinator has been employed part time to take the initiative forward.
- The NAAONB submitted a £4.5M application to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund in September 2020, which was unsuccessful.
- Landscapes for Life Week (formerly Outstanding Week) was 19th – 27th September 2020, coinciding conveniently with the Wye Valley River Festival.
- The NAAONB has been granted some resources from DEFRA to run a National Landscapes advocacy project on the Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme.
- Art in the Landscape - A National Strategy, was commissioned by the NAAONB and launched in July 2020 with further training on-line this Autumn, including contributions from the Wye Valley AONB and Wye Valley River Festival team.
- The AGM for the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) is on 19th November 2020 and will be on-line, as will the Chairperson’s Conference early in the new-year.

We noted the report.

14. AONB / Partner Progress

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

- Covid-19 impacts - on AONB and AONB Unit.
- AONB 50th Anniversary 2021 & Gilpin2020+1.
- Lower Wye Catchments projects - Natural Flood Management and INNS in Monmouthshire & Valley Brook, Gloucestershire.
- Restoring Our Amazing River (ROAR) Water Environment Grant (WEG) project.
- Riparian Trees project with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust.
- Youth Rangers.

Having received the report it was noted that in addition to the Nutrient Management Plan, Herefordshire Council is also engaging with parish councils and community hubs regarding riparian responsibilities with a view to mitigate and minimize flooding.

We noted the report.

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15. Proposed dates of meetings for 2021

To be held at 2.00pm on the following dates:

Monday 1st March 2021.

Monday 5th July 2021.

Monday 1st November 2021

The venue for the meetings to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 3.35 pm.