

AONB UNIT REPORTS

Purpose

To advise members of activity of the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

FOR INFORMATION

Below are brief update reports on the following AONB Unit initiatives: -

- a) AONB 50th Anniversary programme
- b) AONB Nature Recovery Plan & Priority Species
- c) Water Environment Grant ROAR & Catchment Advisors (England only)
- d) Natural Flood Management (NFM) and Riparian Tree project work
- e) Wye Valley Villages Transport Plan update (verbal).
- f) Lower Wye Green Infrastructure (GI) work (Monmouthshire)
- g) Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) AONB Office refurbishment
- h) Undergrounding

a) AONB 50th Anniversary programme

Celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of the Wye Valley AONB being designated an AONB have commenced with distribution of the 2021 AONB calendar, an on-line talk by the AONB Manager on 24th February – the day the Designation Order was submitted to Government in 1971, and the first of a series of Social Media ‘take-overs’ by local AONB champions and activists.

b) AONB Nature Recovery Plan & Priority Species

Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trusts are co-ordinating the creation of Nature Recovery Network Maps that will cover Herefordshire, the Wye Valley AONB and the Malvern Hills AONB. Work on this commenced in January and when complete will form the basis for the AONB Nature Recovery Plan, and form part of the implementation of the Colchester Declaration.

The AONB Unit have also been working with local wildlife and conservation experts to choose a list of 5 species, or assemblage of species, around which conservation effort can be galvanized over the coming years. The species are representative of the AONB Special Qualities [SQ], as identified in the AONB Management Plan, and will benefit from positive landscape scale management. The following have been selected:

- Woodland [SQ2] - Woodland Butterfly assemblage (particularly Wood White / Pearl Bordered Fritillary)
- River [SQ3, SQ10] - Water Crowfoot

- Grassland [SQ4] - Bumblebee assemblage (particularly Shril Carder Bee, Brown Banded Carder Bee, Redshank Carder Bee, long horned bee)
- Orchards & Veteran Trees [SQ27, SQ18] - Noble Chafer beetle
- General [SQ1, SQ4, SQ5, SQ26] - Hedgehog

c) Water Environment Grant ROAR & Catchment Advisors (England only)

The farm advice work has continued throughout the English part of the AONB, led by the Wye & Usk Foundation's Catchment Advisors, working with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and the Wye Valley AONB Unit and Herefordshire Rural Hub. However, the Water Environment Grant (WEG) funding ceases later this year and the contract for one of the Catchment Advisors ends on 31st March.

d) Natural Flood Management (NFM) and Riparian Tree project work

Environment Agency funding has facilitated targeted farm advice and Natural Flood Management (NFM) interventions in the Valley Brook catchment, Gloucestershire - the tributary flowing through Coleford and Newland to Redbrook. A decision is awaited on funding to extend the project into next financial year.

Similarly, farm advice on riparian tree management has been carried out throughout the English part of the AONB, by one of the Wye & Usk Foundation's Catchment Advisors, working with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and the Wye Valley AONB Unit. However, the contract for the Catchment Advisor ends on 31st March. This was a pilot project and it remains to be seen whether funding will be available to expand the initiative.

e) Wye Valley Villages Transport Plan update

The project is led by Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) and a partnership made of representatives from the Community Councils of St. Arvans, Devauden, Tintern and Trellech United, with local county councillors and officers from MCC and the Wye Valley AONB. In November 2020 a contract was awarded to Arup to prepare a Plan for the main villages in the Welsh part of the Wye Valley AONB that will address and provide recommendations on a range of issues, including:

- Road (safety) and village infrastructure improvement schemes
- Active travel links within and between communities, including better integration of walking and cycling networks & leisure routes within the valley
- Public transport
- signage audit & review
- visitor experience

To date, Arup have complete Phase 1 of the study which has consisted of a document and evidence review along with consultation on stakeholder mapping and SWOT analysis. The next phases will develop a vision for an integrated and holistic strategy with proposals for each of the key focus areas and each village. It will prioritise proposals into quick wins, short, medium and long term opportunities. These will be consulted on and a final Plan prepared that will include options appraisals and development scenarios, supported by high-level delivery and funding strategies. The project should conclude in June 2021 and will be an essential precursor to determining and developing capital projects to further conserve and enhance the Wye Valley AONB. The Wye Valley Villages Plan is funded by Welsh

Government's AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) funding and by Monmouthshire County Council.

f) Lower Wye Green Infrastructure (GI) work (Monmouthshire)

The Lower Wye Project Officer has been progressing with several access enhancement initiatives. Contracts and specifications are being prepared or have been let for the following works:

- enhancements to the Wordsworth Walk around Llandogo and Cleddon Falls.
- Surveying of the river bank erosion along the Wye Valley Walk between the Duke of Beaufort Bridge and the Monmouthshire Show Ground. It is hoped a viable solution can be found to maintain the riverside walk at this point.
- Natural Flood Management (NFM) interventions on Chapel Hill Lane at the southern end of Tintern. This is an Unclassified County Road (UCR), which means it is open to all users including vehicular users. It will be closed to the public for three weeks in March while contractors install a pilot NFM scheme that aims to improve the lane's drainage and halt the prolonged hydraulic erosion and degradation of its fragile surface. The project is trialling different approaches to water management than that usually adopted by Highway Authorities. These measures are low-tech, working with the natural processes and, in addition to having a low visual impact, they are low-cost compared to standard highway drainage projects. The pilot Chapel Hill Lane scheme is funded by the Welsh Government through the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) grant.

g) Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) AONB Office refurbishment

The AONB Office at Hadnock Road, Monmouth is undergoing a significant refurbishment under the Decarbonisation theme of the Welsh Government Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) funding, augmented by Monmouthshire County Council Disability Access funding. The AONB Office was very poorly insulated and thermally inefficient, including single glazed windows & doors, gas heaters and a Port-a-cabin with electric heaters. The refurbishment is now underway and includes

- insulated cladding & double glazing of AONB Office
- new insulated roof
- replace portacabin and building a new meeting room as part of the main building
- improved heating system
- shower for staff cycling to work
- replacement of diesel van with EV van
- installing EV charging point

It is hoped that the AONB staff will be able to return from lock-down and into the refurbished office after Easter.

h) Undergrounding

Following recent promotion of the opportunity to underground overhead electricity cables through the Town, Parish & Community Councils, the AONB Development Officer has received a range of suggestions. He is currently reviewing and assessing the power lines put forward and will making recommendation to Western Power in due course.