

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Meeting on Monday, 5th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor: A Webb (Chair)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: C. Edwards and M. Feakins

Herefordshire Council

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

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillors: C. McFarling and D. Wheeler

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers

Herefordshire Association Local Councils - R. Gething

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire – Mr. B. Nash

Country Land and Business Association – Ms. H. Dale

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

Gwent Wildlife Trust – Mr. A. Taylor

National Farmers Union Wales – Mr. D. Price

Technical Advice Officers:

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

Also in attendance:

Mr. M. Quine	-	Environment Agency
Mr. S. Thomas	-	Environment Agency
Ms. H. Sisley	-	Natural Resources Wales
Councillor E. Swinglehurst	-	Chair of the Nutrient Management Board

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APOLOGIES:

County Councillor M. Lane, Dr. G. Peterken, Mr. M. Price, Mr. R. Hesketh, Mr. R. Niblett, Mr. J. Bisset, Mr. C. Rees, Ms. C. Grimstead, Mr. G. Parry and Councillor S. Phelps

1. Election of Chair

We elected County Councillor A. Webb as Chair.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

We appointed Councillor Y. Watson as Vice-Chair.

3. Introductions and new members

The Chair welcomed to the meeting County Councillors Christopher Edwards and Mathew Feakins representing Monmouthshire County Council.

The AONB Manager introduced Sam Taylor representing the Environment Agency and Holly Sisley representing Natural Resources Wales who would be providing the Committee with a presentation on water quality in respect of the River Wye.

Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst, Chair of the Wye Nutrient Management Board and Adam Taylor representing Gwent Wildlife Trust were also in attendance.

4. Declarations of Interest

None received.

5. Public Question Time

No questions had been received.

6. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 1st March 2021 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Gloucestershire County Council had yet to update its representation on the Joint Advisory Committee.
- The AONB Manager will be advising the Joint Advisory Committee later in the meeting regarding the Glover Review and the implementation of the agricultural transition plan with respect to farming and protected landscapes.

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- A question was raised regarding the review of designated landscapes in Wales in respect of progress being made of plans for a nature recovery network nine year strategy. The matter would be discussed outside of the meeting.

7. Water quality presentations

We received a joint presentation from Sam Thomas, Environment Agency and Holly Sisley, Natural Resources Wales, regarding water quality on the River Wye.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- With regard to phosphates and mercury levels within the River Wye, it was noted that the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are now able to detect these element in the tissues of living organisms within the river. These investigations are ongoing. It is anticipated that further information on this matter will be published in due course, nationally.
- There have been issues relating to phosphates in the River Wye for a long period of time. High rainfall events and flooding occurrences within Wales in recent years could have further exacerbated this problem causing soils and sediments to wash into the river.
- There are studies being undertaken investigating how phosphates, once in the river gravel systems, can re-mobilise into the water column. Research into these issues is ongoing so definitive answers are not yet available in respect of this matter.
- It was noted that the sense of urgency has been recognised by the EA and NRW and it has been instilled already to restore the health of the River Wye. There is a vast amount of work being undertaken via the Nutrient Management Plan Board. The new asset management plan for the water companies began this year with the majority of required measures being put in place between now and 2027. Further measures identified would be for the next five year cycle.
- It was recognised that diffuse input of phosphate from the wider catchment needs concerted effort across multiple sectors applying pressure to create change.
- This matter should not be looked at in terms of water quality alone. Issues occurring on the land such as climate change is having an impact on our water bodies.
- There is a need for more resource to not only monitor the changes but also to monitor the interventions that are planned to ensure that the Wye remains a healthy river for now and future generations.
- In response to a question raised regarding spot checks on water course consent forms and the inclusion of an ecologist being a part of the consultation process, it was noted that the EA representative would take this matter back to the EA for consideration.

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- The Chair of the Nutrient Management Board informed the Joint Advisory Committee that the phosphates in the River Wye has been a long standing issue that needs to be addressed. A study is being brought forward from the University of Leeds and Lancaster looking at legacy phosphate. It was noted that the soils around the River Wye contain high quantities of phosphate already and phosphate tends to mobilise in peak events. There needs to be a sense of urgency to address this issue. Citizen Science is working with the EA to bolster the data flow to identify a more detailed analysis of what is happening within the River Wye. Flooding and water quality are linked. Therefore, solving one of these issues will help towards solving the other issue.

On behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee, the Chair thanked the representatives from the EA and NRW for providing their presentation on water quality on the River Wye. The Chair also thanked the Chair of the Nutrient Management Board for attending the meeting.

8. Wye Valley River Festival Community Interest Company

We received a report regarding the Wye Valley River Festival Community Interest Company (CIC) and the relationship with the AONB Partnership, going forward.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Joint Advisory Committee had previously supported the proposal to progress with establishing a possible Community Interest Company (CIC) as an autonomous body to secure the future of the Wye Valley River Festival.
- The Wye Valley River Festival CIC has now been established with three Directors, all hitherto involved and integral to the previous Festivals.
- A Working Agreement is proposed between the Joint Advisory Committee and the CIC with a lead AONB staff member invited to have a non- executive role on the Wye Valley River Festival (WVRF) CIC Advisory Board. The CIC is now commencing plans for the next Festival and is submitting grant applications to secure appropriate funding.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The AONB Manager would continue to provide the Joint Advisory Committee with update reports in respect of the work being undertaken by the CIC in respect of the Wye Valley River Festival.
- Going forward, it is anticipated that a member of the Joint Advisory Committee could have a role on the CIC Advisory Board.

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We resolved to:

- (i) welcome the establishment of the Wye Valley River Festival Community Interest Company (CIC) to take forward the Wye Valley River Festival;
- (ii) endorse the Working Agreement between the Wye Valley River Festival Community Interest Company (CIC) and the Joint Advisory Committee, with an AONB staff member taking a non-executive and advisory role with the CIC, on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee and AONB Partnership.

9. Glover Review & Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

We received a report regarding the Ministerial Statement on the Government's response to the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes in England and the launch of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The 'Glover' Landscapes Review of National Parks and AONBs in England was published in 2019 with 27 'Proposals' for Government.
- The Written Ministerial Statement published on 24th June 2021 provides the Government's initial response to the Landscapes Review.
- The Minister also launched the DEFRA funded 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' programme, originally announced in the Agricultural Transition Plan.
- Natural England has also announced proposals for new protected areas across England.
- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) continues to work closely with DEFRA and Natural England and has responded formally to both.
- Each AONB and National Park in England has an allocation from DEFRA to administer the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme for farmers and land managers to provide benefits for nature, climate, people and places.
- The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme requires and enables the AONB Unit to establish a Local Assessment Panel and recruit a Farm Advisor to assist farmers and land managers applying to the programme.
- It is proposed that the Local Assessment Panel is adopted as a Joint Advisory Sub-Committee with at least one Joint Advisory Committee member, augmented by other sector representatives as outlined by DEFRA 'Expectation'.

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Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding the Golden Valley being designated as an AONB, the AONB Manager stated that an annex to the Glover Review included the Herefordshire Marches as well as the Forest of Dean. Natural England has been empowered to take this matter forward. However, it was noted that there was a further list of unfinished AONB designation business to be considered. There are discussions being held to map out the potential areas for National Parks and AONBs.
- Natural England has funding for the designation process. Central Government has announced the 30 by 30 target to designate 30% of the Country by 2030 for nature recovery.

We resolved to:

- (i) welcome the Ministerial Statement of 24th June 2021 outlining the forthcoming response to the Glover Review and the launching of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme;
- (ii) note the accompanying announcement by Natural England and the respective responses by the National Association for AONBs to the Ministerial Statement and Natural England announcement;
- (iii) endorse the establishment of a Local Assessment Panel for the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme, with at least one Joint Advisory Committee member and the recruitment of a Farm Advisor to assist applicants in the Wye Valley AONB.

10. **AONB Funding bids**

We received a report regarding various funding allocation secured by the AONB Unit and to seek endorsement on behalf of the AONB Partnership.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Unit has successfully secured the following funding for projects:
 - Severn Trent Boost for Biodiversity - Brockweir Riverside Invasive Non-Native Species Treatment (BRINNST).
 - NRW Biodiversity & Ecosystems Resilience Funding (BERF).
 - Environment Agency Natural Flood Management (NFM) and Riparian Tree projects.

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- The AONB Unit is leading on a partnership bid to the Nature Networks Fund (NNF) through National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.

We resolved to:

- (i) welcome the various funding allocations secured by the AONB Unit on behalf of the AONB Partnership;
- (ii) endorse the Lower Wye Nature Networks application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the Nature Networks Fund in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.

11. AONB Partnership Study Tour - 17th September 2021

We received a report regarding the proposal to hold an Annual AONB Partnership Study Tour, if Covid-19 restrictions allow.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour was cancelled last year due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.
- It is proposed that, subject to restrictions allowing, the AONB Partnership Tour be held on Friday 17th September 2021.
- The programme will be finalised nearer the time but will focus on using individuals' private vehicles to reach sites and may only be for half a day instead of a full day, depending on logistics.

Following discussion, we resolved that the AONB Manager would make appropriate arrangements for Friday 17th September 2021 within the Covid-19 restrictions which will be as informative as possible due to the circumstances. He will then email the Joint Advisory Committee in due course, as plans are firmed up.

12. Annual Report 2020/21

We received the annual report figures for 2020/21 and noted the delay in the completion of the tabulated achievements for the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The 2020/21 Annual Report figures were outlined in the report.
- There is a delay in finalising the full report tabulating the achievements of the year against the annual Work Programme. This will be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee.

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- The AONB Unit has levered in over £12 for every £1 of local authority contribution during 2020/21.

We welcomed the Annual Report figures and await the finalised Annual Report on AONB achievements for 2020/21.

13. **Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & HCF AONB Fund**

We received a 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 £43,823.25 allocated from the £100,000 offered by Welsh Government for 2021/22, with £56,176.75 remaining.
- This is the 21st year of the SDF and Welsh Government may make some minor modifications to the SDF Grant Guidance. These will be reported on in due course.
- Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) host the Wye Valley AONB Fund for which the 2020/21 Quarter Four balances were £2,916.19 for immediate funding and £54,531.59 in the Endowment Fund.
- Applications are welcome for both sets of funding for 2021/22.

We noted the report.

14. **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 'Landscapes for Life' Conference 2021 is on-line on 7th & 8th July 2021, 'hosted' virtually by the five Devon AONBs with the theme of 'A Climate for Change - Climate Change and Nature Recovery in National Landscapes'.
- The NAAONB have signed a joint Memorandum of Understanding with Natural England and National Parks England.
- The new Chief Executive of the NAAONB will be John Watkins, formerly Head of Landscapes and Outdoor Recreation at Welsh Government.
- The NAAONB Strategic Plan for 2021-2023 has been published.

We noted the report.

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15. AONB updates

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

- AONB Volunteers & Youth Rangers.
- Appointment of a Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer.
- Wye Valley Villages Transport Plan update.
- Lower Wye Green Infrastructure (GI) work (Monmouthshire).
- Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) AONB Office refurbishment.

Having received the report the following points were noted:

- Local Authority members of the Joint Advisory Committee were asked to notify the AONB Manager of any planning applications within their authority that were located within the AONB boundary. This matter could be discussed further at the next Joint Advisory Committee meeting. The AONB Manager stated that planning applications located within the AONB are monitored but welcomed any notifications from members or the public.
- In response to a question raised regarding the AONB unit acquiring a Planning Officer, it was noted that this matter is subject to resources. Currently, the resources are not available to employ a Planning Officer. The AONB Manager has requested to Welsh Government that each AONB should employ a Planning Officer.

We noted the report.

16. Dates of next meetings:

- 2pm Monday 1st November 2021 (Subject to Covid-19 restrictions the meeting will be held at Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford).
- 2pm Monday 7th March 2022 (to be confirmed).

The meeting ended at 4.01 pm.