

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Remote Attendance
Monday, 1st November, 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. Lane

Herefordshire Council

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

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillors: C. McFarling and D. Wheeler

Gloucestershire County Council

County Councillor T. Hale

Town / Parish Community Councils with voting powers

GAPTC – Mr. C. Evers

Herefordshire Association Local Councils – Mr. R. Gething

One Voice Wales – Councillor R. Edwards

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

Gloucestershire County Council – Mr. R. Niblett

Herefordshire Council – Mr. J. Bisset

Also in attendance:

Mr. A. Clay

Mr. A. Karran

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Attendance Monday, 1st November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor M. Feakins, Councillor B. Durkin, Mr. B. Nash, Mr. D. Price, Mr. A. Taylor, Councillor S. Phelps, Councillor T. Forester and Mr. M. Quine

1. Declarations of Interest

None received.

2. Public Question Time:

2.1. Preservation of Rural Beauty proposal to extend the Wye Valley AONB.

A proposal had been received from The Preservation of Rural Beauty Herefordshire and Gloucestershire (PRuB) that the Wye Valley AONB be extended to include the eastern ridge forming the watershed between the River Wye and River Severn from Woolhope to the Forest of Dean.

In doing so it was noted that Natural England would be responsible for identifying and nominating proposed AONBs in discussion with the respective local authorities.

We resolved that:

- (i) the AONB Manager prepares a report for the next meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee with a response to the proposal having discussed it with officers via the Technical Officers' Working Party;
- (ii) representatives of PRuB be invited to attend the next meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee.

2.2. AONB Management Plan - Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services

The following questions had been received from Councillor Forester, Forest of Dean District Council:

1) Are members of the Joint Advisory Committee aware that the Natural Capital model being adopted by the AONB Management Plan would, when combined with the associated ESS (Ecosystems Services) and PES (Payment for Ecosystems Services) mechanisms:

a) Audit our land, water, mineral, biodiversity and energy resources and seek to convert such resources into "marketable" financial assets (referred to as 'Natural Assets') through various "market-based instruments and payments for ecosystems services."

b) Permit financial institutions, hedge / pension funds, private individuals and multinational corporations to purchase, hold and trade our 'Natural Assets' through emerging Natural Capital and 'Carbon' markets?

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Attendance Monday, 1st November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

c) Effectively privatise and commodify by stealth all land within the AONB and Public Forestry Estate by permitting companies and individuals to, for example, own the 'Carbon' contained within our forests (for offsetting, for-profit-trading or tax evasion purposes)?

2) Do the Committee members responsible view this privatisation by proxy as in anyway related to obligations implicit in the AONB's declaration of a Climate Emergency?

3) Do the Committee members responsible consider that there has been adequate public consultation (especially in the Forest of Dean); and that residents (and members) have been fully informed of the implications of such a policy?

We resolved that the AONB Manager prepares a report for the next meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee in response to the questions raised.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 5th July 2021 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

4. AONB Annual report 2020/21

We received a report regarding the annual reports for 2020/21 on the achievements of the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The 2020/21 Annual Report on the Work Programme for the AONB Unit was appended to the report, along with a summary financial report.
- High standards of achievement were maintained by the AONB Unit despite the Coronavirus Pandemic restricting many activities.
- The AONB Unit has levered in over £16 for every £1 of local authority contribution during 2020/21.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The AONB Unit comments on around 1% of planning applications and tends to look at around 10% of them. The remainder of the applications tend to not have a detrimental impact on the AONB.
- The AONB Unit does not have resources to comment on more applications. Neither does it have the capacity to check whether comments made by the AONB Unit have been acted upon with a view to helping to determine the outcome of such applications.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Attendance Monday, 1st November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

- The Wye Valley Society and Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) track and comment upon planning applications located within the AONB.
- Planning Departments of local authorities located within the Wye Valley AONB have a duty and responsibility to have regard to the AONB.
- Town, Parish and Community Councils also have a duty of regard to the AONB are statutory consultees for planning applications.
- The AONB Manager has previously made a presentation on training which could be sent to Town, Parish and Community Councils.
- The AONB Manager would raise the issues of planning application inconsistencies regarding the Planning Inspectorate to the National Association for AONBs.

We welcomed the Annual Report of AONB achievements for 2020/21 and noted the comments made.

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

We received a report regarding the allocations of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Assessment Panel and update on the Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF).

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) delegated by Welsh Government is £100,000 for 2021/22 and is yet to be confirmed for 2022/23.
- The SDF Assessment Panel has allocated £99,138.75 for 2021/22 and £25,000 for 2022/23 to date, subject to funds being made available.
- Negotiations are on-going with some applicants and full project delivery and spend may not be achieved this year leaving up to £5,000 unallocated and a commensurate transfer of grant offer to next year, subject to funds being available from Welsh Government.
- The Joint Advisory Committee had previously endorsed the principle of allocating any remaining SDF at end of year to specific AONB projects that meet the SDF criteria.
- The first of a number of podcasts on successful SDF projects has been produced.
- The Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley AONB Fund latest balances were £966.19 remaining in the immediate impact fund and £58,554.32 in the Endowment Fund. There were no applications in the current round meaning £9,520 is available for grants.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Attendance Monday, 1st November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

- Applications are welcome for both sets of funding, including under the Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grant element.

We resolved to endorse the recent allocations of the SDF for 2021/22 and 2022/23, subject to minor variations and funds being available.

6. AONB 50th Anniversary Programme

We received a report regarding progress with the celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of the Wye Valley being designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1971.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The AONB's 50th Anniversary celebrations during 2021 have been less ambitious than originally planned due to the uncertainties and limitations of the Covid-19 restrictions.
- A consistent campaign of social media 'take-over' posts and regular promotions of 50walks@50 have helped raise the profile of the AONB.
- A repeat of the five yearly AONB Perceptions Survey is planned to benchmark activity against results from 2016 and 2011.
- The Wye Valley AONB Manager will be co-chairing a major on-line conference on 1st December 2021 on 'What is Natural Beauty'.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The perceptions questionnaire will be put onto social media with a view to reaching as wide an audience as possible.
- Details could be sent to each town, parish and community council with a view to the clerks distributing this information to all councillors and via their social media accounts.
- A report on the work undertaken by Youth Rangers would be presented to a future meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee.

We noted the report.

7. Wye Water quality update

We received a report regarding an update on the River Wye water quality situation.

In doing so the following information was noted:

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Attendance Monday, 1st November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

- The Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales provided a joint presentation at the previous meeting on the situation with water quality in the River Wye.
- Through July 2021 the 'Walking With the Wye' pilgrimage took place along the length of the River Wye to raise awareness of the environmental crisis in the Wye.
- RIVERCIDE - George Monbiot's live documentary on the state of the UK's rivers was broadcast on 14th July 2021 further raising the profile of the pollution impacts on the Wye.
- In late July / early August 2021 another severe algal bloom extended down the Wye from Hoarwithy to below Monmouth, smothering most of the Water Crowfoot beds.
- Citizens Science projects monitoring phosphate levels in the Wye and its tributaries have been initiated by Friends of the Upper Wye, Friends of the Lugg, CPRW and Herefordshire CPRW. A Friends of the Lower Wye group has also been formed.
- The Wye Nutrient Management Board met on 27th September 2021 to further debate the issues, including the Wye Phosphate Action Plan being finalised for publication.
- Avara Foods acknowledged at the Nutrient Management Board that they were "part of the problem" in polluting the Wye and so are looking at opportunities to be "part of the solution" through initiatives to remove its chicken manure from the catchment.
- DEFRA have increased funding for Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE) to enhance resources for advice, monitoring and enforcement.
- The AONB Unit continues to manage projects and initiatives including with EA, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Wye & Usk Foundation, to advise farmers in mitigating soil erosion and reducing agricultural run-off into the river.
- The AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes programme may be applicable to farm wetland enhancement schemes upstream of the AONB.
- Lobbying of both governments by public, private and 3rd sector interests continues for adequate resources to reduce phosphate levels across the Wye catchment.
- The Environment Agency has launched a 6 month consultation on the Severn River Basin Management Plan which includes the Wye catchment.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In 2018, regulations came into force regarding the reduction in prevention of agriculture diffuse pollution. The Environment Agency has written to all commercial poultry holdings in the Wye catchment on the England side of the border stating that these regulations will be enforced.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Attendance Monday, 1st November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

- As of 22nd October 2021, a Government consultation document was issued regarding the Severn River Basin Management Plan. It was suggested that the Joint Advisory Committee makes a strong response to the consultation document highlighting the water quality issues in respect of the River Wye and its tributaries.
- An active group of Herefordshire farmers are working with the Wye and Usk foundation with regard to addressing the issue of phosphates in these rivers.
- Monitoring of the water quality within the River Wye is being undertaken.

We noted the report.

8. Monmouthshire Wye Valley Villages Plan

We received a report regarding the completion of the consultation on the Wye Valley Villages Plan for the Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB.

In doing so the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley Villages Travel & Transport Plan project is led by Monmouthshire County Council and a partnership made of representatives from St. Arvans, Devauden, Tintern and Trellech United Community Councils, with local County Councillors and officers from Monmouthshire County Council and the Wye Valley AONB.
- ARUP have been commissioned to prepare a Plan for the main villages in the Welsh part of the Wye Valley AONB to address and provide recommendations on a range of travel and transport issues.
- A 6 week public consultation period was completed on a Stage 2 Report with 260 comments received. ARUP are now assimilating the comments to prepare a Final Report and Action Plan later in November 2021.
- There are funds allocated in the AONB's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) allocation from Welsh Government this financial year for some 'quick win' delivery from the Plan.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Communication between Monmouthshire Highways and Gloucestershire Highways needed to improve with both authorities needing to work closely with parish councils within lower Wye with regard to signage in this area.

We noted the report.

9. NAAONB update

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee Remote Attendance Monday, 1st November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

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 was held on-line in early July 'hosted' by the five Devon AONBs.
- John Watkins has taken over from Howard Davies as NAAONB Chief Executive. As a leaving event, the Wye Valley AONB Unit hosted a walk for Howard and the NAAONB team.
- AONB Lead Officers met on-line to debate the forthcoming Government response to the Glover Landscape Review due later this year.
- The NAAONB will be a signatory to a Global Statement on climate change in Protected Areas for COP26.
- Recruitment is underway for a new NAAONB Wales Development Manager.
- The national AONBs Chairpersons' Conference and AGM for the NAAONB will be held on-line on 18th November 2021.

We noted the report.

10. **AONB progress reports**

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

- a) Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme update.
- b) Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects.
 - i. AONB Office decarbonisation refurbishment.
 - ii. Chapel Hill Road, Tintern.
 - iii. Old Station Tintern decarbonisation & refurbishment.
 - iv. Wyesham riverbank consolidation of Wye Valley Walk.
 - v. Designated Landscapes Wales seminar.
- c) Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks project with Gwent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust: £258,500 awarded by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).
- d) Lower Wye Catchments projects in Monmouthshire & Gloucestershire.
 - i. INNS control – WISP.
 - ii. Cleddon Falls.
- e) AONB Volunteers & Youth Rangers.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Remote Attendance
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Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Signage relating to Cleddon Falls will be completed in the coming weeks. An official opening will be held in due course.

We noted the report.

The Chair allowed the following matter to be raised:

Councillor Yolande Watson asked if members would be willing to share their water course consent forms with her as she was undertaking a piece of work on this matter.

11. Dates of next meetings:

2pm Monday 7th March 2022.

2pm Monday 4th July 2022.

2pm Monday 7th November 2022.

Subject to Covid-19 restrictions the meetings will be held in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

The AONB Manager stated that in February 2022 he will be looking to hold an on-line presentation / meeting instead of holding a Wye Valley Tour due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The meeting ended at 4.05 pm.