

## 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. Nature Recovery Plan***
- c. Undergrounding Powerlines***
- d. Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects***
- e. Natural Flood Management & Riparian Tree work (England only)***
- f. Peatland Restoration – Cleddon Bog SSSI***
- g. Youth Rangers & AONB Volunteers.***

### **a) AONB 50th Anniversary programme**

The AONB's 50th Anniversary celebrations culminated with the 'What is Natural Beauty?' national on-line symposium on 1st December. The event was hosted by the UK's Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA), and co-hosted by Andrew Blake, AONB Manager and Harriet Fraser of The PLACE Collective. Over 100 people attended with a cross-sectorial range of speakers from landscape management and conservation, arts and academia. In Workshop sessions attendees focused on three questions:

Q1: What actions could be taken to better conserve and enhance 'Natural Beauty'?

Q2: In what ways can we broaden access to 'Natural Beauty'?

Q3: What threats are there to 'Natural Beauty'?

The event report is available to download <https://www.cumbria.ac.uk/media/WINB-Report-FINAL-PDF.pdf> and the full recording of the event (excluding the individual breakout workshops) can be viewed on the CNPPA YouTube channel: <https://bit.ly/3H1ljt2>.

Ruth Waycott, AONB Information Officer, has continued to develop the Wye Valley AONB social media 'take-over' posts and regular promotions of 50walks@50. This has raised the profile of the Wye Valley AONB and built AONB 'followers' on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter.

The repeat of the 5 yearly AONB Perceptions Survey has yet to be undertaken. Commissioning has been delayed due to capacity issues in the AONB Unit. However it is still intended and will benchmark activity against results from 2016 and 2011 as well as linking to the 5 Pledges in the AONB Management Plan.

## **b) Nature Recovery Plan**

Nick Critchley, AONB Development Officer, and Ellie Baggett, Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer, have been progressing work with the development of the AONB's Nature Recovery Plan. The plan will be habitat based, focusing on Special Qualities set out in the AONB Management Plan. It will establish priority areas for the creation of and connectivity between woodland, species rich grassland, riparian habitats and orchards. Consideration is also being made for notable and veteran tree enhancements, and peatland, bog and heathland opportunities.

Running in parallel to the Nature Recovery Plan, and also linked to key habitats, 5 species action plans are also in production. These are for the 5 species or assemblages identified by the AONB team and partners in response to the Colchester Declaration pledge to adopt species and reverse their decline. The species are Nobel Chafer beetle in relation to orchard habitats, Woodland butterfly assemblage with special interest in the Wood White and Pearl Bordered Fritillary in relation to woodlands, Water Crowfoot as an indicator for water quality, Bumblebee assemblage with particular focus on Shril Carder, Brown Banded Carder, Redshank Carder and long horned bees in relation to grassland sites, and Hedgehog as a species for public engagement to highlight species decline and what people can do themselves to help reverse decline.

Data gathering has taken place which will be followed shortly by a ground truthing exercise before draft priority areas are drawn up. Once in draft, the Nature Recovery Plan will be consulted upon before being finished and produced. This work will be undertaken and completed by the AONB Nature Recovery Officer and Development Officer throughout 2022. The finished Nature Recovery and Species Action plans will be used to prioritise and target the AONB's work with landowners and partners through available schemes, programmes and funding opportunities.

## **c) Undergrounding Powerlines**

There are currently 4 approved schemes being delivered in the Wye Valley AONB by Western Power Distribution (WPD) teams. These are all at different stages of delivery, but once complete will place approximately 1.6km of cable underground in the AONB. Work is scheduled for completion before the end of the current price review period in 2023. Nick Critchley, AONB Development Officer, had an excellent response to promotion of the scheme with Parish and Community Councils and there is now a long list of schemes to put forward to WPD as and when funding becomes available in the next price review period.

## **d) Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects**

### **i. AONB Office decarbonisation refurbishment**

The AONB Office refurbishment is completed and the AONB team have been settling back into the office in line with the lifting of Covid restrictions. The new meeting room is starting to be used, including by the Wye Valley River Festival CIC as an in-kind contribution. There

are still a few of boxes of files to be sorted and now several boxes of empty lever-arch files to be re-housed.

**ii. Old Station Tintern decarbonisation & refurbishment**

The Planning application is being considered for the new Shower/Toilets pods to upgrade facilities and accessibility to meet current requirements for campers.

Work is underway on upgrade electrical works and the installation of double 10Kw electrical car charger point along with 2 new dedicated car park spaces for EVs. Also 2 new dedicated disabled parking bays are being marked out. On the railway carriage roofs 36 solar panels are being installed and all internal and external lighting is being upgraded to LED. Meanwhile secondary glazing is being installed to the Station building windows and new Site interpretation is also planned.

**iv. Wyesham riverbank consolidation of Wye Valley Walk**

The Lower Wye Projects Officer, Nickie Moore, has been co-ordinating progressing with the investigation for the Wye Valley Walk just downstream from the Duke of Beaufort Bridge at Wyesham. Ecological surveys have been carried out and an assessment of the badgers' sett. Next steps will be finalising the design work and establishing viable costs. It is hoped resources will be found to complete works during 2022/23.

**v. Carbon Neutral Designated Landscapes Organisation**

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority commissioned Aquatera on behalf of Snowdonia National Park Authority; Brecon Beacons National Park Authority; Clwydian and Deeside Valley AONB Partnership; Anglesey AONB Partnership and Wye Valley AONB Partnership to undertake a baseline assessment of the respective organisations and offer guidance on where attempts can be made to achieve a target of Net Zero Carbon emissions by 2030. Having just completed the decarbonisation of the AONB Office, the next highest carbon emitting activity of the AONB Unit appears to travel and transport, including commuting. The final stage of the assessment is yet to take place. AONB staff will appraise opportunities to reduce their carbon footprint and discuss AONB specific priorities and ambitions with the other departments within the Local Authorities and stakeholders to identify realistic opportunities to achieve net zero.

**vi. Designated Landscapes Carbon Footprint**

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority is also leading on a commission for the Welsh National Park Authorities and AONB Partnership to provide a consumption-based assessment of the Greenhouse Gas footprint for each National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This uses the methodology developed with the National Park Authorities in England. It uses national and ONS data on businesses, tourism and land use to build consumption-based as well as more traditional production-based metrics for each Designated Landscape area. The consumption-based emissions reporting can be used to inform local carbon reduction initiatives covering aspects of human consumption that would not have been covered by more traditional production-based carbon accounts.

**vii. Wye Valley AONB Travel & Transport**

The Stage 3 Report of the Wye Valley AONB Villages Plan has been produced in consultation with Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) and the Community Councils of St Arvans, Trellech United, Devauden and Tintern. The development of new village gateway signage is underway as an initial project of the implementation of the Villages Plan.

**vii. Wordsworth Walk / Cleddon Shoots Permissive Path**

Lower Wye Projects Officer, Nickie Moore, has continued supervising the enhancement works for this unique path. Technical Access team, iBEX, have commenced the next phase of work restoring 80 steps in the middle gorge. Further cherry laurel control is also progressing. The private landowner is contributing both time and resources in clearing paths and coppicing undergrowth. Appropriate safety signage has been installed. Meanwhile the next phase of work is being planned which includes the replacement of a foot bridge along the Permissive Path.

**viii Piercefield Walk Permissive Path – part of Wye Valley Walk**

Gwent Wildlife Trust, who manage the Piercefield Woods on behalf of the private owner, have been undertaking path consolidation and management of trees infected by Ash Dieback along the Wye Valley Walk, a Permissive Path through this woodland SSSI.

**e) Natural Flood Management (NFM) & Riparian Tree work (England only)**

These two initiatives are funded by the Environment Agency.

The Wye and Usk Foundation (WUF) have been delivering farm advice in the English part of the AONB, initially through the Water Environment Grant ROAR project, but since December through Environment Agency funding. Ben Nott, the WUF Catchment Advisor, seconded to the AONB team under the ROAR project, has been cold calling farmers offering advice and grants for NFM and riparian habitat management work. Over the winter 11 grant aided projects are being taken forward.

The Riparian Tree management project is a partnership between the Wye Valley AONB Partnership and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, delivering project work both in the AONB and River Lugg catchment. Herefordshire Wildlife Trust have delivered 3 on farm riparian habitat management schemes along the Lugg.

The ROAR project ended in December along with Ben Nott's secondment to the AONB team, however he is being retained as a WUF Catchment Advisor and will continue to work in the and around the AONB, as resources allow.

**f) Peatland Restoration – Cleddon Bog SSSI**

The Peatland Restoration funding from Natural Resources Wales for 2021/22 was unexpected and finally approved in late October 2021. The late standing start and short term nature of the funding was always a concern. However, the main partners, NRW, Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Wye Valley AONB Unit were keen to grasp the opportunity to re-institute management of Cleddon Bog SSSI. There has been good collaborative working between the partners and sound progress has been made. The Commoners have been engaged, the draft Management Plan dusted off and the necessary SSSI consent secured. Most of the initially proposed capital work has not been able to be progressed in the tight timeframe but the foundation has been laid for future delivery of peatland restoration work on Cleddon Bog SSSI.

**g) AONB Volunteers & AONB Youth Rangers**

Sadly, Sarah Sawyer, AONB Community Links Officer, left the AONB Unit in December. While recruitment for her replacement is underway it has not been possible to maintain an activity

programme for the AONB Volunteers and AONB Youth Rangers. The last outing of the Youth Rangers was in late November; Ellie Baggett, Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer, gave an excellent talk on birds of the Wye Valley and the Angiddy Valley to the Youth Rangers who then built Nest box.

