

## **MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held  
at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, High Street, Coleford,  
GL16 8HG on Monday, 4th July, 2022 at 2.00 pm**

**PRESENT:** County Councillor: A. Webb (Chair)

### **Elected Members (with voting powers)**

#### **Monmouthshire County Council**

County Councillors: E. Bryn and D. Rooke

#### **Herefordshire Council**

Councillor: 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 – Mr. R. Gething

### **Co-opted Members (with voting powers)**

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

### **Co-opted Members (without voting powers)**

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

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

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### **APOLOGIES:**

County Councillor S. Garratt, Councillor B. Durkin, Councillor J. Hardwick, Councillor P. Symonds, Councillor T. Hale, Mr. B. Nash and Mr. R. Niblett

#### **1. Election of Chair**

We elected County Councillor A. Webb as Chair.

#### **2. Appointment of Vice-Chair**

We appointed Councillor C. McFarling as Vice-Chair.

#### **3. Introduction and New Members**

The Chair invited the Joint Advisory Committee members to introduce themselves before welcoming County Councillors Emma Bryn and Dale Rooke to their first meeting of the Committee.

#### **4. Declarations of Interest**

None received.

#### **5. Public Question Time**

No questions from the public had been received.

#### **6. Confirmation of Minutes**

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

In doing so, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that the AONB Perceptions survey will be undertaken later this year, surveying partners and key stakeholders.

#### **7. Venue and Format of the Joint Advisory Committee Meetings**

We received a report regarding the venue and format of future meetings of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is established jointly under a formal Agreement between the four constituent local authorities.
- The Agreement states that the JAC Clerk is Monmouthshire County Council and JAC meetings are held in Coleford unless or until the Committee decides to make other arrangements.

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- Meetings fall under the jurisdiction of the law of the land in which they are held.
- Post-Covid-19, Council meetings held in England are required to meet face to face, whereas in Wales Councils must give participants the option of attending remotely.
- The English local authorities tend to only have the technology installed for hybrid meetings in small meeting rooms.
- Monmouthshire County Council has the technology for hosting hybrid Full Council meetings at County Hall, Usk.
- Several other AONB Partnerships in England hold hybrid meetings where the technology exists, often purchased by the AONB Partnership.
- The AONB Unit could investigate the purchase, or hire, of bespoke equipment for hybrid JAC and other meetings as necessary, alternatively the JAC could meet in Usk.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Herefordshire Council holds hybrid meetings in one of its committee rooms which could be investigated as an option to host future JAC meetings.
- The AONB Manager and Councillor C. McFarling could investigate the cost of installing a hybrid system within the Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Council Chamber with the Council's Democratic Services Department.
- The Forest of Dean District Council Offices are centrally located which helps to minimise the carbon footprint of meetings.
- Monmouthshire County Council already has a hybrid system in place at its offices in Usk which could be used as a potential venue, going forward. However, concern was expressed regarding the distances some JAC members would have to travel to attend a meeting in Usk.
- Concern was expressed that due to the poor internet connectivity in some areas within the AONB, attending meetings virtually can be a challenge on occasions.

We resolved that:

- (i) the next meeting of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee be held in person at the Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford;
- (ii) the AONB Manager investigates the purchase, or hire, of bespoke equipment for a hybrid Joint Advisory Committee and presents a report to the next meeting in November 2022 regarding this matter.

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### **8. AONB Unit 2022/23 Work programme report**

We received a report regarding the finalised AONB Unit work programme for this financial year, following confirmation of funding from DEFRA, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Welsh Government.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The proposed Wye Valley AONB Unit Work Programme for 2022/2023 was presented in draft and endorsed at the last Joint Advisory Committee meeting, due to budgets for the AONB not having been confirmed.
- New AONB core funding allocations have been offered by DEFRA and Welsh Government for 2022-2025 and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for 2022-2024. Welsh Government has also confirmed allocations for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme for 2022-2025.
- Various project funding bids have also been confirmed covering this financial year.
- The new Community Links Officer and the Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer have been recruited and both start in the coming weeks.
- The medium term funding has also enabled consolidation of the Lower Wye Projects Officer and Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer posts. The shared AONB Planning Officer with the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership is also being proceeded. This will take the AONB Unit up to 7.3 full time equivalent (FTE) staff.
- The finalised Wye Valley AONB Unit Work Programme for 2022/2023 includes an estimated percentage of each staff member's time on each work programme activity. Activities are also assessed for impacts of any potential on-going implications from Covid-19.
- The AONB Unit operating budget for 2022/23 is £342,540 with an additional £1.1million of project funding, delegated grants and leveraged match funding during the year.
- This enables an ambitious work programme focused on the delivery of the AONB Management Plan and the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The names / contact details of the AONB Unit staff would be made available to JAC members.

The Wye Valley AONB website should outline the objectives of the AONB Management Plan. The citizen's charter could be on a separate webpage, in a simpler format, away from the AONB Management Plan.

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- The AONB Unit should produce a more regular and accessible newsletter outlining achievements and key information.
- The AONB Development Officer's role, along with the AONB Manager, is to develop projects and undertake fundraising. However, due to staff shortages in recent months the AONB Unit has been under resourced. It is anticipated that the AONB Unit will be fully resourced again by the autumn of 2022.
- There are several undergrounding schemes currently with Western Power waiting to be progressed. An update report will be brought to the Committee at the next meeting in November 2022.
- The Joint Advisory Committee undertakes the scrutiny role for the AONB Unit over and above the Technical Officers' Working Party and the AONB Steering Group. However, it is also the role of each of the local authorities within the AONB to address this matter via their own scrutiny processes.
- A governance review of the AONB processes had been undertaken in 2018 with no significant deficiencies having been identified.
- The AONB Manager, with the Malvern Hills AONB Manager, is looking to appoint a joint Planning Officer with a view to assessing planning applications that impact both AONBs.

We resolved to endorse the finalised Wye Valley AONB Unit Work Programme for 2022/2023.

### **9. Annual report 2021/22**

We received an update regarding the annual report figures for 2021/22 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:

- 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 (JAC).
- The AONB Unit has levered in over £16 for every £1 of local authority contribution during 2021/22.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding Farming in Protected Landscapes, it was noted that AONB and National Parks representatives sit on DEFRA working groups.

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- In Wales, the AONB Manager is involved in proposals for the Sustainable Farming Scheme which is scheduled to be launched in July 2022 at the Royal Welsh Show.

We welcomed the Annual Report figures and await the finalised Annual Report on AONB achievements for 2021/22.

### **10. AONB Partnership Study Tour 2022**

We received a report regarding the outline programme for the Annual AONB Partnership Study Tour.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour has not been held since 2019.
- This year the intention is to revive the Tour, to be held on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2022.
- The programme is still being finalised but will focus predominantly on projects and management issues in the part of the AONB around Ross-on-Wye and south Herefordshire.
- Initial invitations for expressions of interest to attend will be despatched shortly.
- Invitations could be extended to representatives from our neighbouring Designated Landscapes and other appropriate partner organisations in the interest of sharing good practice and broadening collaboration.

Having received the report it was noted that it might be necessary to change the date of the Tour to the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

We resolved:

- (i) to note the date of Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2022 for the Study Tour and encouraged a good attendance, at £20 each;
- (ii) to invite representatives from our neighbouring Shropshire Hills and Malvern Hills AONB Partnerships and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and other appropriate partners.

### **11. AONB Climate Action report**

We received a report regarding the Statement of Commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

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- Climate change is a major challenge for society and the environment and a key priority for the conservation and enhancement of our National Landscapes.
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation requires collaborative action, working with partners, stakeholders, land managers and local communities to multiply the capacity and impact of individual and collective activity.
- AONB teams and partnerships must now more than ever confirm their leading role and ambition in addressing this challenge.
- AONB staff from across the country, supported by the National Association for AONBs, have created a collaborative Climate Action Framework and Toolkit with a programme of five workstreams.
- The Wye Valley AONB Unit has undertaken a carbon audit of operations with a plan of action to help achieve the target of Net Zero Carbon emissions by 2030.
- An audit of the organic carbon stocks and stores across the whole AONB as a landscape has estimated that there may be up to 5 million tonnes of carbon stored in the AONB.
- A consumption-based assessment has been conducted on the Greenhouse Gas footprint of residents, businesses, tourism and land use in the AONB.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Issues regarding transport, energy and food need to be addressed. The Forest of Dean District Council's Climate Action Plan is available as guidance for the AONB unit.
- The latest census data indicates an increase in the number of people aged over 65 in the area which will have an impact on the Climate Action Plan.

We resolved:

- (i) to endorse the signing of the Statement of Commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action;
- (ii) to welcome the Carbon Audits of the Wye Valley AONB Unit and wider landscape and the development of actions to achieve the target of Net Zero Carbon emissions.

#### **12. Reviews of Designated Landscapes update**

We received a report regarding the on-going progress following the respective Reviews of Designated Landscapes in Wales and England.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

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- The Welsh AONB lead officers continue to meet with Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, the National Association for AONBs and the Welsh National Parks working together as Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales.
- Welsh Government and DEFRA have committed to three year core funding agreements for AONBs with additional or proposed capital funding programmes.
- DEFRA is assimilating the results of the public consultation on the Government Response to the Landscapes Review, with further announcements and outcomes anticipated.
- Natural England is progressing work on the All England Strategic Landscape Mapping Assessment Tool and evaluating the Yorkshire Wolds for potential AONB designation.
- Welsh Government is undertaking a deep dive focussing on how Wales can implement the target to restore 30% of land and sea by 2030 (known as '30 by 30') including convening a Designated Landscapes Expert Subgroup.
- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) continues to liaise and co-ordinate collaboration with both governments and key stakeholders over progressing the agenda for AONBs.

We noted the report.

### **13. Tintern Wireworks Bridge refurbishment**

We received a report regarding the closure of the Tintern Wireworks Bridge for refurbishment.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wireworks Bridge at Tintern is one of the three remaining former railway bridges spanning the River Wye in the AONB. It provides a strategic crossing point for recreational users, particularly walkers and cyclists using the recently opened Wye Valley Greenway.
- Gloucestershire County Council leads on repairs and maintenance under shared ownership with Monmouthshire County Council.
- The bridge is in poor condition and in need of significant repairs. Contractors have been commissioned to undertake these repairs.
- The bridge will be closed from mid-July 2022 until Spring 2023.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:



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- In response to a question regarding the Duke of Beaufort Bridge, Wyesham, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that bids for lottery funding had been submitted in previous years to upgrade Lydbrook and Redbrook bridges. However, these had been unsuccessful. Bids for funding will continue to be submitted. It was noted that the Beaufort bridge was not in the AONB and was not in public ownership.
- A pedestrian & cycleway footbridge across the River Wye at Monmouth was proposed. However, it was noted that funding is currently unavailable to accommodate such a scheme.
- There was a need for Active travel networks and funding to join up between the Welsh and English side to enable some cross-border solutions.
- Forest of Dean District Council is investigating options to build a bridge for cyclists and pedestrians between Beachley Point and Chepstow.
- Matthew Lewis, Monmouthshire County Council's Environment and Culture Manager would liaise with Monmouthshire County Council's Highways Department regarding the current condition of the Wye Bridge.

We noted the report.

#### 14. Wye Valley River Festival 2022 update

We received a report regarding the success of the Wye Valley River Festival held between the 27th May and 5th June 2022, supported by the Wye Valley AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley River Festival 2022 ran from 27<sup>th</sup> May - 5<sup>th</sup> June 2022, organised by the Wye Valley River Festival Community Interest Company (CIC).
- The Wye Valley River Festival CIC received funding from Arts Council England (ACE), Community Renewal Fund UK, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), Welsh Government Major Events - Festival Growth Fund, Arts Council of Wales (ACW), Forestry England and in-kind support from Cadw.
- The Festival on the theme of HUMAN⇌NATURE was a great success with a range of bespoke outdoor arts events and activities with some augmented local Platinum Jubilee celebrations.
- Further events are planned, including in Tintern Abbey 21<sup>st</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2022.
- Meanwhile, a full evaluation of the Festival will be available later in the year. Then the CIC will begin contemplating the next Wye Valley River Festival.

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On behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee, the Chair asked the AONB Manager to pass on the Committee's best wishes to the CIC for organising a successful festival.

We noted the report.

#### 15. **AONB & Partner progress reports and updates**

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

- AONB Species Action Plans.
- Wye Invasive Species Programme (WISP).
- Wye Valley AONB Villages signage.
- Farming in Protected Landscapes.
- Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & and Herefordshire Community Foundation Wye Valley AONB Fund.
- Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects.
- National Association for AONBs Conference.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Wye Valley AONB Villages signage production is anticipated to be installed this summer. Signage is only on the Welsh side of the border being funded via Welsh Government. DEFRA is being encouraged to provide funding on the English side. It was noted that communities wanted to recognise the AONB.
- The re-opening of dismantled railways within the AONB should be encouraged.

We noted the report.

#### 16. **Dates of next meetings:**

Monday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at 2.00pm – The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at 2.00pm.

The AONB Manager would present a report to the November 2022 meeting for discussion regarding holding a Wye Valley AONB Partnership Winter Seminar.

The AONB Manager would provide Members with an update on the state of the River Wye via newsletter.

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**The meeting ended at 4.29 pm.**