

## **AONB UNIT WORK PROGRAMME 2023/2024**

### ***Purpose***

To seek members' approval for the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit during the forthcoming financial year, under the current funding agreements with DEFRA, NRW and Welsh Government.

### ***Recommendations***

That the JAC endorses the AONB Unit Work Programme for 2023/2024

### ***Key Issues***

- The attached table sets out the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit in the form of the Work Programme 2023/2024.
- During the year it is expected that the AONB Unit will remain with 8.4 FTE posts although a partnership project with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust may enable the secondment of a Farm Advisor to work with the AONB Unit.
- Priorities include the on-going development of the AONB Nature Recovery Plan and Species Action Plans; promotion and delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme (in England); the distribution and administration of grants through the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Herefordshire Community Foundation AONB Fund; the conclusion of the Lower Wye Nature Networks Fund project; the delivery of the second year of projects funded through the 3-year tranche of Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme; including ongoing control of Invasive Non-Native Species, support for Village Halls and enhancements to the Wye Valley Walk; being a co-host for the National AONB Conference and continuing a range of existing activities and projects; while retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.
- The AONB Unit core budget for 2023/4 presented to the AONB Steering Group is £361,000 with additional funding programmes, grants and match funding anticipated to exceed £710,000 levered into the AONB during the year.

### ***Reasons***

This will be the second year of three year funding agreements for the Wye Valley AONB Unit from both DEFRA and Welsh Government and the second of two year funding from Natural Resources Wales (NRW). This relative stability enables the AONB Unit to plan ahead and

consolidate team capacity. This is in contrast to the two previous years which saw successive one year funding agreements of varying rates, often with late approval, causing significant uncertainty for AONB staff and the development of longer term projects.

### ***Implications***

The AONB core budget for 2023-24 has been estimated at £361,000 based on a current flat-line budget. This is augmented by the Farming in Protected Landscapes and Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places programmes (in England and Wales respectively) and the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) which between them also lever in varying levels of match funding into the AONB. Various partnership projects also substantially increase the capacity and reach of the AONB Partnership, through the development and delivery of new initiatives and funding bids to further the implementation of the AONB Management Plan.

The Work Programme incorporates this range of externally funded projects, grants and match funding initiatives which add value to the core AONB activities. The anticipated leverage of investment and expenditure is anticipated to exceed £710,000 through the year. This will take the turnover of the AONB Unit Business Plan to over £1.7million.