

AONB PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL STUDY TOUR

Purpose

To endorse the date and outline programme for the Annual AONB Partnership Study Tour.

Recommendations

That the JAC

A. Note the date of Friday 22nd September 2023 for the Study Tour and encourage a good attendance.

B. Invite representatives from our neighbouring Shropshire Hills and Malvern Hills AONB Partnerships and the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority and other appropriate partners.

Key Issues

- This year the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour will be held on Friday 22nd September.
- The programme is still being finalised but will focus predominantly on achievements and management issues relating to the Lottery funded Lower Wye Nature Networks Project in the Monmouthshire part of the AONB.
- Initial invitations for expressions of interest to attend will be sent out 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.

Reasons

The Annual Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour is hosted by the JAC and has always had a good reputation as both an information exchange and a networking opportunity, with good attendance from across the wider AONB Partnership. The invitation to attend the Tour is extended to all members of the Joint Advisory Committee, to senior officers and County and District Councillors whose wards fall within the Wye Valley AONB and all Town/Parish/Community Councils that cover the AONB. It is thus a key tool in the transfer of information to the wider partners and interested parties in and around the AONB. The annual AONB Partnership Tour is traditionally held on one of the last Fridays in September.

Implications

The date of 22nd September is proposed for the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour because there appears to be minimal conflict with council meetings in the four constituent local authorities. In the interests of wider collaboration invitations will be made to other appropriate partner organisations and neighbouring Designated Landscapes; including the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, the Malvern Hills AONB and Shropshire Hills AONB Partnerships, the National Association for AONBs, Welsh Government's Climate Change and Rural Affairs Group and DEFRA's Landscape & Access Unit. In most recent years the Tour comprised of 2 mini-buses, driven by AONB staff, and there is the capacity to provide a 3rd mini-bus.

The programme for the Tour is still being finalised, but will include visiting various sites that have benefited from Lottery funding through the Lower Wye Nature Networks Project, an AONB initiative in collaboration with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust in the Monmouthshire part of the AONB. As the programme is finalised there may be other issues or projects in the vicinity that the Tour might visit, such as the Dôl-Wen One Planet Development.

The event reaches a wide audience of AONB partners and interested parties and always proves to be very popular and informative for those who attend. Lunch and transport will be included.

Background

The 2022 AONB Partnership Tour was attended by 33 people with a good spread of representation from throughout the AONB even though the Tour was focused around Ross-on-Wye, Brampton Abbots, Lydbrook & Welsh Bicknor in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire in the AONB. The Tour visited a range of sites looking at land-use and land management around various AONB projects and initiatives along with regenerative farming and recreation, including variously football, fishing and hostel accommodation.

Tours were not held in 2020 nor 2021 due to the coronavirus restrictions.

In 2019 the Tour focused predominantly on the Monmouthshire part of the AONB. The 2018 Tour looked at a selection of projects and issues in the Herefordshire part of the AONB north of Ross-on-Wye. The 2017 Tour also looked at a number of projects and issues between Ross and Lydbrook. The 2016 Tour visited sites in and around Tintern.