

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, 3rd July, 2023 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

Councillors: E. O'Driscoll, B. Durkin and S. Cole

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

One Voice Wales – Ms. R. Edwards

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire – Mr. A. Thomas

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire – Mr. B. Nash

National Farmers Union – Mr. M. Price

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society – Mr. C. Barron

Local Tourism Sector – Ms. R. Clay

National Farmers Union Wales – Mr. D. Price

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust - Dr. J. Hynes

Technical Advice Officers

Wye Valley AONB Manager – Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. M. Lewis

Monmouthshire County Council – Mr. R. Williams

AONB Planning Officer – Mr. J. Bailey

AONB Business Support Assistant – Mrs. Juliana Foster

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APOLOGIES:

County Councillor S. Garratt, Councillor G. Biggs, Councillor T. Hale, Mr. R. Hesketh, Mr. R. Niblett and Ms. E. Whitehouse.

1. Election of Chair

We elected County Councillor Ann Webb as Chair.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

We appointed Councillor Chris McFarling as Vice-Chair.

3. Introductions & New Members

The Chair welcomed the new Committee Members to the meeting.

4. Declarations of Interest

Councillor D. Wheeler declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as he is the Chair of Forest of Dean District Council's Planning Committee.

Councillor C. McFarling declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 8 – Planning Guidance & AONB Position Statements as he lives within the AONB.

5. Public Questions

None received.

6. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 6th March 2023 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

In doing so, the AONB Manager informed the Committee that there were two vacant positions on the Joint Advisory Committee. However, it was intended to fill these positions in time for the next meeting.

7. River Wye update

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

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Natural England recently updated the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition assessment for the River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) from

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'unfavourable recovering' to 'unfavourable declining' due to a decline in key wildlife species.

- There remains widespread concern about high nutrient and pollution levels in the Wye catchment. The main excess nutrient that is causing concern is phosphate.
- With the recent hot weather, Environment Agency (EA) monitoring equipment (sondes) located along the river Wye have shown water temperatures that can be injurious and potentially lethal to salmon.
- There has recently been a bloom of brown algae in the River Wye in Herefordshire.
- Environment Secretary Thérèse Coffey met local farmers, councillors, environmental groups, MPs and Welsh Government Members in Hereford in late May 2023 to discuss actions to improve the state of the River Wye.
- The Wye Catchment Partnership is meeting on 4th July 2023 and will investigate opportunities for a Landscape Recovery bid for the River Wye.
- A Swansea University PhD student will be on placement with the AONB Unit for five weeks in late summer researching their thesis 'Water as a contested space - Improving the quality of our rivers'.
- The AONB Unit continues to manage partnership projects and collaborative initiatives including through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and the Wye Invasive Species Programme, to support farmers and land-managers in and around the AONB.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding whether the National Government is providing emergency funding to address the decline in the river Wye, it was noted that this matter would be raised at the Wye Catchment Partnership meeting on 4th July 2023.
- Local people are concerned at the lack of action being undertaken by National Government to improve the condition of the river Wye. A committed programme of work is required over the next ten years to address this matter.
- Parish Councils are concerned regarding the quality of the drinking water coming from the river Wye following treatment. It was considered that the Environment Agency and Ofwat should be ensuring that Severn Trent Water is providing high quality drinking water from the river Wye.
- Forest of Dean District Council Cabinet will contact Severn Trent Water regarding the quality of the drinking water from the river Wye.

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- In response to a question raised, it was noted that two Herefordshire Council representatives will be attending the Wye Catchment Partnership meeting on 4th July 2023.
- The Committee was aware of the limitations in the Landscape Recovery bid. However, this year's bid will focus on a workable area within the catchment.
- The PHD student will be on placement with the AONB unit for five weeks in the summer. The Committee looks forward to seeing the outcome of the study in due course.

We resolved:

- (i) to support a proposed Landscape Recovery bid for the River Wye by the Wye Catchment Partnership.
- (ii) to welcome the PhD placement with the AONB Unit on 'Water as a contested space - Improving the quality of our rivers'.

8. Planning Guidance & AONB Position Statements

We received a report regarding Planning Guidance and Position Statements which intends to establish the position of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership on key issues affecting the area, helping guide the Partnership and relevant planning bodies and decision-making bodies to articulate how the AONB designation should be protected, conserved and enhanced.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Currently, the AONB Partnership does not have Position Statements. Without them, there can be unnecessary pressure to accommodate unnecessary development.
- Position Statements provide further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to the specific Wye Valley AONB Management Plan Strategic Objectives and associated issues.
- The draft 'Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting' Position Statement advises housing development to be based on robust evidence of need arising from within the Protected Landscape. Currently, assessment of housing need and housing requirements are based on local authority boundaries, not the AONB boundary. This could be avoided if 'housing need' and 'housing requirements' are clearly differentiated.
- The draft Landscape-led Position Statement advises that development within the Wye Valley AONB and, where relevant, in its setting, should be 'landscape-led'. Ideally, there should not have to be a binary choice between conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB and planning for and permitting new development. The aspiration should be to deliver new development

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in a way that is compatible with and positively contributes to the AONB as a nationally designated protected landscape.

- The draft Position Statements, if endorsed, will go out to formal consultation before being brought to the Joint Advisory Committee for further consideration and final sign off.
- It is intended that guidance and associated Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies be presented at a future Joint Advisory Committee meeting. The guidance documents will aim to promote good practice and assist those proposing new development in the AONB and its setting.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The Planning Guidance and Position Statements tighten up the planning framework in the AONB.
- A case should be made for equal standing with the Local Plan.
- Recommendation 5.7.7 – ‘at least 50% affordable housing in market housing developments’ – This is in line with other AONBs.
- There was a need to reduce the number of second homes in the AONB.
- This document is in draft form. A formal consultation process with all elected members within the AONB will be undertaken in early August 2023.

We resolved:

- (i) to endorse the ‘Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting’ Position Statement, and its associated Appendices, as a consultation draft;
- (ii) to endorse the ‘Landscape-led Development’ Position Statement, and its associated Appendices, as a consultation draft;
- (iii) to agree that if future amendments are required, as necessary, that these can be made by Wye Valley AONB Unit staff, in consultation with the Wye Valley AONB Manager, unless materially significant, in which case they will be brought to the Joint Advisory Committee for further consideration and final approval;
- (iv) to agree a formal review date of both Position Statements to take place every five years unless otherwise amended.

9. National Association for AONBs & National Landscapes re-branding

We received a report regarding the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB), including the re-branding of AONBs to National Landscapes and the National AONB Conference in Bath on 5th-7th September 2023.

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In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) is leading on the rebranding of AONBs to National Landscapes, to be implemented later this year.
- The title National Landscape does not remove or replace the legal definition of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in law but is a simpler common name without a complicated acronym.
- The NAAONB will rename as the National Landscapes Association.
- A suite of complementary logos for all AONBs / National Landscapes are being designed and will be presented to the next Joint Advisory Committee in November 2023 for adoption.
- The National AONB Conference will be on 5th - 7th September 2023, with the focus on 'Invested and Investing in Landscape – who, why, how'.
- The Conference is at Bath University with field trips to the co-hosting AONBs of Cotswolds, Cranborne Chase, Mendip Hills, North Wessex Downs, Quantock Hills and Wye Valley on 6th September 2023.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Some Committee Members expressed concern that the rebranding of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be known as National landscapes would lead to a diminution of the AONB.
- Other Committee Members considered that the change in name would provide a form of national identity to the AONB.

It was agreed to consider the two recommendations of the report separately.

Recommendation A:

It was proposed and seconded that recommendation A be amended as follows:

- That the Joint Advisory Committee does not endorse the proposal to rebrand Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be known as National landscapes.

Upon being put to the vote, the following votes were recorded:

In favour of the proposal	-	11
Against the proposal	-	2

We resolved that the Joint Advisory Committee does not endorse the proposal to rebrand Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be known as National landscapes.

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Recommendation B:

We resolved to encourage AONB partners to attend the National AONB Conference at Bath University on 5th – 7th September 2023.

10. Grants update - FiPL, SDF & HCF AONB Fund

We received a report regarding the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the Wye Valley AONB Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF).

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- DEFRA has provided a revised and increased allocation for the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme in England of £339,063 for 2023/24 and £362,384 for 2024/25.
- Currently FiPL grants & payments for 2023/24 total £239,552 with £99,510 remaining. For 2024/5, which is the last year of the programme, £85,972 has already been allocated.
- The AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer, Anna Stankiewicz, is able to assist farmers and land managers applying to the FiPL programme.
- The allocation of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) currently has £63,108 allocated from the £100,000 offered by Welsh Government for 2023/24, with £100,000 also available for 2024/25.
- The AONB Community Links Officer, Lucinda James, is able to assist organisations, community groups and individuals applying for the SDF.
- Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) hosts the Wye Valley AONB Fund, which currently has a balance of £64,500.
- Applications are welcome for all three sets of funding for 2023/24 and 2024/25.

We resolved to endorse the allocations of grants under the FiPL programme, SDF and HCF AONB Fund to date for 2023/24 and encouraged the sound uptake of the remaining funds.

11. AONB Partnership Study Tour 2023 - Lower Wye Nature Networks project

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

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In doing so, the following information was noted:

- This year the Wye Valley AONB Partnership Tour will be held on Friday 22nd September 2023.
- 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 dispatched in due course.
- 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.

We resolved:

- (i) to note the date of Friday 22nd September 2023 for the Study Tour and encourage a good attendance.
- (ii) to invite representatives from our neighbouring Shropshire Hills and Malvern Hills AONB Partnerships, the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority and other appropriate partners.

12. Review of Designated Landscapes in England & Wales

We received a report regarding progress with the respective Reviews of Designated Landscapes in England and Wales.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- DEFRA has yet to publish the Ministerial response on the consultation to the Landscape Review, which will be influenced by the finalised Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.
- Progress is being made on establishing the National Landscapes, Parks & Trails Partnership, between the NAAONB, National Parks England, National Trail UK and Natural England, to be known as the Protected Landscapes Partnership.
- Ministerial Responsibility for AONBs in Wales has moved back to the Climate Change portfolio, under Julie James MS.
- The Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) is co-ordinating a range of activities and projects across the 8 Designated Landscapes in Wales.

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- AONB Lead Officers in Wales are in the process of meeting with Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to review future funding options.
- 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. **Partner and AONB Unit progress reports and updates**

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

- Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects.
- Cleddon Bog & NRW Peatland funding.
- AONB Species Action Plans.
- Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project.
- Integrated Recreational Access Strategy - Monmouthshire.
- INNS & WISP Gloucestershire CPRE Award.
- Access For All.
- Youth Rangers.
- Offa's Dyke Collaboratory.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The AONB Manager informed the Committee that the AONB Unit would be content to receive telephone calls / emails from the public regarding Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) in the AONB, such as Japanese Knotweed, with a view to providing the appropriate treatment to deal with these invasive species.
- The Species Action Plan for Hedgehogs is in the final development phase. Dylan Allman and his Hedgehog Aware campaign has been working with local suppliers of gardening equipment with a view to encouraging people to be more aware of hedgehogs. He has received a modest SDF grant to help support his conservation efforts.
- The Integrated Recreational Access Strategy and Action Plan is funded via Welsh Government. Therefore, can only focus on the Monmouthshire area at present.

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We noted the report.

14. Date of next Meeting

Monday 6th November 2023 at 2.00pm at the Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford.

Before closing the meeting, the Chair informed the Joint Advisory Committee that this would be Richard Gething's last meeting as the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils representative. Richard has been a member of the Joint Advisory Committee since 1997. On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Richard for his contributions over the years and wished him well in the future.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm.