

ANNUAL REPORT

Purpose

To present the annual reports for 2022/23 on the achievements of the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

Recommendations

That the JAC welcome the Annual Report of AONB achievements for 2022/23

Key Issues

- The 2022/23 Annual Report on the Work Programme for the AONB Unit is appended, along with the summary financial report.
- High levels of achievement were maintained by the AONB Unit despite the challenges and on-going impacts of Covid-19 restricting many activities and some reduced capacity due to staffing issues.
- The AONB Unit has levered in nearly £22 for every £1 of local authority contribution during 2022/23.

Reasons

The Annual Work Programme Report for the AONB Unit is usually presented to the July JAC. However the Report was delayed due to work pressures and staff shortages. The impacts of Covid-19 have continued to affected many aspects of life over the past year.

Implications

The AONB Unit Work Programme Plan was risk assessed in relation to Covid-19 restrictions and reviewed by the AONB Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP). AONB staff developed a hybrid working systems with several staff predominantly returning to the office but also more flexibly 'Working from Home' as needs required. This will also have helped reduce the AONB Unit's carbon footprint, along with the Office refurbishment and decarbonisation. Extensive use of Microsoft Teams has also contributed to office efficiency, but hopefully not at the expense of networking and building stakeholder relationships. Site works and commissioning contractors on the ground was easier without Covid lockdowns. Staff capacity was increased through the successful recruitment of the FiPL Officer and the (shared) AONB Planning Officer, however the Finance & Administration Officer then put in their notice at the end of the year, which has impacted on subsequent reporting.

The overall turnover of the AONB Unit increased in 2022/23, mostly accounted for by the income and expenditure of the DEFRA Farming in Protected Landscape programme and the Partnership projects such as the Lower Wye Nature Networks Lottery funded project. Total turnover in 2022/23 was £1,073,021. The leverage of the AONB Partnership means that for every £1 of local authority contribution, the AONB Unit brought in £21.80.