

PLANNING GUIDANCE AND POSITION STATEMENTS

Purpose

To formally endorse two Position Statements, which intend to establish the position of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership on key issues affecting the area, helping guide the Partnership and relevant plan-making and decision-making bodies to articulate how the AONB designation should be protected, conserved and enhanced. To be made aware of intended upcoming position statements, which seek to aid all interested parties to uphold and deliver the vision and priorities contained within the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan.

Recommendations

That the JAC:

- a) Note the public consultation undertaken by Wye Valley AONB Unit Staff on the 'Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting' Position Statement and 'Landscape-led' Position Statement, which took place between 4th August and 29th September 2023;
- b) Discuss, amend (if necessary) and formally endorse the 'Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting' Position Statement, and its associated Appendices; and
- c) Discuss, amend (if necessary) and formally endorse the 'Landscape-led Development' Position Statement, and its associated Appendices.
- d) Note that Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies intend to be presented at a future JAC meeting.

Key Issues

- Currently, the AONB Partnership does not have Position Statements. Position Statements provide further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to the specific Wye Valley AONB Management Plan Strategic Objectives and associated issues.
- The '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 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 in a way that is compatible with and positively contributes to the AONB as a nationally designated protected landscape.
- The Position Statements have had formal public consultation between 4th August and 29th September 2023 (inclusive), following which comments submitted have been considered and amendments made, with the revised version being brought to the JAC for endorsement
- Shared experience from the similar Position Statements for the Malvern Hills AONB has helped inform, revise and strengthen both sets of Position Statements.
- It is intended that guidance and associated Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies for the Wye Valley AONB will be prepared and presented at a future JAC meeting. These will aim to promote good practice and assist those proposing new development in the AONB and its setting.

Reasons

Position Statements establish the position of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership on key issues affecting the area, helping guide the Partnership and relevant plan-making and decision-making bodies to articulate how the AONB designation can be protected, conserved and enhanced. They provide further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to the specific Management Plan Strategic Objectives and associated issues. They do not create new policies. Adoption of Position Statements has become increasingly commonplace across Nationally Protected Landscapes, including the Cotswolds National Landscape and Malvern Hills AONB.

Implications

Once the position statements have been endorsed, the Position Statements will thereafter be referred to by the AONB Planning Officer in consultation responses to development management applications, as well as Strategic Planning consultation responses. Consideration should be given to how the AONB Partnership monitors development management decision-making within the Wye Valley AONB, to help demonstrate the effectiveness of the Position Statements and other policy and guidance in supporting Local Planning Authority decision-making.

Position Statement on Housing in the Wye Valley AONB and its Setting

The over-arching principle of this Position Statement is for housing development in the Wye Valley AONB and its setting to be based on robust evidence of need arising from within the nationally designated Protected Landscape. Currently, assessment of housing need and housing requirements are based on local authority boundaries, not the AONB boundary. Accordingly, current reliance on local authority housing need figures solely means there can be unnecessary pressure to accommodate residential development from the wider area within the AONB

boundary. This could be avoided if 'housing need' and 'housing requirements' are clearly differentiated. The recommendations help to filter, or screen, the initial local authority housing need figure down to a more appropriate level of housing provision within the Wye Valley AONB. This particularly applies when accommodating unmet needs, affordable housing, local connection, rural housing need surveys, choice based letting systems and second homes. Location & Design are considered, recognising climate change and needing to promote sustainable development.

Position Statement on Landscape-led Development

The over-arching principle of this Position Statement is that development within the Wye Valley AONB and, where relevant, in its setting, should be 'landscape-led'. The AONB Partnership recognises that there are a range of other considerations that must be weighted in the planning balance, including climate and ecological emergencies, and meeting housing needs and economic growth. However, there should not have to be a binary choice between conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB and permitting new development. The aspiration should be to deliver new development in a way that is compatible with, and positively contributes to, the AONB as a nationally designated protected landscape.

The Position Statement intends to provide a more balanced stance. A landscape-led approach should also consider all the factors that contribute to the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB. In principle, the landscape-led approach is applicable to all development in the Wye Valley AONB and its setting, albeit to a degree that is proportionate to the nature, scale, setting and potential impact of the proposed development. Recommendations are made in relation to strategic and neighbourhood planning, development management, including Major and EIA development and conserving and enhancing natural beauty on-site.

Renewables & Dark Skies Position Statements and Guidance

It is for the JAC to note for information that Position Statements on Renewables and Dark Skies intends to be presented at a future JAC meeting. The purpose of these Position Statements intend to assist anyone who is proposing new development in the AONB and its setting on these matters and how they can make a positive contribution to conserving the AONB, and awareness of its Features and Special Qualities.

Background

Position Statements seek to help to deliver the strategic objectives and policies contained within the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026. The Wye Valley AONB Management Plan is a statutory document and a material consideration in planning decision-making. However, it is the adopted development plan policies of the relevant local authority that planning decisions are required to be taken in accordance with, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Position Statements have been prepared by the Wye Valley AONB Planning Officer. The two Position Statements relate to one another and are thus presented together. As discussed at the

July 2023 meeting of the JAC, it was agreed by the Committee 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. It was also agreed at the same meeting that a formal review date of both Position Statements is to take place every five years.

The two draft Position Statements, these being on Housing and Landscape-led Development, were endorsed by the JAC, as a consultation draft at the July meeting, along with its associated Appendices. Since then, a formal consultation took place between 4th August and 29th September (eight weeks) with the position statements being published on the Wye Valley AONB website, as well as direct email notifications being sent to the following:

- Elected members of Monmouthshire County Council, Herefordshire Council, Forest of Dean District Council and Gloucestershire County Council within the Wye Valley AONB;
- The Town, Parish and Community Council clerks within the Wye Valley AONB;
- Current members of the Wye Valley AONB JAC of relevance including NFU, NFU Wales, One Voice Wales, GATPC, HALC, The Voluntary Conservation Sector representatives, Wye Valley Society, River Wye Preservation Trust, Recreation Sector, Local Tourism Sector and Local Wildlife Trusts;
- Various organisations and interested parties; and
- Local authority staff.

12 consultation responses were received, broken down as follows:

- Town, Parish / Community Councils – 6
- Local Planning Authorities – 3 (Forest of Dean District Council and Gloucestershire County Council – Forward Plans for both; and Herefordshire Council – Built and Natural Environment Team)
- Agencies – 2 (Historic England and Natural Resources Wales)
- Public Representations – 1

Consultation feedback was positive, although there was sometimes a lack of clarity and context regarding one or two of the recommendations being put forward. What has helped is that given the AONB Planning Officer is shared with Malvern Hills AONB, they have undertaken a similar consultation exercise earlier in the year on similar position statements, meaning further comments have informed, revised and hopefully strengthened both sets of Position Statements. There is now a stronger narrative which, hopefully, provides a clearer context.

The Position Statements have been tweaked in a format too, acknowledging that the planning system is development-plan led, which will provide greater clarity on the purpose and scope of the Position Statements, including their relationship with key issues such as the climate and ecological emergencies. A more detailed summary of consultation feedback is available on request via the AONB Manager.