

AONB UNIT & PARTNER REPORTS

Purpose

To advise members of activity of the Wye Valley AONB Unit and other partners.

FOR INFORMATION

Below are update reports on the following AONB Unit & partner initiatives: -

- a. NAAONB Conference & Wye Valley Field trip
- b. River Wye update & Wye Catchment Partnership & collaborations
 - i) Wyescapes: food, nature, water ELMS Landscape Recovery 2 bid
 - ii) Wye Adapt to Climate Change project
- c. Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project
- d. Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails strategy & consultation
- e. Green Blue Infrastructure – Herefordshire Council Mapping and Strategy

a. NAAONB Conference & Wye Valley Field trip

The annual AONB Conference was held 5th - 7th September at Bath University. The theme of the conference was 'Invested and Investing in Landscape – who, why, how'. Speakers, workshops and field visits took places along with glorious sunshine. The conference explored what it takes in terms of investment of time, energy, and funding to secure the conservation, restoration and enhancement of the nation's finest landscapes. Keynote speakers included Andy Middleton, North Star Transition; Guy Singh-Watson, Riverford Organic Farmers; Tony Juniper, Natural England; Polly Martin, National Trails UK and Julian Glover, National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The Wye Valley was one of the 6 co-hosting AONBs along with the Cotswolds, Cranborne Chase, Mendip Hills, North Wessex Downs, and Quantock Hills.

The AONB Unit hosted a fieldtrip to the lower Wye Valley on 6th September, which explored the investment in the outstanding landscape of the lower Wye Valley, around Chepstow and Tintern, from both a contemporary and historic perspective.

b. River Wye update & Wye Catchment Partnership & collaborations

i) Wyescapes: food, nature, water ELMS Landscape Recovery 2 bid

The Wye Valley AONB Unit worked with Herefordshire Rural Hub and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust on the preparation of a Landscape Recovery 2 bid, submitted by the Rural Hub in mid-September. The bid covered 36 farms along the Wye and Lugg floodplain. The result of the submission and next stages should be heard early in the New Year.

ii) Wye Adapt to Climate Change project

The Wye Valley AONB team are a partner in the 3 year Wye Adapt to Climate Change project, with Herefordshire and Radnorshire Wildlife Trusts. The Herefordshire Wildlife Trust led project

received confirmation of funding from the National Lottery Community Fund over the summer. The project covers the Wye Catchment across Radnorshire, Herefordshire and the Wye Valley AONB. Three Programme Officers will be employed, one based with each project partner, to deliver a suite of farm advice and community enabling work focused on Nature Based Solutions to help mitigate the impact of Climate Change across the Wye Catchment.

Holly Williams has recently started with the AONB team, employed by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and based in the AONB Office, covering the whole AONB. Holly and the other Programme Officers will be working to identify opportunities on farmland and signposting and helping farmers secure funding to deliver Nature Based Solutions. Elements of the SLSP, SDF and FiPL may be applicable to some of these landscape enhancements.

c. Lower Wye Nature Networks Partnership Project

This Lottery funded partnership project between the AONB Unit, Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust was completed in September 2023. The project commenced receiving National Lottery Heritage Funding towards the end of 2021. Work by the project partners has been completed which enhances the condition of 7 SSSIs and 5 additional Nature Reserves in the Lower Wye Valley. Funding has enabled woodland and grassland site management, including through conservation grazing, Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) Control and monitoring & surveying activity to increase understanding. Orchards and woodlands have also been planted. Funding has augmented INNS work through the WISP project and included management of Cherry Laurel in Cleddon Shoots SSSI. Farm Advice was provided by The Environment Partnership on 10 farms, focusing on habitat enhancement and connectivity. Work was carried out on 9 landholdings, creating and restoring hedgerows, woodland and wetland habitats. In total the project injected £268,630 into SSSIs work and connectivity between sites, both capital work and enabling organisations to continue management into the future. Match funding of £12,900 was contributed by the Woodland Trust and landowners delivering capital enhancements.

d. Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails strategy & consultation

The Wye Valley AONB Unit along with Monmouthshire County Council, NRW and other stakeholders are working together to develop an Integrated Recreational Access Strategy and action plan for the Lower Wye Tracks & Trails. A public consultation is about to commence enabling local communities, users, landowners and interest groups can help shape the strategy. A Frequently Asked Questions sheet is appended and further information is available on the AONB website. The strategy & consultation is one of the initiative funded through the Welsh Government Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme.

e. Green Blue Infrastructure – Herefordshire Council Mapping and Strategy

Herefordshire Council's new People, Place & Nature themed Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy (including updated Landscape Character Assessment and Open Space Assessment) is now available on the council's website as part of the Core Strategy evidence base <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/local-plan-1/local-plan-evidence-base/2>. The Natural Environment Team have also worked with LUC (Land Use Consultants) to make this information available alongside a fully searchable and interactive mapping facility. The link to this 'Natural environment map' can be found at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/conservation-1>