

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE TEAM WORK PROGRAMME 2024/2025

Purpose

To seek members' approval for the proposed outline business plan for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team during the forthcoming financial year, and acknowledge the need to roll forward of the existing Memorandum of Understanding for the National Landscape Team until a revised version is adopted by the constituent Local Authorities.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. Endorses the outline Work Programme for the National Landscape Team for 2024/2025.
- B. Notes the need to roll forward of the existing Memorandum of Understanding for the National Landscape Team until the constituent Local Authorities have adopted a revised version.

Key Issues

- The attached table sets out the proposed business plan for the National Landscape Team in the form of the outline Work Programme 2024/2025.
- The Work Programme remains 'draft' as final confirmation is awaited from DEFRA on new capital funding for 2024/25.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the four constituent local authorities is intended to give medium term security and commitment to the National Landscape Partnership.
- The current MoU ends in March 2024 and a revised three year edition is being prepared, meanwhile it is prudent to extend the existing version for up to 12 months until the revised version is adopted and signed by the four local authorities.
- Work Programme priorities for 2024/2025 include the on-going development of the Nature Recovery Plan, Species Action Plans and Climate Action Plan; promotion and delivery of what is currently the final year of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grant programme in England; the distribution and administration of grants through the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Herefordshire Community Foundation Wye Valley National Landscape Fund; the delivery of the final year of projects funded through the 3-year tranche of Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme; including ongoing control of Invasive Non-Native Species, support for Village Halls and enhancements to the Wye Valley Walk, in preparation for the route's 50th Anniversary in 2025; and continuing a range of existing activities and projects; while

retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.

- The National Landscape Team core budget for 2024/5, as presented to the National Landscape Steering Group, is £457,000 with additional funding programmes, grants and match funding anticipated to exceed £835,000 levered into the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty during the year.

Reasons

This will be the third and final year of the existing funding agreements for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team from both DEFRA and Welsh Government. However, both Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Gloucestershire County Council have confirmed their contributions for the next three years. Discussions are progressing with both DEFRA and Welsh Government on future allocations based on robust funding formulae. While this currently creates a fiscal cliff in March 2025, it is anticipated that relative stability and continuity of funding will be established well in advance of the end of the next Financial Year. This will enable the National Landscape Team and the constituent local authorities to plan ahead and consolidate team capacity. The Memorandum of Understanding is similarly intended to give medium term security and commitment to the National Landscape Partnership, including outlining the local authorities' contributions.

Implications

The National Landscape Team core budget for 2024-25 has been estimated at £457,000 based on current core contributions, which are mostly flat-line. This is augmented by the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programmes in England and Wales respectively, and the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in Wales which between them also lever in varying levels of match funding into the AONB. DEFRA also provide Access for All funding and have announced new capital funding for National Landscapes, of which the details are still awaited. Various partnership projects also increase the capacity and reach of the National Landscape Partnership, through the development and delivery of new initiatives and funding bids to further the implementation of the AONB Management Plan, such as the Lottery funded Wye Adapt to Climate Change project run jointly with Herefordshire and Radnorshire Wildlife Trusts.

The draft Work Programme incorporates this range of externally funded projects, grants and match funding initiatives which add value in excess of £835,000 through the year to the core activities. This will take the turnover of the National Landscape Team Business Plan to about £1.3million. There is further additional leverage and expenditure in the National Landscape through the public, private and third sector investment and match funding to the various projects and grant schemes, particularly FiPL and SDF.

The National Landscape Team is currently working on a new monitoring scheme to better report on activities and outcomes arising from the work programme.

It is recognised that if the new DEFRA & Welsh Government funding agreements are not provided in a timely way before April 2025 and the revised Memorandum of Understanding is not adopted then there will be significant uncertainty. This would impact the effectiveness of the National Landscape Team, and the ability of the Partnership to seek to further the purposes of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation beyond March 2025.