

PARTNER AND NATIONAL LANDSCAPE TEAM PROGRESS REPORTS AND UPDATES

Purpose

To advise members of activity of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team and other partners.

FOR INFORMATION

Below are update reports on the following National Landscape Team & partner initiatives: -

- a. Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership Seminar - 19th March 2024
- b. Welcome Tintern - Visitor Experience Improvements with MonLife, Monmouthshire County Council
- c. River Wye update and collaborations, including the Wye Catchment Partnership
- d. Lower Wye Track and Trails consultation & strategy
- e. Species Action Plan – Hedgehogs First Response Unit
- f. Wye Valley Youth Rangers
- g. Wye Valley River Festival 3rd-12th May 2024

Further information and updates are also in the latest edition of Picturesque, the Wye Valley National Landscape newsletter, see:

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKHEREF/bulletins/389307d>

a. Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership Seminar - Tuesday 19th March, Old Court Hotel, Whitchurch (verbal) : 10:00am-4:00pm

The theme of this year's annual seminar is 'The National Landscape and its function in the Planning System' which will cover the National Landscapes rebranding and the changes through the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023 and other legislation in England and Wales. The invitation has been sent to all JAC members, local Ward members and Town, Parish and Community Council clerks for distribution to their members.

b. Welcome Tintern – Visitor Experience Improvements with MonLife, Monmouthshire County Council

Utilising Brilliant Basics capital funding from Welsh Government (Visit Wales) improvements to the visitor experience in Tintern are nearing completion. These have built on experience managing visitor flows through the pandemic, feedback from visitors and the Tintern Visitor ambassadors, and via community and business consultations. The scheme has been developed in close cooperation with Cadw and comprises three elements:

- Replacing and updating tourism signage intended to be clearer for visitors, including new parking and attraction signage.
- New visitor welcome and orientation signage and a further phase of fingerposts shortly to be installed, including new signage for visitors arriving via the Wye Valley Greenway and on the Wye Valley Walk.

- Resurfacing of the Lower Wireworks Car Park including fully marked spaces, disabled parking spaces and for the first time EV charging provision. These works complement the previous improvement works carried out under the Overlooking the Wye scheme.

Redundant signage is also being removed as part of the project to simplify the visitor experience and avoid unnecessary visual clutter.



c. River Wye update and collaborations, including the Wye Catchment Partnership

The Wye Catchment Partnership, through the support of the Environment Agency, has been undertaking a Systems Mapping exercise of the catchment, led by Mott MacDonald. This has enabled a multitude of Wye interest groups to understand each other’s perspective on issues and activity in the catchment and is creating a shared platform for understanding trade-offs and making decisions. This will help inform the Wye Catchment Management Plan which is being produced this year by the Wye Catchment Partnership. Closer relationships are also being built with the Nutrient Management Board (NMB) and the Wye Agri-Supply Partnership.

The new website for the Wye Catchment Partnership is now live

<https://wyecatchmentpartnership.org/> and includes a ‘Project Areas & Funding Map’ (see tab on the [new WCP website here](#)). This has been progressed through a Task & Finish Group, led by Pat Stirling (Citizen Scientist), and outlines projects and initiatives across the Wye Catchment. It has already received 1000+ views.

The Environment Agency also host a River Wye Water Quality website: <https://engageenvironmentagency.uk.engagementhq.com/hub-page/river-wye-water-quality-2> which has information on some of the key challenges facing the catchment and highlights the on-going work and evidence to make improvements.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team continues to manage partnership projects and collaborative initiatives including through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and the Wye Adapt to Climate Change project, to support farmers and land-managers in and around the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the lower stretches of the River Wye. This collaboration includes the Wyescapes: food, nature, water Landscape Recovery scheme which is progressing through the approval process with DEFRA and the Environment Agency. A Programme Manager is currently being recruited by the Herefordshire Rural Hub, as the lead partner in the scheme. It is anticipated that the 2 year development phase of the scheme will commence early in the new financial year. This will see the 40 or so farmers involved in the scheme, between Goodrich and Bredwardine on the Wye and Mordiford to Leominster on the Lugg, sign up to 20 years agreements for floodplain management and other agri-environment options.

Friends of the River Wye recently hosted a 'Restore the River' evening conference at which a wide range of speakers from the public, private and voluntary sectors outlined the positive actions, and the challenges, that they are working with individually and collectively. The chair, freelance journalist Nicola Cutcher, suggested that "we are hopefully past peak-worst with the River". But the challenges remain significant and considerable, and concerted collaborative effort remains paramount.

Natural Resources Wales are setting up their team of River Wye Restoration Officers to put in place improvements to address the ecological decline of the upper Wye SAC. One of the team is Nickie Moore, formerly the AONB Lower Wye Catchments Project Officer. We wish her all the best in her new role looking after the other end of the Wye.

d. Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails consultation & strategy

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team are working with Monmouthshire County Council, NRW and other stakeholders to develop an Integrated Recreational Access Strategy and action plan. The Lower Wye Tracks & Trails strategy and action plan will help provide the best experience for all those that enjoy the tracks and trails in the Monmouthshire part of the National Landscape. The aim of the work is to develop the most practical ways of supporting the requirements of all types of users, while protecting the natural and built environment for current and future generations.

A 12 week consultation, from 8th November 2023 to 12th January 2024, received over 350 responses and has revealed a lot of data about user types, activities and key concerns. Responses came from individuals, both local residents and visitors, and representatives of 50 organisations and interest groups including; Community groups; Environmental groups; 4x4 vehicle & Trail bike users; Cyclists/Mountain Bikers; Walkers/ramblers; and Horse riders/drivers. Findings include:

- The vast majority of users (89%) are local and those walking on foot, undertaking conservation or outdoor activities make up 73% of all users.
- The need to encourage responsible behaviours among all users and discourage any undesirable behaviours is seen as the highest priority, with 68% saying this is 'very important'.

- A recognition of the need to support landowners in maintenance of the tracks and trails, particularly among those involved in conservation activities
- Almost half (48%) of those taking part in the consultation believe it is 'very important' to respond to the opportunity to support the improvement of the tracks and trails and reduce the impact of flooding and erosion.

Key Themes & Actions Emerging

- Responsible Tourism that can influence all visitors to the Wye Valley is a key principle for the new strategy.
- Fill the gaps in understanding of different visitors – good information is vital but so too is appreciating others' perspectives and needs.
- A new trail etiquette should be considered, perhaps by a code of conduct, signs in some places and by a wholesale boost in volunteering.
- Protection of this precious natural environment is critical and needs continued vigilance. Some tracks and trails may need to be off limits for a time to enable repair and regeneration.
- Improving access to the tracks & trails is important, so too is opening up access to all users who may have mobility or other impediments.

Two follow-up public engagement meetings were held in St Arvans Memorial Hall and Pelham Hall, Penallt on 27th & 28th February respectively.

It is intended that the Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails Strategy & Action Plan will be presented to at the next JAC meeting in July.

e. Species Action Plan – Hedgehogs First Response Unit

The National Landscape Team are supporting a new venture by our Hedgehog Hero Dylan Allman, who has started a Hedgehog First Response Unit as part of his Hedgehog Aware project. We have trained and supported 8 volunteers to be part of this project, who will respond to calls from the public when they have found a sick or injured Hedgehog. For further information see <https://www.facebook.com/MonmouthHedgehogFRU/> and the article in Picturesque.

f. Wye Valley Youth Rangers

The relaunch of the Wye Valley Ranger scheme commences with the first session due on 23rd March, with the help of the Gwent Green Grid team, Coed Lleol and Wye Coppice CIC. Activities will include, Woodland Flowers walk, Woodland Treasure hunt, making beeswax healing balm, whistle whittling and bush craft. For further details please contact Lucinda James, Wye Valley National Landscape Community Links Officer.

g. Wye Valley River Festival 3rd-12th May 2024

The Wye Valley River Festival CIC will be presenting the next full Wye Valley River Festival between 3rd & 12th May 2024. For full details keep an eye on <https://wyevalleyriverfest.com/>.