

## **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. National Landscapes Conference 3rd - 5th July.
- b. National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) bid
- c. Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects
- d. Cleddon Bog & NRW Peatland funding
- e. Wye Valley Walk
- f. Wye Adapt to Climate Change project
- g. National Landscape Partnership Seminar
- h. Planning Update
- i. Powerline undergrounding
- j. Volunteers
- k. Wye Valley Adventurers
- l. Wye Valley River Festival

### **a. National Landscapes Conference 3rd - 5th July.**

The National Landscapes Annual Conference 2024 is at Harper Adams University, Shropshire. The theme is 'Changing Landscapes: Changing Minds'. A high proportion of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team are attending and will report back to JAC verbally. Two fundamental questions this conference will explore are: What role is there for natural beauty and landscape designation in ever-changing landscapes? What are the different ways of working and resilience needed if natural beauty is to prevail in the contested debate on the value and use of

land and sea? The programme is available here: <https://www.national-landscapes-conference.org.uk/programme>

**b. National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) bid**

An application has been submitted to the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI). Working in partnership with Herefordshire Meadows and landowners within a 3km buffer of the National Grid high voltage powerlines between Walford and Marstow, the National Landscape Team have recently submitted the first of three anticipated application to the National Grid LEI scheme. The project, entitled 'Wye Valley Magnificent Meadows, Tremendous Trees and Wonderful Wetlands', will over the next six years, if approved: deliver pond restoration and management; natural flood management work; small woodland planting; standard and orchard tree planting and species rich grassland creation.

The National Landscape partnership can have three schemes running at any one time, up to a value of £300,000 funding in each. Two further expressions of interest for hedgerow and boundary projects will be submitted in the coming months. All work has been developed through consultation with landowners carried out by Herefordshire Meadows and National Landscape officers, with the aim of enhancing landscape quality, mitigating the visual impact of the high voltage electricity infrastructure and provide habitat enhancement.

It is anticipated a decision on grant funding for this project will be received at the end of 2024.

**c. Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects**

Two applications have been submitted through the Woodland Trust's MoreHedges scheme to plant two new hedgerows at Porthcasseg Farm, Chepstow. These hedges will provide improved habitat connectivity across the farm between woodlands.

During a farm visit for the Wye Adapt to Climate Change project, an opportunity was identified to restore species-rich grassland at a smallholding near Penallt. The SLSP fund contributed £302.40 to the purchase of a species-rich grassland seed mix. Once established this will hopefully help to improve the wildlife value of the grassland and increase carbon sequestration through deep-rooting wildflowers.

Village Hall Decarbonisation- Itton Village Hall had a successful energy audit completed and now the committee is selecting which of the recommendation in the report they should implement with the help from Andrew David from South East Energy Agency. Once decided they will apply for a grant through the SLSP.

**d. Cleddon Bog & NRW Peatland funding**

The grazing season for 2024 is underway, managed by Grazing Management Ltd and the local voluntary Livestock Checkers. There are 8 cattle grazing at Cleddon, all of which seem to have adapted well to the no-fence system that's in use. In addition to the charismatic belted Galloways, this year the beautiful Ancient Cattle of Wales have also been introduced, helping to bring back this very rare native breed. The cattle are already exploring the whole site and have already started to make tracks through the denser overgrowth.

The stem-boring treatment of the more dispersed birch and willow saplings growing across the site has started. This should mean that there will be no need for any herbicide to be used when the volunteer work parties clear areas of scrub on the bog in November.

#### **e. Wye Valley Walk**

The final proof of the new Wye Valley Walk Official Route Guide has been sent to Cicerone for printing and publications. This has been updated by Ruth Waycott, National Landscape Information Officer, to enable walkers to follow the route from 'Source to Sea'. The old Route Guide started in Chepstow leading walkers up to finish on Plynlimon, where there are no services (and barely any mobile reception). The new Route Guide will be ready for the 50th Anniversary of the route in 2025.

An Audit of the furniture and waymarking along the Wye Valley Walk from Hereford to the Monmouthshire boarder has now been completed. It was organised and carried out team of volunteers from the Ross Walkers are Welcome group and the Parish Footpath officers. They have done a fantastic job in a very short space of time and have highlighted that there are 13 stiles in need of replacing, 3 of which are particularly bad (borderline dangerous) in the Parish of Walford and that most of the waymarking is either missing or in need of replacing/updating.

We hope to engage Herefordshire Council PROW team in plans and ways to improve the Walk for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the route in 2025. The next stage will be to replace the waymarking where needed though local Parish volunteers and encourage them to liaise with landowners for the replacement of stiles with gates. The DEFRA Access for All funding can be used to supply and install new gates.

The next challenge will be to replicate this audit for the section of the walk beyond the National Landscape boundary, from Hereford to the Powys boarder. We are hopeful that with Herefordshire PROW team we can engage with the Parish Footpath officers in that area to help with the surveying and waymaking the route.

#### **f. Wye Adapt to Climate Change? Project**

Our Wye Adapt to Climate Change (WACC) Project Officer, Holly Williams, has visited nearly 20 local landholdings and farms since the project began in October 2023 to provide advice on implementing Nature-Based Solutions to help tackle climate change and biodiversity loss. This has included advice on wetland creation, tree and hedge planting, herbal ley seeding, Natural Flood Management and grassland management. Holly is now working with some of these landholders and farmers to secure funding for the work from sources like SLSP, SFI, Woodland Trust, FiPL.

The WACC project team have put together a Recovering our Rivers toolkit which rounds up all the ways to take action to help recover our rivers. From citizen science and practical tasks, to supporting campaigns, there are a range of actions suiting different interests and levels of commitment: [Recovering our Rivers: Take Action | Herefordshire Wildlife Trust \(herefordshirewt.org\)](https://www.herefordshirewt.org)

#### **g. National Landscape Partnership Seminar**

The annual Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership Winter Seminar took place on Tuesday 19th March at the Old Court Hotel, Whitchurch. The theme of this year's annual seminar was 'The National Landscape and its function in the Planning System'.

The seminar covered: the National Landscape re-brand; the implications of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023 and other legislation in England and Wales; a general introduction to the AONB designation; planning and the role of the National Landscape Team; which was all provided by members of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team. Several external speakers discussed Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the climate and ecological emergencies, Special Qualities in their own protected landscapes or local authorities, and an introduction to the Wye Adapt To Climate Change? Project.

The invitation was sent to all JAC members, local elected Ward/Division members and Town, Parish and Community Councils, as well as LPA Officers. The seminar had 38 attendees on the day plus the National Landscape Team staff. The National Landscape Team extends its thanks to all those who attended on the day as well as to all speakers and those who contributed.

#### **h. Planning Update**

On Friday 28<sup>th</sup> June, the Wye Valley National Landscape Team Manager, the Wye Valley & Malvern Hills National Landscape Planning Officer (shared), and the Malvern Hills National Landscape Partnership Manager delivered planning training to officers in the Planning service at Herefordshire Council. Topics covered an introduction to both the Wye Valley National Landscape and Malvern Hills National Landscape, the new strengthened Section 85 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 duty, along with a general discussion of planning issues concerning development management across both National Landscapes, including guidance and position

statements which have been developed by the National Landscape Team. This was attended by 17 officers either in person or remotely, which included a mixture of planning officers, development managers and officers from the Built & Natural Environment Team.

Josh Bailey, the (shared) National Landscape Planning Officer, leaves the post to return to Herefordshire Council as a Senior Planning Officer. A replacement has been recruited and is intended to start in September. We wish Josh well in the future and look forward to continue working with in him in his new role, fortified with his knowledge and experience gained working with National Landscape teams locally and nationally.

#### **i. Powerline Undergrounding**

A 400 meter section of low voltage powerline and poles has recently been placed underground by National Grid, as part of the Protected Landscapes programme of undergrounding. The lines and poles previously on the river Wye floodplain in front of Bishopswood Village Hall, have been removed from view and undergrounded. The electricity infrastructure was intrusive in views and the public enjoyment of the landscape from the Village Hall, Wye Valley Walk and to river users, but with their removal now allow for an unobstructed view of the floodplain, river and woodland beyond, all important and distinctive features of the National Landscape. Proposed for undergrounding by the National Landscape team and approved by the West Midlands steering group of Protected Landscapes, local Western Power Distribution and subsequently National Grid staff have worked with landowners to plan and arrange the removal of the lines and poles.

#### **j. Volunteers**

We've held 5 volunteer days, 1 community volunteer day and a tour of the beaver enclosure near Lydbrook since March. Activities include scything, Balsam Bashing, vegetation clearance along the Offa's Dyke and drystone walling. We have also had a corporate volunteer group from the HP Monmouth office, out with us Drystone walling and have another 2 sessions over the coming months organised for them to join us. This equates to 390 volunteer hours on conservation in the Wye Valley National Landscape.

#### **k. Wye Valley Adventurers**

The new programme was successfully launch in March with 19 young people attending the event on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March at The North Village Hall and around manor wood. We ran 3 activities simultaneously- Foraging, Bird ID walk and whittling whistles. Feedback from the sessions was fantastic with everyone excited for more in the future. We used this event to ask what activities we should include in the programme going forward.

Since the launch we have held 2 further sessions, the first was a Bush craft and mindfulness at Devauden village hall where children learnt about survival skills like lighting a fire, making shelter using pegs they whittled themselves and cooked their own tasty lunch on an open fire. The second event we joined Ciaran from the SDF funded Recording Bees of Monmouth Project for a Bee ID and habitat walk then made bee Hotels at the Monmouth Bee festival. The next event will be Woodland Management and Charcoal making with another SDF funded project with Wye Coppice CIC.

## **I. Wye Valley River Festival**

The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Wye Valley River Festival ran from 3<sup>rd</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> May 2024, with the theme of 'The Earth Beneath Our Feet.' As ever there was a packed programme of fun events and creative activities ranging across the Wye Valley between Chepstow and Hereford, Beechenhurst and Caldicot. There was a world premiere of NoFitState Circus' Bamboo, the themed and anarchic antics of the Ensemble, plenty of street theatre, creatively impressive sound installations, inspiring sculptural woven camps in the woods, dance, singing and street parades. Congratulations to the Wye Valley River Festival CIC and all the artists and production teams, ecologists, workshop hosts & Creative Community Champions, working with schools and communities to create work shared throughout the Festival.