

REVIEW OF CO-OPTED MEMBERSHIP OF THE JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Purpose

To adopt recommendations from the Task and Finish Group to review co-opted membership and vacancies on the Joint Advisory Committee.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. Adopt the recommendations from the Task and Finish Group to amend the current co-opted membership and seek to fill vacancies on the Joint Advisory Committee.
- B. Agree to host future meetings of the JAC at the Forest of Dean District Council Chamber as hybrid meetings to facilitate broader attendance.

Key Issues

- There are a number of vacancies that have emerged in the co-opted membership of the Joint Advisory Committee and some of the representative bodies have been dissolved.
- The Task and Finish Group established by the JAC to review co-opted membership recommends a number of changes to representation of co-opted members.
- Of the 8 Co-opted seats with voting powers, changes are proposed to the three Voluntary Conservation Sector representatives, moving from 3 'county reps' to one with national experience and two local representatives for the English & Welsh sides respectively. These will be recruited through an open nomination recruitment process.
- Of the Co-opted Members without Voting Powers, changes are proposed to invite a new representative for the River Wye and replace one vacant seat with a new Arts sector representative. Recent non-attendance by both Tourism and Recreation representatives will also be addressed. These will all be recruited through an open nomination recruitment process.
- Future JAC meetings could be managed as hybrid meetings which may encourage a broader attendance, as the Forest of Dean District Council Chamber has that facility.
- The Management Plan Review was identified as good opportunity to enable wider engagement with different sectors and communities that should have an interest in the National Landscape, such as young people and visitors from a diversity of backgrounds.
- The Task & Finish Group did not identify any changes that necessitated amendment of the 'Agreement as to the establishment and functions of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee'.
- The Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP) has also reviewed its Terms of Reference, which are attached for information.

Reasons

The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is constituted under an 'Agreement' between the four constituent local authorities, which states

“The Committee shall consist of twenty voting members, twelve members of which (hereinafter referred to as “the Elected Members”) shall be appointed by the Authorities, and eight members of which (hereinafter referred to as “the Co-opted Members”) shall be persons nominated by such bodies or organisations as the Committee may determine to include three Parish/Town/Community Council representatives in the area. The Committee may appoint five further co-opted Members who shall not have voting rights on the Committee and who shall be persons nominated by such other bodies or organisations as the Committee may from time to time determine”.

Therefore any proposed changes to Co-opted Members can be determined by the JAC.

In March 2024 the JAC resolved to establish a Task and Finish Group to review current vacancies and representation that had emerged in the co-opted membership of the JAC and report back with proposed recommendations. The following issues we noted:

- There are a number of vacancies that have emerged in the co-opted membership and some of the representative bodies have been dissolved or disbanded.
- Recent initiatives, including the Glover Review and the Diversity & Inclusion training provided through Welsh Government, have highlighted the need for increasing diversity in public sector representation.
- The Joint Agreement as to the establishment and functions of the Wye Valley AONB JAC should be reviewed from time to time.

The Review Task and Finish Group consisted of

- Chris McFarling: JAC Chair, Forest of Dean District Council Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency
- Chris Barron: Wye Valley National Landscape / AONB Volunteer and former JAC co-opted member for the Wye Valley Society (now dissolved)
- Anna Jones: Inclusion, Diversity and Governance Excellence Strategic Lead - Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales
- Andrew Blake: Wye Valley National Landscape Manager

Implications

The Task and Finish Group met on 19th December 2024 with the objective and ambition to refresh the JAC co-opted membership by increasing the sector range of representatives and involving a broader diversity of voices and interests in the work of the National Landscape. However it was recognised that not everyone can be involved within the existing operational structures of the JAC and further opportunities for engagement should be sought.

The table below outlines the current co-opted membership and recommendations from the Task & Finish Group.

JAC Representation	Nominating Organisation	Task & Finish Group Recommendation
Co-opted Members with Voting Powers		
Town / Parish / Community Councils in the area	Gloucestershire Association of Parish & Town Councils (GAPTC)	No change - Continue current nominating organisation
	Herefordshire Association Local Councils (HALC)	No change - Continue current nominating organisation
	One Voice Wales	No change - Continue current nominating organisation
Voluntary Conservation Sector representatives		<i>Revise from 3 'county reps' to one rep with national experience and two local reps for the English & Welsh sides of the Wye Valley National Landscape respectively</i>
Voluntary Conservation Sector in Gloucestershire	Open Nomination recruitment in 2009. Previous sponsorship /nominating body no longer exists	Change - <u>Open Nomination for broader role with national & local experience of public / private &/or 3rd sector conservation or land / landscape management</u>
Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire	Open Nomination recruitment in 2009. Previous sponsorship /nominating body CPRE (Herefordshire)	Change - <u>Open Nomination for England 3rd Sector Conservation rep</u> , eg. from CPRE Hfds/Glos etc.
Voluntary Conservation Sector in Monmouthshire	Open Nomination recruitment in 2009. Previous sponsorship /nominating body no longer exists	Change - <u>Open Nomination for Wales 3rd sector Conservation Sector rep</u> , eg. CPRW, Monmouthshire Meadows etc.
Farmer / Landowner representatives		
Country Land and Business Association (CLA)	CLA	No change - Continue current nominating organisation
National Farmers Union (NFU)	NFU	No change - Continue current nominating organisation
Co-opted Members without Voting Powers		
Wye Valley Society (WVS)	WVS dissolved	Change - <u>Open Nomination for new Arts representative</u> –eg. Wye Valley River Festival CIC, Canopy Creative Network, h.Art etc.
River Wye Preservation Trust (RWPT)	RWPT dissolved	Change - Invite <u>Friends of the River Wye</u> to nominate a new/local rep.
Recreation Sector	[Nomination recruitment in 2009] - No recent attendance	No change - <u>Open Nomination recruitment for same</u> , through Herefordshire, Gloucestershire & Monmouthshire Local Access Fora

JAC Representation	Nominating Organisation	Task & Finish Group Recommendation
		(LAFs), & other local recreation groups/organisations.
Local Tourism Sector	Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism Association / Visit DeanWye - No recent attendance	No change - <u>Open Nomination recruitment for same</u> , from <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit DeanWye • Visit Monmouthshire • Visit Herefordshire
Local Wildlife Trusts	Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust	No change - Continue current nominating process – rotating between Herefordshire, Gloucestershire & Gwent Wildlife Trusts.
National Farmers Union Wales	National Farmers Union Wales	No change - Continue current nominating organisation

The Task & Finish Group identified several issues to recruiting and retaining members on the JAC:

- Daytime committee meetings can exclude private sector working people unless there is clear value for them in their attendance
- Afternoon meetings can exclude people with school age children that need collecting and caring for at the end of the school day

The Group also highlighted various opportunities for recruiting and retaining JAC members:

- It's important to make the changes and be open to more change if/when needed
- Promotion of the value and benefits of JAC membership, and wider communication of the outcomes of the JAC and National Landscape Team, would increase focus and commitment of JAC members and inspire potential new members
- Representatives should have lived experience as well as and where possible increase the JAC's diversity, gender, ethnicity, age, ability/access, under representation, urban/rural, educational background, cultural links etc. Relationships and connections need to build with more diverse partners before engaging and seeking potential representatives / members
- A conscious effort to find younger people will establish a different image and may attract more diverse voices in the future. Seeking a Youth representative or establishing a Youth Council could be considered, perhaps from engagement with youth groups, local 6th Forms, Young Farmers, or through the Youth Rangers/Young Adventurers.
- The Management Plan Review should be used as an engagement opportunity for new individual & community / sector connections.

Other considerations raised by the Task & Finish Group were

- What is the succession plan for JAC members?
- What does the JAC need to focus on for the next five years?
- What skills & experience does the JAC need and at what level?

The Task & Finish Group endorsed that JAC Membership Criteria or 'Roles and responsibilities of JAC Members' included in the JAC Members Guidelines. This states:

Members of the JAC should be expected to:

- promote the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the National Landscape/AONB and champion the vision set out in the AONB Management Plan;
- contribute knowledge, expertise and experience to the work of the JAC;
- support and play a full and active part in the work of the JAC in fulfilling its roles and responsibilities as set out in the Constitution/Agreement;
- assist the JAC in achieving an independent and apolitical profile in the performance of its functions;
- attend JAC meetings, Tours and Seminars whenever possible and, if no longer able to attend meetings on a regular basis, to step down from the JAC or to seek another representative from their organisation.
- read and consider JAC papers in advance of meetings;
- recognise the validity of other members' views and accept joint responsibility for the decisions of the JAC once made;

Organisations belonging to the JAC undertake in addition, to:

- keep the JAC informed of their work relevant to the National Landscape/AONB.
- be prepared to adjust their activities and work with others to improve co-ordination of activity in the National Landscape/AONB.
- report back to their organisation on the work of the JAC, and bring to the JAC or National Landscape Team appropriate and relevant updates and information.

In doing so, it was noted that there is no requirement for JAC members to live within the National Landscape, but an active interest in the area is expected. JAC members are nominated by respective organisations but serve on the JAC to benefit the National Landscape, as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and represent wider interests rather than those of a particular organisation or constituency. However, members need to take particular care to avoid prejudicing both the independence of the JAC's advice and their own position on other bodies.

Following discussions with the Forest of Dean District Council and the upgrading of their technological infrastructure in the Council Chamber, it should be possible in future to hold the JAC as a hybrid meeting, on Microsoft Teams. It is proposed to adopt this technology from the next meeting, in July, which may encourage a broader attendance at JAC meetings.

In completing the Review of JAC Membership, the Task & Finish Group did not identify any changes that required amendments to the 'Agreement as to the establishment and functions of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee'. This was last reviewed in 2009 and a Good Governance Review was undertaken in 2018.

The Technical Officers' Working Party has also reviewed its Terms of Reference, which are attached for information.

Background

The JAC is constituted under the 'Agreement As to the establishment and functions Of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee' [2000 & amended 2009]. This 'Agreement' is between the four constituent local authorities of the Wye Valley National Landscape, namely: Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council.

The 2019 Glover 'Landscape Review of National Parks and AONBs in England' included *Proposal 26: Reformed governance to inspire and secure ambition in our national landscapes and better reflect society*. The report noted that "the lack of diversity among those governing the bodies looking after our national landscapes is extremely narrow.... this is not to say there aren't brilliant and committed people doing brilliant things.... [but] they suffer from the same demographic biases as most authorities in England, lacking proper representation across age, gender, ethnicity and (dis)ability.... Every effort should be made to achieve diversity – of social background, gender, age, ethnicity, (dis)ability."

The training provided through Welsh Government for National Park and AONB members on diversity and inclusion emphasised that "there is a strong moral, legislative and business case for diversity and inclusion. The moral case is based on principles of human rights, equality, social justice, and democracy: those who govern Public Bodies should be representative of the communities that they serve. Most importantly, a whole-organisation approach to improving diversity and inclusion needs to be established."