

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE TEAM WORK PROGRAMME 2025/2026

Purpose

To seek members' approval for the proposed outline work plan for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team during the forthcoming financial year, subject to confirmation of funding with DEFRA Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.

Recommendations

That the JAC endorses the draft Wye Valley National Landscape Team Work Programme for 2025/2026

Key Issues

- The proposed Work Programme for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team for 2025/2026 is presented in draft form as budgets for the National Landscape have yet to be confirmed. The Programme is ambitious but dependent on adequate funding and resources being available.
- A new National Landscape Core Funding agreement is awaited from DEFRA with allocations currently unconfirmed, part from continuation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Officer post.
- Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have confirmed provisional National Landscape allocations for 2025/26 and 2026/27 subject to the final approval of the Welsh Government Budget in late March.
- Consequently only a draft Work Programme can be presented.
- Priorities include: the potential expansion of the farming support role, with the continuation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Officer post and the Wye Adapt to Climate Change? Programme, potentially augmented by a similar role on the Welsh side; on-going Planning advice shared jointly with the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership; the focus on Nature & Climate outcomes through the promotion and administration of Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme and Sustainable Development Fund (SDF); the on-going activities and achievements of the Volunteers and Young Adventurers led by the Community Links Officer; the development of Nature Recovery Plan and publication of the remaining Species Action Plans by the Development Officer and Nature Recovery Officer; the delivery of the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects; the review of the AONB Management Plan and publication of the Public Consultation Draft Plan; the celebratory activities for the Wye Valley Walk's 50th anniversary; and continuing a range of existing activities and projects, including continuation of the control of Invasive Non-

Native Species (INNS) and advancing the Lower Wye Tracks & Trails Action Plan, led by the Projects Officer; while retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.

- The draft Wye Valley National Landscape Team core budget for 2025/26 as presented to the Steering Group is £504,028 and additional funding programmes, grants and match funding is anticipated to exceed £1,000,000 levered into the National Landscape during the year.

Reasons

For a number of years the National Landscape Team received multi-year funding agreements from DEFRA, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW). However, with the change of Government in Westminster last year and the Comprehensive Spending Review, DEFRA has not been able to confirm allocations yet.

Welsh Government have provisionally made 2 year allocations for National Landscape Revenue support, the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme as well as for the new Welsh Designated Landscapes Farming programme. However, Welsh Government Budgets have yet to be fully signed off by the Senedd. Similarly Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has made a provisional grant funding offer for 2 years, subject to Welsh Government Budget approval.

Implications

The Wye Valley National Landscape core budget for 2025-26 has been estimated at £504,028 based on a current flat-line budget. In collaboration with the National Landscapes Association, all National Landscapes in England carried out some scenario modelling based on 5% and 10% cuts from DEFRA. Both Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have provisionally offered modest variations or flat-line allocations over 2 years. This considerably helps with medium term budgeting and work programming. Mitigation of modest cuts is likely to be made by making fuller use of cost recovery opportunities from the additional grants and funding programmes, albeit at the expense of direct on-the-ground project expenditure. Where required National Landscape budgets and grant match-funding commitments can be supplemented by drawing on National Landscape reserves. Consequently it is difficult to calculate what the impacts and implications will be for the National Landscape, its staff and delivery of the core functions. For example, if there are funds available for a Welsh Designated Landscapes Farming programme along with a farming advisor post, this would augment the capacity of the team to give farmers and landowners in and around the National Landscape targeted land management advice and guidance. This would significantly benefit farmers and land managers and the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the area and help address the nature, climate and pollution emergencies.

The Work Programme is enhanced by projects and partnership initiatives with funding and grants from a variety of sources. For example the Lower Wye Project Officer will help deliver the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects between Ross-on-Wye and

Whitchurch. The range of externally funded projects, grants and match funding initiatives, adding value to the core National Landscape budgets, are anticipated to lever in investment and expenditure into the National Landscape in excess of £1,000,000 through the year.

Consequently there are a number assumptions, caveats and contingencies included in the ambitious, but draft, Work Programme outlined below. These may be relieved or exacerbated depending on the final DEFRA, Welsh Government & NRW funding settlements.

| AONB Unit (draft) Work Programme 2025-26 priorities <i>{subject to budget confirmation & resources}</i> |
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| Nature |
| Species Actions Plans – Finish/publish & deliver actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat Creation/Restoration • Support Hedgehog Rescue Centre Farming & land management support: advice, guidance and grants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FiPL programme (tbc) [England only] • Ffermio Bro programme (tbc) [Wales only] • Wye Adapt to Climate Change? (WACC) Programme • National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects x3 • Conservation Grazing • River Friendly Farming • Natural Flood Management (NFM) projects Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) control Wildlife of the Wye Valley Guide/Leaflet |
| Climate |
| Peatland Restoration particularly at Cleddon Bog SSSI Climate Action Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carbon & Climate Assessments of Landscape Management Zones (LMZs) Training & Development Climate Action Network |
| People |
| Volunteers Young Adventurers Training & Development of LPA staff & Cllrs including s85 Training Governance, including Joint Advisory Committee & National Landscape Partnership (inc. training, Tour & Seminar) Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) [Wales only] Wye Valley National Landscape Fund with Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley Walk 50th Anniversary events Farm Clusters Website update & review LA Liaison Local, Regional & National partnerships, collaborations & liaison, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • including National Landscapes Association and Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales |

AONB Unit (draft) Work Programme 2025-26 priorities

{subject to budget confirmation & resources}

Place

AONB Management Plan Review

- Nature Recovery Plan
- Climate Action Plan
- SEA, HRA
- Systems Mapping of Plans
- State of the National Landscape Report
- Public Consultation Draft

Lower Wye Track & Trails Action Plan & Steering Group

Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) [Wales only]

Improvement to Routes & Access Work

- Cleddon Falls & Jubilee Walk
- Wye Valley Walk including Piercefield Walk
- 65 & 69 Bus Routes/Walks

Fixed Point Photos

Undergrounding (low voltage lines)

Planning & Development Control

- Planning applications
- Local Plan reviews
- Position Statements on Tranquillity, Setting & Cultural Capital
- Land use Framework

Cultural heritage projects - Overlooking the Wye legacy & Offa's Dyke Collaboratory

Landscape Connections Bid

PR, communications & outreach activities

Funding, resource management & Monitoring

Work placements

Background

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team consists of 10 staff employed across 3 local authorities with one additional seconded member:-

- Wye Valley National Landscapes Manager
- Business Support Assistant
- Community Links Officer
- Development Officer
- Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Officer
- Information Officer
- Lower Wye Project Officer
- Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer
- Planning Officer (shared with Malvern Hills National Landscape)
- Wye Adapt to Climate Change? Programme Officer

The National Landscape Team are based at the AONB Office, Hadnock Road, Monmouth.