

LANDSCAPE CONNECTIONS LOTTERY BID EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Purpose

To seek members' support for the submission of an Expression of Interest to the National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Connections programme.

Recommendations

That the JAC endorses the preparation and submission by the Wye Valley National Landscape Team of an Expression of Interest to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Landscape Connections programme.

Key Issues

- Landscape Connections is a competitive grant programme open to National Landscapes and National Parks provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).
- Projects can be up to 10 years (with 2 years development plus 8 years delivery) and up to a maximum of £10million.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Team intend to submit an Expression of Interest for a project that would work with farmers and landowners and local communities to deliver transformative change across (sub)catchments flowing directly into the Wye Valley National Landscape.
- The proposal has been discussed with various partners at the Wye Catchment Partnership, Farm Herefordshire, The Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence, Herefordshire Council Natural Environment Team, Woodland Trust, Wye & Usk Foundation and Wyescapes Project Board.
- If the Expression of Interest is successful the Development Phase would refine the project area and outputs.
- The project name of 'Ergyng Landscape Connections' is proposed, as the project area aligns with the ancient kingdom of Ergyng, covering most of the catchments in the lower Wye Valley.

Reasons

The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) 'Landscape Connections' is a grant programme open to those who care for or partner with National Landscapes and National Parks. Projects can be up to 10 years with a development phase of up to 2 years development and

subsequent 8 years of project delivery. Grants can be between £250,000 up to £10million. Funding is to:

- Support long-term projects which boost nature recovery and connect more people to our most treasured landscapes,
- Drive systematic change across the UK's Protected Landscapes,
- Put Landscapes into recovery; supporting habitats and species alongside rich cultural heritage in better connected, working landscapes,
- Landscapes strengthened as working landscapes, alive with nature and providing space for people to relax and connect with the environment.

Lottery guidance advises that projects:

- Have a Protected Landscape (PL) as a key partner and have a core area of PL at their heart.
- Deliver work over a contiguous landscape, not on a theme over a wider area.
- Delivery for Nature Recovery, following the 'protect the environment' investment principle.
- Area can be any size but advised to focus on impact rather than scale.
- Address a problem and support systematic change
- Farm advice as well as capital work is viable
- NLHF want to see demonstrable change, where they can go to a project area at the end of the project and see lasting change.

Implications

The Wye Valley National Landscape Team consider this an opportunity to work cross-border at landscape scale to address key challenges facing the Wye Valley National Landscape. Through a number of focused sessions, the Team identified two main and interconnected issues: the health of the River Wye and its tributaries and the disconnection between farms, local communities and consumers. Within this, family farms are recognised as an essential functioning part of both the landscape and the local community. Consequently, the Team developed the proposal for a Landscape Connections project that would **work with farmers and landowners and local communities to deliver transformative change across (sub)catchments flowing directly into the Wye Valley National Landscape, monitoring impact and acting as a catalyst to actions in the wider Wye catchment.**

The tributaries of the Wye and their catchments were mapped, creating an effective buffer area around the Wye Valley National Landscape – see map below. However the River Monnow and its catchment was excluded on 3 counts:- a) the catchment is large and extends into the Black Mountains and Golden Valley, b) this would almost double the project's area into distinctly different landscapes, potentially diluting resources and thus diminishing the overall project, c) the confluence of the Wye and the Monnow is not actually within the Wye Valley National Landscape.

However, if an Expression of Interest was successful, the Development Phase would test and define the exact project boundary. There are also currently a number of projects and programmes which will conclude before this project would reach Delivery Stage, or may run concurrently with it. Some of these will lay excellent foundations through landowner

engagement and identification of opportunities, and others will complement and work in parallel. The Wyescapes programme has the potential to deliver tremendous change focussing on the floodplain between Leominster and Symonds Yat, with farmers signing up to deliver dramatic change over the next 20 years. The Farming in Protected Landscapes and Ffermio Bro programmes are engaging farmers at a scale not previously possible in the National Landscape. The Wye Adapt to Climate Change project is building climate action networks and identifying Nature Based Solutions for future planning. The National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects are encouraging landscape change and mitigation across a defined corridor impacted by pylons. The intention of a Landscape Connections project would be to learn from, complement and augment these projects, rather than duplicate or compete.

Outline proposal (to be refined through the Development Phase):

- Over 8 years, work with landowners and farmers across catchments flowing directly into the Wye Valley National Landscape, in England and Wales, to deliver interventions which align with the Farm Herefordshire River Friendly Farming Standards.
- Provide advice, guidance, peer to peer knowledge sharing and funding for farmers on nature based solutions and carbon audits, including providing assistance accessing DEFRA & Welsh Government schemes and natural capital funding where suitable.
- Develop a greater connection between farms and communities, including schools, developing a better understanding of where our food comes from and how to make good use of it.
- Promote the connections and benefits of local supply chains and the importance of food production which sustains family farm businesses and enhances the landscape.
- Establish robust monitoring of water quality and quantity, with Citizen Science and remote sensing, to demonstrate the achievements of interventions and the benefit of the project funding on the river and tributaries.
- Support Public, Private & Voluntary sectors working in partnership to support farmers and local communities to deliver transformative change, highlighting achievements and acting as a catalyst for actions, locally, regionally and (inter)nationally.
- Potentially reintroduce key species in suitable agreed locations.
- Promote Dark Skies and reduce light pollution, enhancing appreciation of the night sky and connection and celebration of place.

The ambition is to reconnect people with their landscape, closing the current disconnect between people, food and place, whilst supporting a more river friendly system of farming in the target sub-catchments in and adjacent to the Wye Valley National Landscape. There are opportunities to both develop local markets for food produced in an environmentally friendly way, which support nature and the landscape, and nurture a greater understanding and appreciation of the benefits such land management brings.

These proposals have been further discussed with various partners, collectively or individually, including at the Wye Catchment Partnership, Farm Herefordshire, The Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence, Herefordshire Council Natural Environment Team, Woodland Trust, Wye & Usk Foundation and Wyescapes Project Board.

Project outcomes

The Landscape Connections project must achieve against a known problem and support systematic change. The issues are:

- Degraded condition of the River Wye, both designation features and water quality,
- A disconnect between farms, food production and communities, within a wider disconnection of people with the natural environment.

The project will

- deliver against the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan and Wye Catchment Management Plan,
- bring together partners cross border working towards a common goal.

As a result of the project:-

- Farmers will be producing food that regenerates rather than degenerates soil and water in the sub catchments of the lower Wye
- water quality in each sub-catchment will be measurably improved where it enters the Wye.
- Wetland, woodland and connectivity habitats will have been created, contributing towards Wye Valley National Landscape Species Action Plans and Nature Recovery Plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Local Nature Recovery Action Plans.
- People will have a greater understanding of food production where they live and
- farms will be connected with the community, including potentially through the development of branding and supply chains.
- The approach of working with the community and in partnership with farmers will demonstrate how improvements can be delivered throughout the Wye Catchment, leading to an improvement in water quality over the length of the river.

Project name

The proposed name of the project is '**Ergyng Landscape Connections**', as the project area aligns with the ancient kingdom of Ergyng¹, which covered most of the catchments in the lower Wye Valley.

Ergyng was the post-Roman and early medieval Celtic/British kingdom that covered south Herefordshire, eastern Monmouthshire and the Forest of Dean between the 5th and 7th centuries. It became the buffer state between the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia and the British kingdoms of Powys & Gwent. The old Roman town of Ariconium at Weston under Penyard is believed to have been its first capital.

In the 8th & 9th century, Mercia expanded into eastern and northern Ergyng and the British inhabitants became 'foreigners' or "Welsh" in the English/Anglo-Saxon language, in their own land. The remaining area of southwest Herefordshire became known by the English name of Archenfield². However, the area and its inhabitants continued to retain special status and rights until relatively recent times.

¹ [Ergyng - Wikipedia](#)

² [Archenfield - Wikipedia](#)

Project Area

(for further discussion during Development phase)

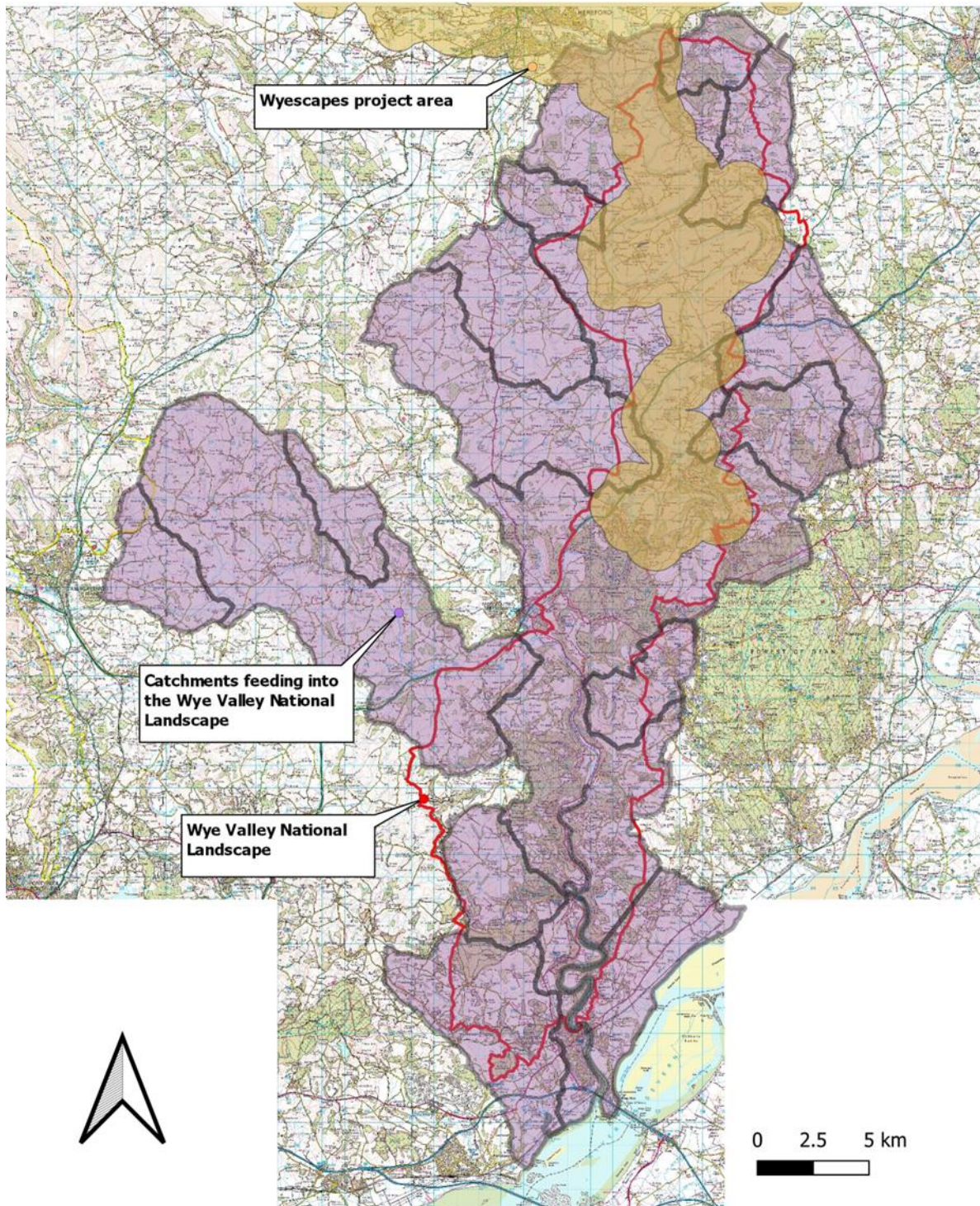
Sub catchments that drain into the Wye in the Wye Valley National Landscape = purple area

Wye Valley National Landscape boundary = red line

Wyescapes project area = brown area, extending up stream

Landscape Connections

Catchments where confluence with the Wye is within the National Landscape boundary



Potential timetable

- Dec 2025 Expression of Interest (EOI) submission to National Lottery Heritage Fund
- 2026-28 2 year Development phase, including:
 - Partnership development – establish a strong partnership of organisations, landowners and individuals to help shape, guide and deliver both the development and delivery stages.
 - Project scope, geography and detail - Work with partners to develop in detail the scope of constituent projects, geography, delivery model and outputs/objectives.
 - Full Application – Prepare and submit all documents required for a full application submission to the NLHF.
- 2029-2037 8 year Delivery phase

Background

NLHF ambition by 2033 is to have supported around 20 Landscape Connections projects that:

- enable everyone in the UK to have access to landscapes rich in nature, clean water and fresh air, places that are inspiring in their beauty and cultural heritage
- help these landscapes to become better for nature and more able to welcome people from all backgrounds, including those who rarely visit them now
- deliver longer-term projects that are bold in ambition and create measurable outcomes for Protected Landscapes
- support those who live in and care for these places to strengthen them as working landscapes based on a clear diagnosis of why the landscape is currently failing to deliver for nature and people and how that will be addressed
- accelerate systemic and lasting nature recovery across whole landscapes, creating and sharing exemplars for how landscape conservation and nature recovery can be delivered with, by and for people who live and work there
- create innovative frameworks for ways in which communities, landowners, organisations and those that manage the land can work equitably together to agree how to influence and drive change to ensure a lasting legacy.