

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 Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects
- b. Annual Partnership Study Tour – 26th Sept 2025
- c. Marches Food Convergence, Square Farm: 3rd & 4th October 2025.
- d. Lower Wye Track & Trails
- e. Species Action Plans
- f. Cleddon Bog SSSI
- g. Wye Valley Walk 50th Anniversary events & walks
- h. Wye Adapt to Climate Change project
- i. Undergrounding

a. National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) projects

The Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) is a national grant scheme funded by National Grid to help reduce the visual impact of high-voltage electricity infrastructure within Protected Landscapes.

In the Wye Valley, the National Landscape Team is delivering three LEI projects within a 3km buffer of the National Grid's high-voltage powerlines, which run through Coughton, Goodrich and Marstow. This work is being carried out in partnership with Herefordshire Meadows, who undertook much of the initial groundwork to scope and plan potential projects.

Over the next three years, working with 16 landholdings, we aim to plant 5.5 km of new hedgerow and create or restore 19.5 hectares of species-rich wildflower meadows. Complementing this, we will also be installing leaky dams and creating ponds and scrapes to slow surface water flow and enhance natural flood management.

Since the first project began in January 2025, we have already:

- Installed 8 leaky dams
- Created 7 new scrapes and ponds
- Desilted a large sediment pond and built a 116m bund to divert runoff
- Harrowed and seeded 3 new meadows
- Installed 1km of fencing ahead of hedge planting this winter

b. Annual Partnership Study Tour – 26th Sept 2025

The Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership Annual Tour was held on Friday 26th September. The programme focused on projects around the Goodrich, between Ross and Monmouth. The tour included visits to: Bishopswood Village Hall, looking at undergrounding of electricity lines; Kerne Bridge Canoe launch site, talking about and seeing canoe hire operations and site management issues; Hen and Dot café, Flanesford Priory, for refreshments and to experience farm diversification in action; Priory Farm, discussing planned work under the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) and Wyescapes project. After lunch at The Hostelrie, Goodrich; Ashe Farm, Pencraig, looking at irrigation reservoirs and farm water management; below Glewstone Boat, looking at Floodplain meadow restoration and other land management issues, including glamping; finally Newhouse Farm, Brelston Green, looking at LEI work: creating ponds, scrapes & leaky dams, meadow restoration and eDNA monitoring.



A total of 31 people attended the Tour with a good spread of representation from throughout the National Landscape. Feedback from attendees has been extremely positive and the time and dedication of the speakers and hosts was greatly appreciated.

c. Marches Real Food & Farming Convergence, Square Farm: 3rd & 4th October 2025

The Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence 2025 was hosted at Square Farm, Mitchel Troy, near Monmouth on 3rd & 4th October. It was the third Convergence but the first visit to Monmouthshire, and was supported by the Wye Valley National Landscape Sustainable

Development Fund (SDF), Monmouthshire Food Partnership and The Marches Forward Partnership. Over the two days more than 150 people explored the future of local food while fostering collaborations through a variety of fascinating presentations, walks, learning circles and practical sessions. The issues of food resilience and the interconnectedness of soil, plant, animal, and human health were discussed and innovative practices shared with others actively working at the forefront of these vital topics, from across The Marches and Wales. Speakers, workshops and panel discussions focused on key themes such as agroecology, regenerative farming, and the development of strong local supply chains.

The National Landscape Team had a stand, along with other organisations and exhibitors showcasing local initiatives and resources. There was also delicious local food and live entertainment on the evening of Friday, 3 October, along with some blustery weather. For more information and photos of the event see <https://www.mrffc.uk/>.

Sadly, on Friday 17th October there was a fire at Square Farm which destroyed some of the main buildings and livestock handling area. Luckily no people or animals were hurt. But this has been devastating for the farm. They have now launched a Crowfunder to help recover and build back something better, with the ambition to include educational and community facilities – see [Help Square Farm Rebuild From Fire to Future - a Food and Drink crowdfunding project in Monmouth by Square farm shop](#).

d. Lower Wye Track & Trails

An audit of the unsealed Unclassified County Roads (UCRs) around Tintern and Whitebrook was carried out by Earth Science Partnership (ESP) in March. Following two revisions, the final report was completed and shared with the Lower Wye Tracks & Trails Steering Group members in October. The audit examines the condition and management of approximately 11 km of unsealed UCRs, identifying issues such as environmental damage, user conflicts, and safety concerns, as well as opportunities for improvement.

A facilitated workshop will be held with the Steering Group on 17th November to present and discuss the findings ahead of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum meeting on 26th November. Next steps include exploring a range of solutions including potential Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs), identifying drainage and maintenance improvements, surface repairs, signage and conservation of natural and historical features.

New route signage has been designed for the two target areas around Tintern and Whitebrook. These are awaiting approval from Welsh Government. The signage will clearly mark the status of each track and trail, thus making it easier for users to understand the respective rights of users. They will also facilitate any enforcement necessary over illegal use or trespass. Further work is also being investigated into monitoring and surveying usage of the tracks & trails.

e. Species Action Plans

Good progress has been made on the Wye Valley's Species Action Plans over the past few months. The Water Crowfoot Action Plan is currently in an early draft stage and is on track for completion by the end of the year. Actions from the Bumblebee Action Plan are already being implemented, including the launch of BuzzWatch, a citizen science project encouraging volunteers to record bumblebee sightings and contribute valuable data on local pollinator populations. The Hedgehog Action Plan has also seen progress through a successful pilot schools monitoring project, which engaged pupils and families in using hedgehog tunnels and wildlife cameras to record activity both at school and at home. These initiatives have generated strong community participation and valuable baseline data to inform future conservation work.

f. Cleddon Bog SSSI

2025 marked the fourth year of ongoing birch and willow clearance at Cleddon Bog. Trees were stem-bored in June and later felled and cleared on 2–3 September. In total, 660 manhours were spent clearing approximately 1,800m² of bog, with four chainsaw operators and 25 labourers removing around 4,500 stems.

The GPS-collared cattle also returned for a four-month grazing period (May–August), targeting the dominant *Molinia* grass. This year, eight cattle (four Belted Galloways and four Australian Lowlines) grazed the site. Owing to the unusually dry summer, the bog remained drier than normal, and supplementary water was provided using bowsers.

A vegetation survey—the first since 2008—was carried out this summer. It confirmed the continued presence of several locally scarce or rare plants and recorded a new species for Monmouthshire: the liverwort *Kurzia sylvatica*. The bog remains of high conservation value for its mire communities. However, recommendations were made to adjust the grazing regime to limit trampling impacts on *Sphagna* and ericoid vegetation. Next year, the grazier will trial a shorter grazing period and digitally fenced zones to protect sensitive areas.

Unfortunately, some fly-tipping was also dealt with this year, including the removal of several bags of asbestos and over a hundred glass bottles.

g. Wye Valley Walk 50th Anniversary events & walks

Guided Wye Valley Walk from Source to Sea in 13 Day Walks

We wanted to do something memorable to mark the 50th anniversary of the Wye Valley Walk, which would encourage new people to take on this 138 mile long distance trail and raise awareness of it amongst walkers and walking holiday operators.

Ruth Waycott, Wye Valley National Landscape Information Officer co-ordinated, and largely led, the source to sea adventure, starting on April 19th on the windswept moorland of Plynlimon, near the source of the Wye. She led guided walks of a new section of the Wye Valley Walk roughly every two weeks, covering between 8 miles and 16 miles on each stage. This saw Spring turn to Summer (with 28 degree temperatures for 2 walks) and enjoying the vibrant autumnal colours of the Wye Valley National Landscape as walkers completed the final 25 miles in October. A heady mix of romantic viewpoints (the Lover's Leap and the Giant's Cave), the haunting ruins of Piercefield House, and the cheers and shouts of punters enjoying a day at Chepstow Races, created a spectacular finale as we arrived in Chepstow.

Completing the 138 mile Wye Valley Walk is no mean feat and we held a small celebration in Chepstow Museum, to award Wye Valley Walk badges and certificates to completers. 100 or so people joined us on the different stages along the way, some walking the whole route whilst others dipped in and out or joined us as part of Ross Walking Festival such as Fownhope Parish Footpaths Officer Will Morris. We had a walk artist, whose paintings we enjoyed in the Wyeseide Arts Centre as we passed through Builth Wells. We had a geology expert who added much to our understanding of the changing landscapes we walked through. An enthusiastic amateur videographer captured the spirit of each walk, including the surprises as we stopped for tea and cake at walkers' homes we passed along the way.

We reached out to people who know and love the Wye Valley Walk and asked them if they would like to lead a section of the walk through their patch. This brought a wealth of local knowledge to each walk. Our thanks go to Graham Taylor and Peter Couchran from Powys Ramblers, Nia Lloyd Knot from Wild Trails Wales, Jill Probert from Embark Walking Holidays, Ceri Belli from Herefordshire Council Rights of Way Team, Holly Robertson from Celtic Trails and Phil, Helen and Alan from Chepstow Walkers are Welcome.

We have also been running some shorter circular walks, following sections of the Wye Valley Walk, including a nighttime walk in July where walkers heard and spotted rare nightjars, and a community walk visiting the new Wye Valley Walk benches on the Duchess's Ride.

The Outdoor Guide Collaboration

We have been working with The Outdoor Guide on a collaboration putting the Wye Valley Walk onto this popular walking platform. The first phase of this is now live here:

<https://theoutdoorguide.co.uk/walking-routes/long-distance-walks/wye-valley-walk/> and will continue to be developed this autumn. With The Outdoor Guide we will also be rolling out 'Waterproofs and Wellies' packs for schools near the Wye Valley Walk this Autumn.

Travel Lightly – Public Transport Map for the Wye Valley Walk

We are producing a map showing the public transport options for Wye Valley Walkers.

Wye Valley Walk Benches

Five eye catching benches, installed this summer at some of the best viewpoints along the Wye Valley Walk, have been enthusiastically received. One was placed at the start of the Walk in

Hafren Forest with the others dotted through the National Landscape in Fownhope, at Caplor Viewpoint, Townsend Farm and Duchess's Ride. We are hoping to secure funding for five more benches for locations on the path in Wales.



Anniversary bench at Duchess's Ride



Nearing journey's end at the Eagle's Nest
Certificates & badges mark 138 miles!



Feedback – a selection of the feedback we have had from the 50th Anniversary Walks

"I just feel pure joy knowing I'll have finally completed the whole of the Wye Valley Walk."

"My highlights have definitely been the connection I have made with the area that I now live in, the walk has really brought to life everything that is great and beautiful about the Wye Valley. I have hugely enjoyed the diversity of people doing the walks and have learnt a great deal about the regional flora & fauna, farming practices, history and of course geology! It has also been good to widen my knowledge of political and environmental actions (or non-actions) and how

the many organisations in the area who are passionate about preserving and enhancing our countryside are working towards a common goal.”

“Eating watermelon in a quiet churchyard has to be one of the most memorable moments!”

“A surprising aspect of these walks is how people who were once strangers have become friends who I am genuinely happy to see each time. There’s something special about sharing the journey together, the chats, the laughter, and the quiet moments along the way. Thank you for making it happen.”

“It has certainly uncovered many hidden gems which I will explore further. It's further impressed upon me what a special and sacred place the Wye Valley is. Walking the whole route has given me such a place of pride, it's really felt like I have inhabited it and fully put down roots here.”

“As a neurodivergent person, I can find route planning and logistics a bit complicated, and whilst I can work it all out myself it can become an inhibiting factor. Also as a solo walker, I usually stick to circular routes so this was a real change. Having the logistics taken care of was a welcome relief and definitely made the route more accessible. I can also find large group activities quite tiring but it's been a pleasure and I feel I've made friends, especially with people I may not have met organically so it has been enriching and interesting - you created such a warm and supportive atmosphere which really elevated the experience for all of us. A kind and thoughtful guide, creating a magical experience for us all and I will be forever glad that I signed up.”

“A terrific collection of great people each with their interesting life experiences and stories to share. I have learned about other walks of life, eccentric recipes, ethical investment, the realities of farming, running a travel company etc. I have genuinely enjoyed being with a floating population of fellow walkers, some did just one walk, others a couple, all were a delight and added to the fun of the whole endeavour. Everyone ‘bought something to the table’ and in times when the world around us seems so troubled it has been the antithesis. I have LOVED the whole darn thing.”

“I just wanted to congratulate you on a fantastic 50th anniversary celebration of walking the river wye. I particularly want to highlight to you the outstanding work of Ruth Waycott. She was amazing and went above and beyond in her role and must be congratulated on doing the most fantastic work. Congratulations to you all.”

h. Wye Adapt to Climate Change project

In September, the Wye Adapt project hosted a successful ‘Day of Action’, bringing together around 20 events across the Wye Valley National Landscape and Hereford. Delivered in partnership with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust (HWT), the day featured activities led by staff

from the Wye Valley National Landscape Team, HWT and a range of community groups and organisations.

Events focused on climate action, nature recovery, and sustainability, with highlights including free travel on the 65 and 69 bus routes between Monmouth and Chepstow—sponsored in collaboration with Monmouthshire County Council—to encourage sustainable transport. Other activities included farm walks showcasing climate-friendly farming, a tour of an off-grid smallholding, and river surveys exploring local biodiversity. Around 150 people took part in events throughout the day (not including bus passengers – which increased), and overall feedback was positive.

Farm advice and delivery (July to October): Seven new farms were visited to provide advice on Nature-Based Solutions. Recommendations from visits earlier in the year have led to on-the-ground action, including the restoration of one pond, creation of three new ponds, seeding of 4 hectares of herbal ley, and around 25 hectares of meadow restoration at various sites, many of these actions have been funded through a WVNL grant e.g. FiPL or SLSP.

In addition, the installation of eight leaky dams, creation of a new pond and bund, and desilting of an existing sediment pond was overseen across three landholdings in Marstow, funded through the Landscape Enhancement Initiative.

i. Undergrounding

Working in partnership with National Grid and the West Midlands Protected Landscapes, five schemes are now approved and with local National Grid teams for landowner consultation and delivery. Three schemes in the Herefordshire part of the National Landscape will see 3.2km of overhead lines removed and placed underground. Two schemes in Monmouthshire will see 1.4km of overhead line undergrounded. The feasibility of an additional scheme is being assessed in the Gloucestershire part of the National Landscape. Should all schemes progress to delivery, work should be completed by the end of March 2028.