

WYE VALLEY NATIONAL LANDSCAPE NATURE RECOVERY PLAN

Purpose

To present members with the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. Endorses the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan, in accordance with the Colchester Declaration commitments.
- B. Notes the public consultation on the draft Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

Key Issues

- The Colchester Declaration – a ‘declaration for nature’ was produced in 2019 supported by all the AONB (now known as the National Landscape) Partnerships and the National Association for AONBs (now the National Landscapes Association).
- The ambition was pledged for every AONB Partnership to prepare a Nature Recovery Plan and deliver Species Action Plans to reverse the decline of threatened species.
- Five species, or assemblage of species, were chosen as representative of the Wye Valley National Landscape Special Qualities as a commitment to the Colchester Declaration.
- The suite of Species Action Plans support the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan, which is appended below.
- Four previous Species Action Plan (SAP) have been adopted by the JAC, the fifth and final Species Action Plan will be presented to the next JAC meeting, focusing on Water Crowfoot, emblematic for the sustainable restoration and management of the riverine habitat.
- The Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan and Species Action Plans are designed to align with the Monmouthshire Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) and Gloucestershire and Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs).
- The Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy is currently out for public consultation until 22nd March.

Reasons

Biodiversity is in decline. Landscape-scale action is needed to reverse the declines in biodiversity and realise nature’s recovery, enacting the Lawton principles of Bigger, Better, More and Joined Up.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced the duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience in the exercise of local authority functions. This means that the responsibility for compliance and delivery sits across all services and functions.

In England, the Environment Act 2021 introduced the requirement for local bodies to take responsibility for restoring the environment within their locale, working with local groups and the local authority. DEFRA has mandated every county in England to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). These draw on ecological insights and natural solutions that improve biodiversity and describe where and how the development of habitats should have the greatest benefit for nature.

Implications

The Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan 2026–2031 is primarily for the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership to give strategic direction to nature recovery work by the National Landscape Team. However it can be used by a broader audience in decision making around land management opportunities, including landowners and land managers, communities and other interest groups.

The current AONB Management Plan identifies 27 Special Qualities of the landscape. These include 6 Biodiversity features as the most distinctive and important habitats in the Wye Valley National Landscape, being:-

- Woodlands [SQ2]
- The River & Tributaries [SQ3]
- Species rich grassland, including small field pattern of un/semi-improved grassland [SQ4]
- Boundary habitat diversity & connectivity [SQ5]
- Ancient & Veteran tress [SQ18]
- Orchards [SQ27]

The conservation and enhancement of these habitats therefore has the greatest potential for the recovery of nature in the National Landscape. The Nature Recovery Plan explores the extent, condition and issues relating to each habitat and identifies opportunities for nature recovery. Under each Special Quality/habitat theme are a list of ‘Nature Recovery Aims’ and ‘Targets’. These focus on conserving and enhancing the existing natural habitats, but also making them bigger, creating new areas of species-rich habitat and, critically, ensuring they join up to create functional and resilient ecological networks that enable nature and people to thrive.

The Nature Recovery Plan does not advocate ‘re-wilding’ the National Landscape nor wholesale change to the existing landscape mosaic. Many of the special places that exist, such as traditional orchards, species-rich grasslands, rivers and streams, semi-natural and ancient woodlands, are rich in cultural as well as natural heritage. The landscape is special because of the interaction and relationship between the natural and cultural features and each have value in the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape.

The Wye Valley National Landscape Species Action Plans (SAPs) complement the Nature Recovery Plan. The last of the 5 Species Action Plans is being finalised and will be presented to the next JAC meeting in July.

In July 2025, Monmouthshire County Council adopted a Local Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) to help deliver the Council's commitments under the Climate and Nature Emergency and Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The NRAP aims to provide practical, achievable

actions designed to help reverse the decline in biodiversity and build ecosystem resilience in Monmouthshire, see

<https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/documents/s42022/Appendix%20%20Local%20NRAP%20Part%201.pdf>

Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) is the Responsible Authority for the Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The development of the strategy has been a collaborative effort and showcases Gloucestershire's wildlife, and acts as an essential tool for steering nature recovery in the county. Public consultation on the LNRS ran for 6 weeks in September and October 2025. The LNRS includes a spatial online tool that maps the priority Potential Measures across areas of the county where they would have the best impact for nature - joining up existing wildlife sites and expanding from existing habitat. For more detail see:

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/ecology-and-landscape/gloucestershire-local-nature-recovery-strategy/>

Herefordshire Council is leading on the Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). A public consultation on the draft LNRS started on Thursday 5th February and closes on Sunday 22nd March 2026. For further details see <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/lnrs>.

Background

In 2019 the annual National AONB 'Landscapes for Life' Conference took place at the University of Essex, Colchester. The conference concluded with The Colchester Declaration – a Declaration for Nature. This was developed through a series of pre-conference discussion fora and workshop sessions during the conference. The Colchester Declaration has been supported by AONB/National Landscape partnerships across England and Wales, pledging to protect what remains and restore what has been lost.

During 2019-2022 the AONB Unit (now National Landscape Team) worked with local wildlife and conservation experts to choose 5 species, or assemblage of species, that are representative of the AONB Special Qualities [SQ], as identified in the AONB Management Plan, and would benefit from positive landscape scale management. The species chosen are: Noble Chafer beetle in relation to orchard habitats & Veteran Trees [SQ27, SQ18]; Hedgehog as a locally iconic species [SQ1, SQ4, SQ5, SQ26]; Bumblebee assemblage with particular focus on Shril Carder, Brown-banded Carder, and Red-shanked Carder in relation to grassland sites [SQ4]; Woodland butterfly assemblage with special interest in the Wood White and Pearl Bordered Fritillary in relation to woodlands [SQ2]; and Water Crowfoot as an indicator for river water quality and quantity [SQ3, SQ10].