

WYE VALLEY AONB
OFFICER'S REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
4th July 2016

FUTURE LANDSCAPES WALES PROGRAMME

Purpose

To seek members' endorsement of the outcomes and proposals to date of the Future Landscapes Wales programme addressing the Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales.

Recommendations

That the JAC

- A. Welcomes the options and proposals presented to the Future Landscapes Wales Working Group
- B. Endorses the provisional response to the Briefing Papers
- C. Supports the continued involvement of the AONB Officer in opportunities to shape the future of Designated Landscapes in Wales.

Key Issues

- Lord Dafydd Ellis-Thomas AM, chair of the Future Landscapes Wales Working Group delivered an interim report to the outgoing Minister for Natural Resources just before the Welsh Assembly election in May (see Appendix 1)
- The Future Landscapes Wales Project Groups recently presented their current findings to the Working Group (see Appendix 2, Briefing Papers).
- There is a new draft Vision for Wales' Designated Landscapes and a number of proposals that will be considered further in preparation for Lord Ellis-Thomas's final report later in the year.
- A provisional response to the main implications for the Wye Valley AONB is provided below and in Appendix 3.
- The new Minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM has endorsed the Future Landscapes Wales programme and attended part of the recent Working Group meeting.

Reasons

The Future Landscapes Wales Project Groups, made of 24 staff from AONBs, National Parks, Welsh Government and some NGOs, have been working over the last 7 months on the four topics in relation to the Designated Landscapes in Wales: Vision; Governance;

Innovation in resourcing; Catalysts of rural development. They presented their initial findings to the Working Group in March. The Working Group includes academics, entrepreneurs, health and well-being specialists, senior figures in non-governmental organisations and senior representatives from designated landscapes, chaired by Lord Dafydd Ellis-Thomas AM. Subsequently the Project Groups have liaised further with Working Group members and on 20th June they again met and presented their refined proposals. The Briefing Papers are appended. These are working papers which offer an insight into part of the process at this stage of the programme. Lord Ellis-Thomas will finalise his Report to the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs later in the year. A small task group, which includes the AONB Officer, will support him in drafting this report over the summer.

Implications

The provisional proposals in the Future Landscapes Wales Briefing Papers (see Appendix 2 below) were presented to the Working Group on 20th June. Responses and comments have been requested by Welsh Government by 4th July. It is intended that immediately following the JAC meeting the comments and response of the JAC will be forwarded by the AONB Officer to Welsh Government.

Appendix 3 tabulates the proposals and provisional, considered responses in relation to the most relevant consequences for the Wye Valley AONB. Many of these require only operation changes to implement. Most are acceptable and should be endorsed, however the more significant ones can be summarised as follows:

Vision:

- There is some concern that the term ‘natural beauty’ is not referred to as this remains in the founding legislation. There is the need for some rationalisation and prioritisation of the purpose of the Vision.

Governance:

- The general consensus is that the current system of governance of AONBs and National Parks does not need radical reform but some adjustments and modifications. This should be welcomed, particularly considering the uniqueness and strengths of the cross-border arrangements in the Wye Valley AONB.
- There is a proposal to have more formal representation of the national interest on JACs. This could be accommodated by modifying the 3 representatives of county voluntary conservation sectors to have a broader national remit / expertise.
- There is a proposal to amend the CRoW Act section 85 ‘duty of regard’ to strengthen the requirement of all stakeholders to take account of the Management Plan. This should be welcomed but may require primary legislation.

Innovation in Resourcing:

- The emphasis is on securing resources for 3 areas:
 - Sustainable Land Management, at a landscape scale, to ensure natural and cultural resources in distinctive landscapes are conserved and enhanced for future generations. This requires landscape scale collaboration, best facilitated by a:-
 - Dedicated / Executive Body. The vast majority of models across the globe for delivery and resourcing of landscape scale collaboration in nationally important landscapes receive the majority of their core resourcing through public funding. Consequently this requires

- Governance, that adopts the principles outlined (on pages 3 & 4 of the Briefing Papers), accepting that differing models, arrangements and levels of executive power will affect the resourcing required.

It is recognised that there is no single or simple solution to resourcing and there are a number of challenges to innovation (bulleted on pages 8 & 9 of the Briefing Papers). However every effort will be made to continue to pursue all the existing resourcing opportunities and invest in collaboration, innovation, efficiencies and sharing good practice.

Catalysts for sustainable economic development

- Introduction of an additional Statutory Purpose for Designated Landscapes. This is already being done in practice but may require new legislation.

Background

The previous Minister for Natural Resources, Carl Sargeant, established the Future Landscapes Wales programme in response to the publication of the independent Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales (the Marsden Report), published in October 2015. The Review's purpose was to consider how the devolved area of designated landscapes fit with and deliver emerging Welsh priorities including green growth and natural resource management within the context of the Well Being and Future Generations Act.

Andrew Blake (AONB Officer) and Matthew Lewis (chair of TOWP and Monmouthshire's Green Infrastructure and Countryside Manager) have both been involved in the Future Landscapes Wales Project Groups, alongside other officers and members from across the Welsh AONBs, National Parks and other relevant organisations.