

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'  
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB  
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
4th July 2016

## WYE VALLEY RIVER FESTIVAL 2016 INITIAL EVALUATION

### *Purpose*

To inform members of the achievements and the initial evaluation of the Wye Valley River Festival 2016.

### *Recommendations*

That the JAC welcomes the success of the Wye Valley River Festival 2014

### *Key Issues*

- The Wye Valley River Festival journeyed through the AONB from Hereford to Chepstow between 29<sup>th</sup> April and 15<sup>th</sup> May 2016, celebrating nature, culture, landscape and life along the River Wye, and the global connections that water brings us.
- There were over 28,000 visits or acts of engagement in over 30 Wye Valley River Festival events, although not all the main outdoor events were blessed with good weather.
- This second Festival was organised by the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit and a professional Festival Management team with an overall budget of £200,000 working with arts professionals and conservationists in collaboration with local communities.
- A wide variety of organisations and communities supported the Festival including many hours of volunteer time and sizable financial contributions from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), Arts Council of Wales, Arts Council England, Environment Agency, Shire Hall Monmouth, and a significant range of smaller donations.
- A great many people dedicated time and energy to making the Wye Valley River Festival such a broad, innovative and enjoyable series of events.
- A full evaluation of the Festival is being undertaken to appraise lessons learned and whether the original proposal to establish a biennial Festival remains a viable option.

### *Reasons*

The central theme of the Wye Valley River Festival 2016 was 'Global Arteries' and how our river and the water flowing through it connects us to other rivers and people around the world. The Festival aimed to inspire and challenge, to change the way we look at ourselves and our complex and universal relationship with water, and how we relate to our environment, locally and globally. The programme of events created spaces for celebration, wonder and entertainment and to provoke thought regarding our precious River Wye and its connections across the globe.

## ***Implications***

Generally the consensus and anecdotal feedback is that the Festival was successful in spreading the message about the importance of the River Wye both as our local environment and as a global water artery, using innovative and creative outdoor art. There was nearly too much water at some events but that did not dampen what has been an incredibly vibrant and involving community event. Artists and conservationists have worked with more than 1,520 schoolchildren in preparing for the Festival, making the wonderful Festival flags. More than 1000 origami birds were made by local people of all ages for an avian art installation at Tintern Old Station. Over 220 individual singers, musicians and amateur actors came together from riverside communities to perform at the events alongside seasoned professionals. In excess of 25,000 people were engaged in Festival events where people were entertained by 17 local youth theatre groups, choirs and bands and a host of professional artists. 170 torchbearers from the local communities joined together to bless the waters of the Wye at the different events along the river. The overall budget was £200,000 and there is plenty to view on [www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk](http://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk) ; on Twitter: @wybeauty #wyevalleyriverfestival; on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/wyevalleyriverfestival](http://www.facebook.com/wyevalleyriverfestival) and on the Wye Valley TV and WyeEye websites.

A full evaluation of the Wye Valley River Festival 2016 is underway. About 150 audience feedback forms are currently being analysed and 20% of Festival performers, participants and crew have also responded to a formal survey. The evaluation is being conducted by the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) at University of Gloucestershire. The Evaluation Report will be presented to the JAC, probably at the next meeting in November.

The Wye Valley River Festival also hosted Articulture's 'Landowners & Landscape Outdoor Arts' conference in Shire Hall Monmouth on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> May.

Attendees included :

- David Alston, Arts Director, Arts Council of Wales
- Karine Decorne, Director, Migrations
- Carolyn Robertson, Project Manager, RSPB
- Eleri Wynne, RSPB
- Joe Roberts, Recreation Manager, Natural Resources Wales
- Haf Leyshon, Engagement Officer, Coed Cadw/Woodland Trust
- Dr Ffion Reynolds, Heritage & Arts Manager, Cadw
- Sunita Welch, Education Manager, Brecon Beacons National Park
- Andrew Stumpf, Head of Wales, Canal & River Trust
- Neville Rookes, Welsh Local Government Association
- Gerwyn Evans, Visit Wales
- Simon Coates, Creative Associate, National Theatre Wales

On Friday May 13 at the Wye Valley Sculpture Garden, Tintern a talk on The Art of Sustainability: Rivers, Local meets Global included a live link to Brazil and Professor Henrique Chaves, from Brasilia University, in conversation with Simon Evans from the Wye and Usk Foundation.

## ***Background***

The Wye Valley River Festival 2016 was a Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership initiative with funding from the Sustainable Development Fund, a Welsh

Government Initiative in the Wye Valley AONB, The Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales, supported by the Welsh Government and the Heritage Lottery Fund, Big Lottery, Environment Agency, Ernest Cook Trust, Forestry Commission England, New Grove Trust,, Ross Town Council and in-kind support from Hereford River Carnival, The Shire Hall, Monmouth, Mon Teas, National Museum of Wales, Chepstow Racecourse, numerous volunteers and local communities; main business sponsor Eat Sleep Live Herefordshire and media sponsors Sunshine Radio and Live 24-Seven. Special thanks to land owners at Herefordshire Council, Ross Town Council, The Tump Lydbrook, the Slaughters Biblins, Vauxhall Fields Monmouth, Redbrook Bridge, Llandogo Riverside, Old Station Tintern and Chepstow Racecourse who granted access to make these events possible.