

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
6th March 2017

AONB REPORTS

Purpose

To advise members of activity of the AONB Unit.

FOR INFORMATION

The AONB Officer will give a brief verbal report on the following AONB initiatives, outlined below:-

- a. AONB staffing
- b. Undergrounding update
- c. Offa's Dyke Collaboratory
- d. Wye Valley River Festival 2018 update
- e. Draft Garren & Gamber report
- f. Venison marketing feasibility study

a. AONB staffing

The AONB Information Officer post is currently vacant and recruitment will commence shortly to fill this core post on an 18 month contract.

The contracts for the two Trainee Ecological Surveyors have been extended to the end of March. Their work continues to augment the currently depleted core AONB team.

b. Undergrounding update

In South Wales the two undergrounding schemes at Penterry Church and Reddings Farm near Tintern have recently been approved by the South Wales Undergrounding Steering Group, and passed to the local Western Power Distribution (WPD) team for action. The WPD officers will now make further investigations to make more detailed proposals for the undergrounding and secure wayleaves consents for the work to take place. Should these schemes be successfully completed, they will remove approximately 1.5km of overhead line from views for people visiting Penterry Church and walking the Wye Valley Walk. The cost of these undergrounding schemes is currently estimated at approximately £122,000.

The scheme proposed at Cleddon Shoots has been assessed and is unfortunately not viable due to the terrain.

The long running New Grove Meadows scheme is still feasible, but has been put on hold due to the increased cost per meter of placing the cables in the roadside verge, preventing disturbance to the high value unimproved grassland.

In the West Midland, there are three schemes priced up and on the list of proposals; Brampton Abbots, Coppett Hill and Bishopswood Village Hall. A scheme at Soller's Hope church is to be assessed for feasibility and cost in the near future. Proposed schemes in the West Midland currently exceed the available budget. Wye Valley schemes will be considered amongst schemes from the other five Protected Landscapes as the budget window progresses.

c. Offa's Dyke Collaboratory

The publication of Keith Ray and Ian Bapty's book 'Offa's Dyke: Landscape and Hegemony in Eighth-Century Britain' (Windgather 2016) provides a valuable impetus for fostering new collaborative projects on the linear earthworks of the modern Anglo-Welsh border. Following discussions over recent months, a convening group, including the AONB Manager, have established the 'Offa's Dyke Collaboratory'. This aims to be a network of individuals, groups and organisations aimed at promoting and supporting the management and investigation of Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke, and their landscape settings.

As the inaugural event for the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory a workshop is being hosted by the University of Chester at the University Centre Shrewsbury on Friday 28th April 2017. The event will comprise a series of short presentations on current and ongoing research on the dykes and their environs, seeking to identify and revise key themes and questions for future investigations. There will also be a round table session where proposals and ideas will be debated by participants. To stimulate discussion a draft article proposing areas for future research will be circulated to participants prior to the workshop. It is hoped plans for future meetings and potential projects will also be generated through the workshop. Currently 45 people are signed up to the workshop including representatives from the Universities of Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford and Wales, and from the Brecon Beacons National Park, Cadw, Historic England, the respective local authorities along the Dyke, the Forest of Dean Buildings Preservation Trust and Offa's Dyke Association.

The convening group consists of
Paul Belford, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust
Andrew Blake, Wye Valley AONB
Christopher Catling, RCAHMW
Keith Ray, Nexus Heritage
Howard Williams, University of Chester

d. Wye Valley River Festival 2018 update

Two events have been hosted at Wyastone Leys to progress the research and development of the Festival. Over the two days, 18th January and 21st February, nearly 60 people have contributed to creating the potential proposals for the Festival and the outreach work in building up to it. Artists, academics, environmentalists, musicians, foresters and logisticians pooled ideas and opportunities around the trees and woodland theme. Presentations were given by Dr George Peterken, Rob Guest – retired Deputy Surveyor for the Forest of Dean,

Archie Miles – renowned photographer of trees, and Owain Jones - Professor of Environmental Humanities at Bath Spa University. The ideas are currently being written up and will be reviewed over the coming months. It is anticipated that a bid will be submitted to both Arts Council England and Wales for some of the more creative aspects in May 2017. Other funding bids and partnerships will be developed over the summer and if things come together an outreach programme will commence in the autumn. The Festival dates are 5th May – 19th May 2018.

In addition, the Wye Valley AONB Unit is collaborating with a number of AONB Partnerships nationally and The Woodland Trust in preparing to launch a project to capture images of ash-defined landscapes before the landscapes have been changed out of all recognition because of Ash Dieback. The project will take the form of a monograph about the Ash in Britain which will be a complete overview of the botanical, environmental, historical and cultural significance of the ash. The images will be captured by the author and photographer Archie Miles. The book should be ready for the end of 2017. Dr George Peterken is also working on a book about Lady Park Wood and the national, if not international, significance of this non-intervention woodland National Nature Reserve in the heart of the Wye Valley AONB. It is intended that this will similarly be published towards the end of the year.

e. Draft Garren & Gamber report

Funding secured through Natural England has enabled ecological survey trainees contracted by the AONB Unit to undertake a study into potential project work on the Garren and Gamber Brook catchments, which flow into the Wye at Whitchurch. The study made use of site surveys and discussions with organisations working in the area to establish past, present and potential future project work which could benefit the condition of the brooks and species which do and could thrive on it, as well as benefitting the River Wye downstream. A meeting of partners in late 2016 established a desire to work together and take forward proposals. A draft report has now been produced; once finalised this will be shared with these partner organisations and landowners to identify potential projects. The study may provide some options and opportunities that could be eligible for National Grid funding for biodiversity improvements around the high voltage power cables at Marstow. Other projects are likely to require further work and other funding applications.

f. Venison marketing feasibility study

Funding has been secured through Monmouthshire LEADER, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Natural England to undertake a Venison Marketing and Supply Feasibility Study in the lower Wye Valley. Consultants will be working over the coming months to carry out survey work and reporting to the AONB Unit on findings. This project will produce a feasibility study to investigate the production, marketing and sale of locally produced wild venison in and around the Wye Valley AONB. The study area will include woodlands experiencing highest impact from deer between Symonds Yat, Chepstow and Wentwood. It will investigate where wild venison is processed and sold, and how it is marketed. Also whether there is an opportunity to develop local marketing for wild venison and what gaps need to be covered to ensure the venison can be sourced, processed and marketed locally, using as a marketing tool the benefit to woodland habitats.

Recommendations produced within the study will inform future work on the local wild venison supply chain. Further applications are likely to be necessary for funding to enable this work which will enhance the economic benefit locally to all those within the venison supply chain, including woodland managers, stalkers, butchers, distributors, retailers and consumers.

g. mindSCAPE

The mindSCAPE project continues to run at Bishopswood Village Hall and the Orchard Trust in Lydbrook. The group of Dementia sufferers and their carers, who undertake fortnightly activities, remains at capacity, and with a waiting list of new participants. The project is shortly to enter into its final year, and the AONB Unit are now beginning the process of seeking funding to allow the project to continue beyond its current end date. The AONB Unit are also considering expansion of the project, with a wider range of partners, across the AONB.

A conference is planned for Autumn 2017 to celebrate the project and share its success with interested organisations and individuals. It is proposed this will take place over a day and include a morning of speakers and afternoon of mindSCAPE workshops.

Interest in the project from around the country has remained high, with enquiries from as far afield as the North Pennines, Surrey Hills and Somerset. The project was asked to be the focus of a workshop at the South Region Sustainability & Health Networks 'Delivering the health and wellbeing benefits of the natural environment' conference in Bristol in November; the workshop was presented by Hannah Elton-Wall of Artspace Cinderford, who deliver mindSCAPE activities on behalf of the AONB Partnership.