

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee held at The Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council Offices, Coleford on Monday, 6th March, 2017 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor E.J. Swinglehurst (Acting Chairman) (Herefordshire Council)

Elected Members (with voting powers)

Monmouthshire County Council

County Councillors: D. Blakebrough and D. Dovey

Gloucestershire County Council

Councillors: P. McMahon and P. Molyneux

Herefordshire Council

Councillor J. Hardwick

Forest of Dean Council

Councillor G. Davies

Co-opted Members (with voting powers)

Voluntary Conservation Sector in Herefordshire - Mr. B. Nash

National Farmers Union - Mr. M. Price

Herefordshire Association Local Councils - Mr. R. Gething

One Voice Wales - Councillor T. Phillips

Co-opted Members (without voting powers)

Wye Valley Society - Mr. C. Barron

Local Wildlife Trusts - Mr. A. Nixon

Technical Advice Officers

Wye Valley AONB Manager - Mr. A. Blake

Monmouthshire County Council - Mr. M. Lewis

Gloucestershire County Council - Mr. R. Niblett

Monmouthshire County Council - Mr. R. Williams

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor: E. Hackett Pain, County Councillor A. Webb, Councillor P. Cutter, Councillor B. Hogan, Mr. D. Berry, Dr. G. Peterken, Mr. A. Thomas, Mr. D. Price, Mr. A. Lee, Mr. D. Broadbent, Ms. D. Griffiths and Ms. C. Grimstead.

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1. Election of Chair for the meeting

As the Chair and Vice-Chair were unable to attend the meeting, we elected Councillor E.J. Swinglehurst as Chair for today's meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest raised by Members.

3. Public Question Time

The AONB Manager informed the Committee that Simon Dereham had retired as the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) representative serving on the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee and would also be retiring as the River Wye Preservation Trust representative. The Committee was informed that Simon Dereham had been a long standing member of the Joint Advisory Committee and had served as a member since 1983.

We resolved that the AONB Manager should write to Simon Dereham, on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee, thanking him for his commitment and contribution to the Committee during his time as a member of the Committee.

4. Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee dated 7th November 2016 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

5. Pine marten reintroduction feasibility study

We received a presentation regarding the two year feasibility study into whether pine martens should be reintroduced to the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Pine martens are one of Britain's rarest mammals, and are predominantly restricted to Scotland with low numbers in Wales and South Shropshire.
- Once common across England, they were hunted to extinction in the country during the 1800s.
- In the summer of 2016 investigations began into the feasibility of reintroducing pine martens to the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley as part of a collaborative project between Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, The Vincent Wildlife Trust and the Forestry Commission.
- No decision on the reintroduction of pine martens to the area will be made before the spring of 2018. The ultimate decision as to whether to reintroduce pine martens to the area will be taken by Natural England.

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- Andrew Stringer, Pine Marten Project Manager, gave a brief presentation on the project, what is planned for the feasibility study and the latest position.
- The project utilises international guidelines on reintroductions, and aims to assess the costs and benefits of a reintroduction within three key areas, namely: Biological feasibility, Ecological feasibility and Socio-economic feasibility.

Having received the presentation, the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding the potential threat to domestic birds such as chickens, it was noted that there will be consultation with poultry owners and a need to build in mitigation strategies similar to addressing other predators such as foxes and mink.
- There could be a positive impact to the local environment as pine martens are known to predate on grey squirrel as an alien exotic species, whereas red squirrels are indigenous but no longer existing in the area.
- The range expansion is likely to be a slow process but could lead to the repopulation of pine martens to the area over a period of time.

We resolved to receive the presentation and noted its content.

6. AONB Unit 2017/18 Work programme

We received a report regarding the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit during the forthcoming financial year.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The table attached to the report sets out the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit in the form of the Work Programme 2017/2018.
- This is focused on progressing the AONB Management Plan, development of the Wye Valley River Festival 2018 and continuing existing activities while developing new initiatives and funding opportunities.
- Welsh Government has confirmed that the allocation of the Sustainable Development Fund will remain at £55,000 for 2017/18.
- The budgets in the Work Programme have been approved by Defra, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and AONB Steering Group.

We resolved to endorse the AONB Work programme 2017/2018.

7. Joint members' event with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

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We received a report requesting Committee support to pursue joint activity at a members' level with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The Future Landscapes Wales programme had facilitated closer collaboration between the AONBs and National Parks in Wales.
- The AONB Manager had given a presentation to the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) in April 2016.
- The BBNPA was invited to join the AONB Partnership Tour in September 2016 but this had clashed with a full National Park Association meeting.
- The joint members' event with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority had been proposed during 2017. The date and exact format is to be decided. However, Monday 11th September 2017 is a potential date for the event. Further details will be reported back to the Committee when finalised.

We resolved that a joint members' event with Brecon Beacons National Park be arranged.

8. AONB Perceptions Survey

We received a report regarding the initial findings from the AONB Perceptions Questionnaire.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- In 2011 a survey of AONB Partnership members was circulated about perceptions of the Wye Valley AONB, the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and the AONB Unit.
- A follow-up survey on AONB Perceptions has just been completed with a very positive response rate.
- The questionnaire was published and distributed electronically to 620 people involved in the AONB Partnership or connected with various projects. At closure of the survey 235 responses have been received.
- A full analysis of the data including a comparison with the 2011 survey will be presented to the next Joint Advisory Committee in July 2017.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

9. National Association for AONBs

We received a report regarding proposed activity of the National Association for Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB).

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In doing so, the following information was noted:

- The AONB Manager represented the Joint Advisory Committee in November 2016 at the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) Annual General Meeting and the National Parks and AONB Chairmen's Conference, in London.
- The main topic for discussion at the Chairmen's Conference was the implication of Brexit for Protected Landscapes.
- The NAAONB Strategic Plan 2016-2020 is published.
- The 2016 Annual Report for the AONB Family was published and included three case studies from the Wye Valley AONB.
- The AONB Manager also attended the AONB Lead Officers' meeting in Birmingham in February 2017.
- The dates for the next national AONB 'Landscapes for Life' Conference are 18th - 20th July 2017 to be held in Winchester.
- Outstanding Week 2017 is scheduled for 16th - 24th September 2017.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- National Parks and AONBs are recognised as Category V Protected Landscapes under the global protected area framework of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- At the NAAONB meeting, debate had ensued around the implications to farming and land management support and the loss of potential funding when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union. It had been noted that it was too early to know the implications at this stage.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

10. AONB Unit progress reports and updates

We received a report outlining the activity of the AONB Unit and were provided with an update regarding the following AONB initiatives:

- AONB staffing.
- Undergrounding update.
- Offa's Dyke Collaboratory.
- Wye Valley River Festival 2018 update.

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- Draft Garren & Gamber report.
- Venison marketing feasibility study.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- 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 2017. They are currently on short term contracts producing good work for the AONB Unit.
- Undergrounding - The New Grove Meadows Scheme has been put on hold due to the increased cost per metre of placing the cables in the roadside verge, preventing disturbance to the high value unimproved grassland. County Councillor D. Dovey stated that he could provide his support and assistance in pursuing this matter with Western Power Distribution.
- Offa's Dyke Collaboratory – Further information will be available at the next meeting regarding an event that is likely to be held in the autumn 2017.
- The draft Garren & Gamber report is being finalised. It was noted that Natural England funding allowed the AONB Unit to review what has occurred in this area and what the opportunities were with a view to conducting habitat restoration work. It was noted that there was no identified funding to take this forward at present. The local member would be kept abreast of developments with regard to this matter.
- The Committee was informed that this year was Chepstow's 950th anniversary of being a town. The AONB Manager will liaise with the Chepstow 950 group.
- A further report regarding the venison marketing feasibility study will be presented to a future meeting of the Committee. In response to a question raised regarding wild boar, it was noted that this matter will be included as part of the study.
- The mindSCAPE project is in the fourth and final year of Big Lottery funding - A conference is planned for Autumn 2017.
- LEMUR+ scheme ended in 2016. The AONB Unit were partners in a bid by Ambios Ltd in Devon for Lottery funding for the next iteration of this scheme but the bid had been unsuccessful.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

11. **Dates of meetings for 2017:**

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The remaining Joint Advisory Committee meetings for 2017 will be held on:

- Monday 3rd July 2017 at 2.00pm.
- Monday 6th November 2017 at 2.00pm.

Both meetings will be held in the Council Chamber, Forest of Dean District Council, Coleford.

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm