



Wye Valley  
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty  
(AONB)

Management Plan

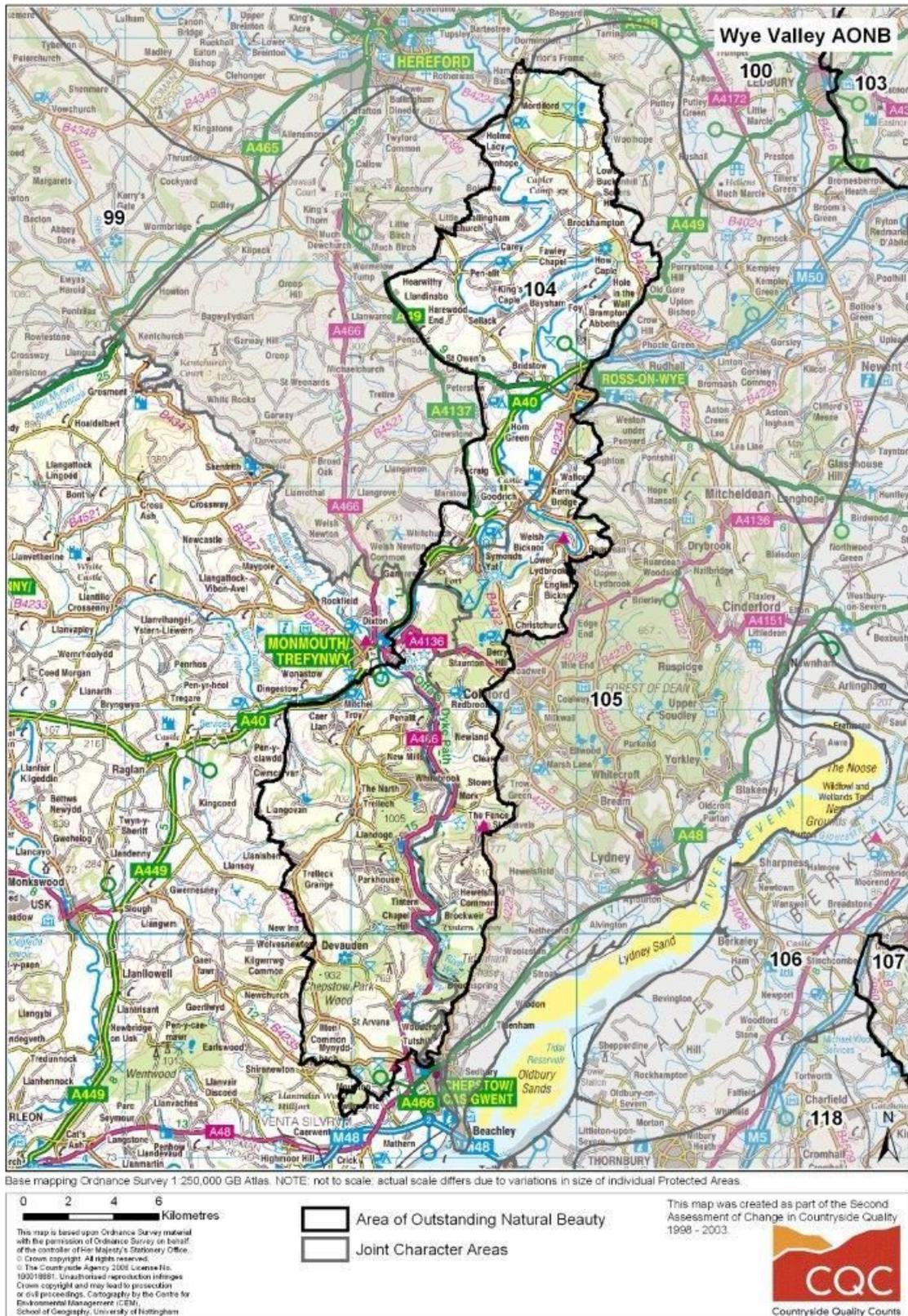
2015-2020

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**Map 1: Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Boundary**



## **Foreword**

## Declaration

This Management Plan was produced and adopted by the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee on behalf of the four local authorities, under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000:

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# **PART 1 CONTEXT**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Purpose of the AONB Management Plan**

1.1.1 This is the third statutory 5 year Management Plan following the earlier non-statutory Plans of 1992 and 1981. Most of the issues in the 2009-2014 Plan are still relevant, and this Plan aims to build on and develop the approach of the previous one, updating and making changes where necessary, and setting out current priorities and actions. The Strategic Objectives in the last Plan have been reviewed and in some cases updated or refined (see 1.1.5 below). An Action Plan and monitoring and evaluation programme is also produced to ensure that these Strategic Objectives are implemented.

1.1.2 This Management Plan, like its predecessors, is intended to provide guidance and strategic objectives, giving support and direction to help steer positive landscape change, particularly to those bodies that make up the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee and the wider AONB Partnership. It also provides guidance to the local communities and many landowners, residents and visitors in the area. The Management Plan is thus for all the bodies and individuals whose actions affect the AONB and who can play an important part in helping to conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the outstanding landscape of the lower Wye Valley, for the benefit of both current and future generations. However this Plan does not provide all the answers for the next five years. It addresses the implications for the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the area. Meanwhile it complements a range of plans, strategies and programmes that cover other aspects in the administrative areas covering the Wye Valley AONB. In this context it articulates the value of the landscape and the added value brought by the designation and the role of the partners in the AONB in supporting society's needs through an integrated approach to land management.

1.1.3 This Management Plan, under Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, formulates local authority policy and action in relation to the management of the Wye Valley AONB. Regard will be given to this Management Plan, which is a material consideration in the respective Core Strategies and Local Development Plans / Local Development Frameworks of the constituent local authorities.

1.1.4 Therefore this Management Plan sits in the following context:-  
National: National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949,  
Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000,  
National Planning Policy Framework,  
Planning Policy Wales,  
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015  
County/District: Forest of Dean Core Strategy,  
Gloucestershire Minerals Local Plan,

Herefordshire Local Plan & Core Strategy,  
Monmouthshire Local Development Plan.

Local: State of the AONB Report,  
AONB Management Plan Action Plan,  
Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA)  
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)  
Wye Valley AONB Partnership guidance notes and positions statements.  
The SEA & HRA contain a list of policy documents relevant to the Wye Valley AONB.

1.1.5 A Consultation Draft AONB Management Plan 2014-19 was published in November 2013 with a 10 weeks public consultation period. In addition two seminars were held with key stakeholders in January 2014 to provide further opportunities for everybody to inspect and comment on the new AONB Management Plan. A total of 27 organisations and individuals submitted 318 specific comments. The consequent recommended amendments to the AONB Management Plan were made and the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee decided to redefine the period of the five year Management Plan to 2015-2020. Screening Reports for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) were consulted on by, in England: Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England and in Wales: Cadw, Natural Resources Wales and the Welsh Government, between July to September 2015. This concluded that the AONB Management Plan does not have any likely significant effects on Natura 2000 sites (SPAs and SACs) alone or in combination with other plans and projects subject to HRAs being carried out at a lower tier plan or project level as set in the HRA document. The Management Plan has also been subject to a Future Generations Evaluation, which includes Equalities and Sustainability Impact Assessments.

## **1.2 AONB designation**

1.2.1 The rich combination of breath taking views, impressive geology, historic legacies and diverse wildlife in the valley of the River Wye between Hereford and Chepstow led to the designation, in 1971, of the valley and adjoining plateaux and hills as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Wye Valley AONB covers 92km (58 miles) of the lower reaches of the River Wye totalling an area of 327km<sup>2</sup> (128 square miles), being 45km North to South and 11.3 km at its widest (East - West) point. It stretches from Mordiford in the north, just east of the city of Hereford, southwards to the outskirts of Chepstow (see Map 1).

1.2.2 The Wye Valley AONB is unique among the 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 14 National Parks in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland in being the only protected landscape to straddle a national boundary; being 64% in England and 36% in Wales. This provides a number of challenges and opportunities for the management of the Wye Valley AONB.

**1.2.3 The primary purpose of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (and National Parks) is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.** This was laid out

sixty five years ago in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, modified in the Countryside Act 1968 and confirmed for AONBs in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. Supplementary purposes to the AONB designation were developed by government agencies in the 1990s (the Countryside Commission and Countryside Council for Wales ‘AONBs: A Policy Statement CCP 356, 1991’ and reiterated by the Countryside Agency in ‘CA 24, November 2001’). These further AONB purposes are as follows:-

- In pursuing the primary purpose, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries, and of the economic and social needs of the local communities.
- Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met in an AONB so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

1.2.4 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty share equal status with National Parks in terms of scenic beauty and landscape protection. This was reinforced in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF para 115) and Planning Policy Wales (PPW para 5.3.6).

1.2.5 Unlike National Parks, AONBs are not authoritative bodies with their own planning or development control functions and other executive powers. Instead, responsibility for the designated purposes lies chiefly with the local authorities, for the Wye Valley AONB being Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council. The government departments and agencies responsible for designating AONBs and advising Government and others on how AONBs should be protected and managed are Defra, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales.

1.2.6 The CRoW Act (Section 85) also requires that relevant authorities, in addition to government and local planning authorities, ‘have regard’ to the purpose of AONBs. These include parish, town and community councils and the holders of public office.

1.2.7 On the grounds of good citizenship and guardianship at least, a duty of care for the AONB also lies with individuals and organisations (private or third sector), especially those who own or manage land in the AONB and also with the visitors to the area.

### **1.3 What is Natural Beauty?**

1.3.1 Natural Beauty is defined as “flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features” in the Countryside Act 1968. These aspects of natural beauty are the components that make a landscape so scenic and distinctive; the wildlife, trees and plants, and the shape of the land with its rivers and hills and rock outcrops. However, since 1968 the recognition and understanding has developed that 'natural' landscapes

of the British Isles are in fact the product of millennia of human intervention. Therefore landscape is about the relationship between people and place; the interaction between nature and culture. Public appreciation is a key component of natural beauty and considerable provision for recreation and tourism in AONBs were made in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Subsequent government guidance provides a further definition: ‘The natural beauty of AONBs encompasses everything – ‘natural’ and human – that makes an area distinctive: geology, climate, soil, plants, animals, communities, archaeology, buildings, the people who live in it, past and present, and the perceptions of those who visit it.’ (Countryside Agency, 23)

Consequently the Special Qualities of the AONB encompass natural beauty, scenic beauty, amenity, heritage and landscape assets.

## **2. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE AND VISION**

### **2.1 Statement of Significance for the Wye Valley AONB**

2.1.1 The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is regarded as one of **the finest lowland landscapes in Britain**, with the River Wye one the **nation’s favourite rivers**. The AONB, straddling the English Welsh border, with the river as the centrepiece, is an area of striking contrasts. In the north, the river meanders through the **broad meadows** of the Herefordshire lowlands. The more dramatic scenery, including famous spots like Symonds Yat and Tintern Abbey, lie downstream from Ross-on-Wye. Here the river has cut **dramatic gorges** with sheer **cliffs and steep wooded slopes**, interspersed with broader valley reaches, with rounded hills and bluffs.

2.1.2 The Wye Valley AONB contains a **splendid variety of geological outcrops** and important examples of **active and past geomorphologic processes**. Formed over millions of years, the underlying rocks have been worked on by ice and then the river to produce the landscape of the Wye Valley we recognise today. The differing geology has given rise to a **range of distinctive settlement and farming patterns**. The oldest rocks are the Silurian limestones and sandstones that make up the grey soils of the Woolhope Dome in the north of the AONB. The Old Red Sandstone creates the fertile red and brown soils of the Herefordshire lowlands along with the rich river alluvium of the floodplain. These softer rocks allowed the river to meander more widely. From Lydbrook the river cuts in and out of the harder Carboniferous Limestone strata of the Forest of Dean plateau to form dramatic gorges. The area has a **full sequence of the Carboniferous Limestone Series** and excellent exposures and formations including limestone pavement, quartz conglomerate, caves, natural stream channels and tufa dams.

2.1.3 The Wye Valley is particularly important for its **rich wildlife habitats**. This is reflected in the remarkable juxtaposition of three separate Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), under the European Union’s Habitats Directive. The river is a SAC as well as being the first major river to be designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) along its entire length. Nearly a thousand hectares of valley

side woodland are also designated a SAC. Nine roosting sites for Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats make a third SAC. Underlying this are 45 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) including 4 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and 204 County local/key wildlife sites. The limestone woodlands are renowned as a refuge of rare species and form part of **one of the largest remaining areas of ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland in the country**. As a predominantly wooded and riverine environment, the Wye Valley has a greater combination of ancient and natural features than virtually all the other AONBs and National Parks in the UK. Priority Habitats cover nearly 17% of the English part of the AONB. The traditional orchards, pastures, hay meadows, hedges and copses within the farmed landscape also provide rich habitats for wildlife. The strong mosaic of these habitats makes the landscape robust and permeable for many species.

2.1.4 The AONB contains an abundance of sites of historic and cultural significance. Many activities **fundamental to the cultural identity of Britain** have an origin in the Wye Valley. This is reflected in the fact that there are 123 Scheduled Monuments (SMs) in the Wye Valley AONB, 10 registered Parks and Gardens, 17 Conservation Areas and 915 Listed Buildings. The river is both the backbone and the border of the historic environment that underlays the landscape of the Wye Valley AONB. There is a range of distinctive settlement types and patterns, field systems, and vernacular building styles and materials. The whole of the lower Wye Valley, from Goodrich to Chepstow, has been included in the **Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest** in Wales. Features range from caves with Palaeolithic occupation, ancient forests, Roman and Celtic settlements, defensive structures such as hill forts, Offa's Dyke and Mediaeval castles, secluded early churches and monasteries. Tributaries cascade down side valleys to join the Wye, giving focus to settlements and power to **pioneering industries** including wireworks, papermaking, tanning, tin-plate and quarrying. The river was the main transport route up and down the valley, superseded by the railway and eventually the roads. The scenic qualities of the Wye Valley are important in the history of art. Landscaped parks, gardens and viewpoints inspired some of the great British poets and writers. The Reverend William Gilpin was inspired in 1770 to write his treatise on the notion and depiction of landscape and gave birth to the **'picturesque' movement**. As a result of his work the valley became very popular with visitors.

2.1.5 The lower Wye Valley remains nationally renowned as a **destination for tourism and recreation** with 2.3 million tourist days per annum. Overnight stays, while common, are outweighed by day trips with many people travelling for less than 2 hours to visit the Wye Valley. Amongst these visitors are some of the **29,300 residents** living and/or working in the market towns, villages and hamlets of the Wye Valley AONB.

2.1.6 The **high quality environment** of the lower Wye Valley makes a significant contribution to the area's economic development. The natural beauty of the area is recognised as **contributing to economic activities and well-being** such as tourism and inward investment, as well as the overall **quality of life**, making the Wye Valley a more attractive place in which to live and work. However, the general locality is renowned for limited job opportunities. Many residents work outside the AONB,

often commuting to Birmingham, Bristol or Cardiff. The reality for some is an area of low incomes, limited housing, inadequate services and poor transport.

2.1.7 **Agriculture, forestry and tourism** are the main industries that operate in the landscape of the lower Wye Valley along with mineral extraction. Combined together they have to a large extent **crafted the landscape** we see today. Agriculture and forestry are the most apparent land uses with farmland covering 58% of the AONB and woodland 27%. There is a great diversity of enterprises dependant on all these industries, which tend to be characterised by low pay and seasonal employment. The viability of some of these businesses can have significant implication for the natural beauty and social well-being of the area. Tourism, from the early days of The Wye Tour, has focused on the river corridor and the market towns. It is still predominantly based around **enjoyment of the scenic beauty** and the **palimpsest heritage** of the Wye Valley. With increasing diversification tourism is spreading throughout the AONB. Limestone extraction continues at one commercial quarry, with another abutting the AONB boundary. Neither of these quarries are operating at full capacity at the moment.

2.1.8 The majority of employment in the AONB comes from distribution, education, manufacturing, public administration and tourism. The growth of environmentally beneficial activities in these sectors is becoming an increasingly important factor in the local economy. For example the increased interest in **locally produced food** is generating renewed investment locally in environmental land management, local food processing and distribution, food tourism, education and recreation. Other influences that have the potential to benefit the local economy include changes in working practices and the development of woodfuel and other local renewable energy technologies.

2.1.9 The **Special Qualities of the Wye Valley AONB**, which contribute significantly to the ecosystem goods and services of the area, are listed below and tabulated in Table 8.

1. Overall Landscape  
of 16 Landscape Management Zones (see Table 1 & Map 2 - at rear) with key features and links to the other Special Qualities

*Biodiversity*

2. Woodlands
3. The river & tributaries
4. Species-rich grassland, including small field pattern of un/semi-improved grassland, often bounded by drystone walls or old hedges
5. Boundary habitat diversity & connectivity, e.g. between grassland & woodland, farmland & heathland, tidal river & ASNW, hedges &/or drystone walls, lanes, banks, verges and fields & woods

*Geological*

6. Silurian Rocks
7. Devonian - Lower Old Red Sandstone
8. Quartz Conglomerate outcropping between Lower and Upper Old Red Sandstone
9. Carboniferous Limestone

10. Riverine geomorphology

*Visual and Sensory*

11. Picturesque, extensive & dramatic views.

12. Overall sense of tranquillity, sense of remoteness and naturalness / wildness

*Historic Environment*

13. Prehistoric sites from Palaeolithic to Iron Age

14. Roman and early Medieval sites including Offa's Dyke

15. Mediaeval Defensive and Ecclesiastical sites and associated landscapes

16. Post-medieval industrial sites and associated landscapes

17. Railway heritage

18. Ancient trees

19. Historic / registered parks and gardens

20. Vernacular architecture: Farmsteads, Commoners cottages, Estate houses

*Language*

21. Welsh language & accent; Forest of Dean & South Herefordshire dialects & accents

*Access and Recreation*

22. Old tracks: often in sunken ways &/or bounded by drystone walls

23. Offa's Dyke Path

24. Wye Valley Walk

25. Access land

26. Small commons; largest are Coppet Hill, Broadmoor, Staunton Meend, Whitelye, The Hudnalls

*Other*

27. Orchards

## **2.2 The Vision for the Wye Valley AONB**

2.2.1 The following was developed for the 2009-14 AONB Management Plan as a 20 year vision and remains a true encapsulation of how we want the AONB to be in 15 years' time and beyond:-

*The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will be a landscape*

- *that continues to evoke inspiration in a wide range of people*
- *where some degree of change is accepted and its impacts accommodated through positive management including effective adaptation to and mitigation of climate change*
- *where the distinctive mix of steep valley sides and rolling hills, covered with ancient and semi-natural woodland, mixed farmland, and scattered settlement dominate the landscape along with the meandering river*
- *where the natural and heritage assets are in good order, well-understood and accessible where appropriate, in fully compatible uses and adapted and changed in ways which respect and enhance their significance*

- *with a robust mosaic of inter-connected semi natural habitats for native wildlife, particularly around grassland, wetland and woodland*
- *providing functioning services and resources for society, including flood storage, food, timber, tourism and minerals*
- *which provides work for local people, who make good use of the varied resources the area has to offer*
- *where both visitors and residents are able to enjoy the area, particularly for sustainable tourism, recreation and informed appreciation of the historic and natural environment, with minimal conflict or disturbance from other users*
- *where association with the Wye Valley continues to benefit the surrounding villages, market towns and counties*
- *supported by the good will, pride and endeavour of local people, visitors, and the public, private and voluntary sectors*
- *worthy of its designation as an internationally important protected landscape.*

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1.1

1.2

### **3. MANAGING CHANGE**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

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3.1

3.1.1 The Wye Valley has always been subject to natural and cultural changes and this will inevitably continue. Our actions inexorably lead to change and we have to embrace and adapt to change. We cannot and should not aspire to one fixed date or state in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The countryside has evolved as a result of land management practices and this evolution will continue as demands from consumers and users continue to change. It is neither possible nor desirable to ‘fossilise’ a landscape, and we must aim to keep a living, working and functioning countryside. Table 2 and Table 8 below outline what the landscape features and Special Qualities of the area are that people value and wish to see remaining in the landscape, and the ecosystem goods and services that the landscape provides. Understanding these interrelations helps us recognise what is required to sustain those assets and services for future generation.

3.1.2 In the past change has often been quite gradual. Today the nature, speed and extent of changes induced by modern lifestyles and management practices are more threatening to the ecosystems, landscape and natural beauty. Indeed the speed and scale of changes in lifestyles, agriculture and transport in the last seventy years are unprecedented and, along with the consequential impacts of climate change, threaten to degrade distinctive landscape features and wildlife habitats; but there are opportunities to adapt and arrest destructive change in places.

3.1.3 Many of the pressures we face now will erode the assets and character of the area unless we make positive choices about what we want to see happen, and make sometimes difficult decisions to achieve this. Thus the impetus in the AONB needs to focus on the most effective solutions to managing those factors influencing change. The challenge is to conserve the distinctive features and Special Qualities of the AONB, to maintain the ecosystem services the area provides and to seek to enhance all of these where they are judged to be deteriorating. We must do this for the benefit of current and future generations.

3.1.4 The main activities and pressures in the AONB are laid out in Table 9 below. This identifies the impacts that are likely to force change in the Wye Valley AONB over the next five years and beyond. These need to be recognised and managed, or the cumulative effect of all these changes could have a significant detrimental impact on the Special Qualities and ecosystems of the AONB.

## **3.2 Forces for Change**

Some of the most dominant forces for change are outlined below:-

### **3.2.1 Climate change:**

3.2.1.1 The effects of climate change may not be that consistent or significant over the 5 years of this Plan. However the 2006 Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change emphasised that the longer we put off action on climate change the more dramatic and costly the changes will be. The UK Climate Change Projections (UKCP09) based on a 'medium emission' scenario, states that across Wales by 2050, average annual temperatures are projected to increase by 2.3 degrees. In summer, daily maximum temperatures are projected to increase by 3.4 degrees and in winter daily minimum temperatures are predicted to increase by 2.5 degrees. Rainfall is projected to increase in winter on average by 14% and decrease in summer by 16%, however overall the total annual average rainfall is predicted to remain the same. Sea levels around Wales are predicted to rise by approximately 20cm by 2050. Therefore some of the most likely outcomes are:

- Greater fluctuations in water table levels
- Increases in localised flooding, and associated pollution risks, soil erosion and property and crop damage. For example, heavy rainfall may result in soil erosion higher up the Wye resulting in pollution of the water course downstream

- Increase in storm events may result in greater tree fall and land slip, particularly in the steep Wye Valley woodlands resulting in damage to and blocking of roads
- Changes in species distribution (including arrival of non-native species and potential loss of species for which suitable climate conditions disappear)
- Changes in phenology (timing of natural events such as migratory patterns of winter and summer visiting birds, egg laying dates, emergence of flowers and leaves etc.)
- Increased levels of over wintering pest species
- Potential for new pests and diseases of crops, trees and livestock
- Increased spring and summer fire risks on woodland and heathland
- Increased storm damage to, and losses of, field and hedgerow trees
- Introductions of new crops and increased viability of existing crops, for example vineyards. Grapes are already successfully grown on the slopes overlooking Tintern on the Welsh side of the Wye
- Changing patterns of visitor numbers with increased usage throughout the year and particularly during the ‘shoulder’ seasons of spring and autumn
- Increased vulnerability of historic environment features (e.g. wetter ground conditions on monuments causing greater poaching, increased decay of redundant farm buildings, erosion or damage of bankside archaeological features and structures such as bridges, watermills, wharves and forges.

3.2.1.2. There are two aspects to addressing climate change; mitigation – reducing greenhouse gas emissions – and adaptation – changing the way we do things to take account of the inevitable and unavoidable changes that have started to happen. There is a need to ‘act locally’ and to consider the contribution that the AONB and AONB based activities, such as tourism, transport, exploitation of renewable materials, design and siting of housing, etc. can make to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It will also be appropriate to support initiatives to tackle issues in a national and global context, including influencing policy.

3.2.1.3 Ecological connectivity and robust habitat networks will allow for the movement of species in the face of climate change. Restored habitats can be utilised to reduce the impacts of extreme events related to climate change. For example, restored woodlands and wetlands could help alleviate the impacts of flooding. The adoption of an integrated landscape-scale approach will create more resilient networks and habitats that improve the adaptive capacity of the countryside and the maintenance of ecosystem services.

3.2.1.4 Green Infrastructure is a clear mechanism that delivers ecosystem services in which landscape, biodiversity, accessibility and quality of life benefits are supported through sustainable communities. Green Infrastructure can therefore play a vital role in tackling climate change, by:-

- Sustaining diversity by promoting ecological connectivity and robust habitats.
- Restoring habitats e.g. woodlands/vegetation, to help reduce flooding and offset air pollution whilst also conserving the key features and characteristics which have led to the AONB designation that make it so attractive to locals and visitors today.

- Providing sustainable urban drainage to absorb excess rainfall and ensuring the character of the river is not degraded.
- Contributing space to grow foods using sustainable methods thus promoting healthy diets for local communities but also enhancing biodiversity, providing jobs and educational benefits.
- Safeguarding accessible green space which helps reduce the effects of urban heat islands and also contributes to people's sense of health and well-being as well as having economic benefits relating to tourism.
- Reducing carbon emissions through encouraging alternative modes of transport by walking and cycling whilst also supporting health, well-being and tourism.

3.2.1.5 Key challenges in tackling adaptation to climate change will be sharing good practice. Some measures to adapt to predicted changes might have unintended consequences for the landscape, historic environment and biodiversity, such as new reservoirs or renewable energy infrastructure. Therefore sensitive planning is required to reduce negative impacts while endeavouring to secure the positive benefits. This all needs to be backed by a strong evidence base, the monitoring of impacts when and where they occur and transferring the knowledge to the policy makers.

3.2.2 **Economic recovery:** With the current emphasis of 'going for growth' the added value that the protected landscape provides for the local and national economy needs to be fully recognised. The natural resources, its constituent ecosystems and biodiversity are critically important to our well-being and economic prosperity, but are consistently undervalued in conventional economic analyses and decision making. Sound advice, support and encouragement is needed for land managers in developing and delivering schemes, and also ensuring that there are multiple outcomes such as access, education, tourism, and community engagement along with biodiversity and landscape enhancements. We should ensure that 'growth' is 'excellent and sustainable growth' and not something that people regret in the future.

3.2.3 **Standardisation:** The overall pressure for standardisation in many aspects of life can have an erosive effect on the natural beauty and distinctive character of an area. The cumulative effect of the replacement of locally distinctive features with standardised materials can create a creeping urbanisation of the rural landscape. Standardised highways infrastructure, replacing drystone walls with mortared walls, hard surfacing of green lanes or uniform design in a new development are all examples of adopting standards that may not complement the landscape features and Special Qualities of the AONB. Recent damaging trends would suggest that these issues need greater consideration within planning applications in the AONB.

3.2.4 **Agriculture:** Farm incomes remain depressed in some sectors and farmers face many challenges in their role of guardians of the countryside. Many farmers have undertaken successful diversifications that add valuable income streams to the farm business. For many, food production underpins the core business and farms have diverged either becoming larger, yet employing less people, or being more labour intensive smallholdings. There are greater efforts to conserve and enhance wildlife habitats and landscape features alongside increased production. Traditional stone

buildings, which form an important part of the rural landscape, continue to be converted, sometimes unsuitably, into dwellings. Reforms and changes of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are likely to affect the AONB. The cross-compliance of farm payments along with the uptake of agri-environment schemes should benefit the landscape. However the vagaries of the open market and the advancement of some farming practices may in themselves force change on farming and the landscape that are undesirable or unintentional.

**3.2.5 Forestry:** The concept of multi-purpose forestry underpins modern forestry policy. Recreational use of the woods remains high. Timber prices, particularly for firewood are buoyant and markets strong. This is encouraging private owners back into managing their woods and grants can assist with improving the access for increased harvesting and for producing robust management plans. However in many parts of the Wye Valley the woods remain under-managed and over-mature. Meanwhile buyers of wood products are increasingly demanding assurances about the quality and impacts of forest management. Certification is one way of providing such an assurance and much of the Wye Valley woodlands are already certified. Past activities, such as planting conifers in ancient semi-natural woodland and on heathland, are slowly being reversed. Historically the Wye Valley woodlands were managed for woodfuel in the form of charcoal. The development of modern woodfuel markets could significantly increase the management of these woods once more. However this will need larger access tracks for modern machinery. These changes would revert the continuous covered forest canopy to which people have become accustomed over recent years, to a more dynamic patchwork of different-aged coppiced coups and stands of maturing trees for timber. The overall connectivity of woodlands in the valley mean the wildlife habitats are fairly robust. However there are significant threats to a variety of tree species by new pests and diseases, which could have a dramatic impact on both the landscape and the viability of some forestry practices. In particular, *Phytophthora ramorum* is significantly affecting larch plantations and will have implications for the clear felling of larch trees in the Wye Valley. Where this happens deer may also be pushed into the remaining woodlands, with consequent impacts of increased browsing. It is worth noting that the effect of *Phytophthora ramorum* can also be viewed as positive in that it will help to achieve restoration of Planted Ancient Woodlands (PAWS) areas back to broadleaves more quickly (although not through the preferred method of continual thinning). The areas not designated as PAWS are likely to support mixed conifers /broadleaves so as not to have a monoculture of trees and this will benefit tree health and wider conservation including protected species.

**3.2.6 Transport:** Private vehicle and HGV use remains the dominant form of transport, although cycling is increasing in the lower Wye Valley. The arrival of alternative forms of fuel and the impacts of ‘post peak oil’ are uncertain within the Plan period. Similarly ‘peak car’ use may have been reached as nationally the number of car miles per person has levelled off or declined since the mid-1990s but the influences of wider economic, social, cultural and spatial factors are complex, and growth in rural areas has remained static or is increasing. In the meantime incremental changes in transport infrastructure can erode local distinctiveness and natural beauty and mar the landscape character. For example; concrete curbing is installed to

prevent increased erosion of verges; signs proliferate to direct and inform the driver, and these are bigger and brighter to gain attention as vehicle speeds have increased. In Wales bi-lingual signs are even larger. Street lighting has also increased so that main junctions are fully lit and what were once quiet obscure rural crossroads may now have a mini-roundabout and a dozen street lamps. Sustainable transport options are required which avoid these pitfalls. Initiatives that provide valid alternatives to private vehicle use need to be pursued by all of us.

**3.2.7 Tourism and Recreation:** Visitors support an important part of the local economy, being one of the largest sectors of employment in the AONB. But managing the flow of visitors, particularly in the peaks and troughs (often weather dependent), is a challenge along with maintaining appropriate staffing levels to service this variable demand, thus very reliant on part-time local labour. The investment generated by tourism can help to sustain aspects of the local environment. However the trend for late booking and discounting is reducing the profitability for many businesses, particularly the small family-run businesses typical of the Wye Valley. This is exacerbated by rising costs. When visitors spend less or expect more for less money, it is often the food and drink industry which is hardest hit. This part of the industry can be an integral part of supporting local production and landscape conservation. Visitors also bring pressures on the local infrastructure, such as facilities, roads and trails, with modifications required to accommodate their needs or militate against the impacts.

**3.2.8 Development pressures:** The UK population will continue to grow, and its demands and expectations continue to evolve. This is likely to increase pressures on ecosystem services in a future where climate change will have an accelerating impact both here and in the world at large. These are predicted to continue as more people require more houses in which to live, and may wish to live in the countryside, while working in neighbouring towns and cities. Linked to this is the growth in road traffic. This all has an effect on the tranquillity and undeveloped nature of the area. Conversely, some people may perceive the AONB designation itself as a threat to the modern aspirations and lifestyles of the area's residents and businesses. Expansion of the market towns adjacent to the AONB and the associated growth in traffic could have significant implications for the AONB. A Green Infrastructure approach when considering development would allow the holistic consideration of a wide range of aspects which ultimately would contribute positively to ecosystem services and the AONB.

**3.2.9 Quality of life:** As the demographics of the population in the AONB evolve so the requirements of local communities change. This has already led to the loss of local services including the closure of several village shops and rural pubs. Agriculture and forestry remain the dominant land uses but less and less people in the countryside have any connection to the growing or processing of local produce. Most of our rural landscapes are oddly quiet now as they are increasingly occupied by people who do not work in the villages and who are not there during the day. For those left behind, such as car-less parents, young people and the elderly, the 'peace and tranquillity of the countryside', that contributes so much to some peoples' quality of life, can become a key feature of social isolation emphasising the emptiness and

silence of their situation. If we do not want our settlements to be soulless dormitories or week-end resorts we must find ways to sustain, recover or improve the core quality of life for people living and working in the Wye Valley AONB. It is also important to ensure that the quality of life that visitors to the Wye Valley experience here is good too.

### 3.3 Changes since designation

3.3.1 The Wye Valley was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1971. The published designation history gives an outline of the key features and reasons for designating the lower Wye Valley as an AONB. However there is not much consistent baseline information from which to measure what changes have occurred in the landscape over the nearly forty five years since the Wye Valley was designated.

3.3.2 A recent comparison of habitat surveys from the early 1970s and 2010-13 over a 10% parcel of the AONB, the Gloucestershire part north of St Briavels, provide a useful insight into changes since designation. The comparison analysis is ongoing but interim results report the following:-

“There are several striking differences between the two surveys. The proportion of broadleaved or mixed woodland, as opposed to solid conifers, has increased considerably, whilst unimproved grasslands and orchards have almost disappeared from the map in most areas. Smaller habitat features such as scrub and bracken patches, small ponds and strips of new planting (including a couple of new orchard patches) have increased:

Deciduous woodland:	+59%
Coniferous woodland:	-43%
Mixed woodland:	+18%
Scrub:	+23%
Improved grass – species-poor:	+6%
Unimproved grass and species-rich semi-improved:	-41%
Orchards:	-87%
Open water:	+140%

“Despite the apparent timelessness of the Wye Valley landscape, there have been big changes since the 1970s. Potential drivers for these changes include:

1. Changes in farming subsidies, leading to abandonment or diversification away from extensive pasture, especially in the more hilly areas;
2. Removal of orchards during the 1970s may also have been encouraged by grants, including grants for farm improvements which required “spare” land near to existing farm buildings;
3. A change in forestry policy leading to replanting of conifer plantations with more diverse mixtures of trees. Outside of the Forestry Commission land some felled areas appear to have been converted to other uses or allowed to grow into scrub;
4. More use of grassland improvement appears to have led to most “unimproved” grasslands either being improved, or allowed to develop bracken or scrub. Some “improved” fields have now developed some species-diversity,

however, possibly due to organic farming or the use of minimal improvement on acid grassland, which can lead to increased floral diversity.”

Gloucestershire Centre for Environmental Records (GCER) 2013.

3.3.3 The following summarises further notable changes that have impacted on the AONB since designation in 1971:-

- The A40 dual carriageway had been constructed by 1971 but subsequent development along the roadside has continued to impact on the natural beauty of the area.
- Most major industry had ceased in the valley by 1971, but development of redundant sites has not always been sympathetic to the heritage or natural beauty of the valley.
- The railway line, closed by 1971, has overgrown significantly providing a tree line where before was a managed transport corridor.
- Agricultural intensification has significantly changed the AONB in some places; field boundaries and orchards have been removed in more intensively farmed areas and much floodplain grassland has been ploughed for arable use.
- Recently there has been a resurgence in cider production and consequently more orchards have been planted, albeit with bush varieties rather than standard trees.
- The mixture of gardens, rough ground, churchyard, semi-natural grassland, scattered trees and walls that characterises [many of] the village[s] provides far greater habitat variety than the commercial farmland nearby (Peterken 2008)
- The number of farmers and people employed in farming has declined steeply.
- Most quarries in the AONB have closed, but the last remaining large quarries in or adjacent to the AONB are still working extensions.
- Many more people work from dedicated home offices. In some parts of the AONB this amounts to about 10% of the resident workforce, equivalent to over 3 home offices per sq km.
- The dramatic decline in salmon stocks in the river is slowly recovering.
- The planting of conifers in ancient woodland sites has significantly reduced in response to higher grants for broadleaves and several areas of heathland have been restored.
- Visitor numbers to the area appear to have declined from highs in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but are increasing again.
- Increasing recreational activity and individual car use continues to exert pressure on honey-pot sites such as Tintern and Symonds Yat.
- Canoeing on the river has increased.
- Housing and development pressure has increased, to the detriment of the stock of affordable housing.
- Many villages and rural areas have lost their shops, pubs and petrol stations, although new community initiatives have re-opened some village shops.

#### **4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE PLAN**

The guiding principles that underpin the approach to managing the AONB are sustainable development, natural resource management, the ecosystem approach and the landscape approach.

#### 4.1 Sustainable development

4.1.1 The concept of ‘sustainable development’ or ‘managing sustainability’ is based around the definition from the World Commission on Environment and Development’s 1987 Brundtland Report as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The UK Sustainable Development Strategy promotes five simultaneous principles:-

- **Living within environmental limits:** respecting the limits of the planet’s environment, resources and biodiversity to improve our environment and ensure that the natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generations.
- **Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society:** meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion and creating equal opportunities for all.
- **Achieving a sustainable economy:** building a strong, stable and sustainable economy which provides prosperity and opportunities for all, and in which environmental and social costs fall on those who impose them (polluter pays) and efficient resource use is incentivised.
- **Using sound science responsibly:** ensuring policy is developed and implemented on the basis of strong scientific evidence, whilst taking into account scientific uncertainty (through the precautionary principle) as well as public attitudes and values.
- **Promoting good governance:** actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society, engaging people’s creativity, energy and diversity.

4.1.2 A move to managing sustainability will require an appropriate mixture of regulations, technology, financial investment and education, as well as changes in individual and societal behaviour and adoption of a more integrated, rather than conventional sectorial, approach to ecosystem management.

4.1.3 The National Assembly for Wales has a statutory requirement to pursue sustainable development (Section 121 Government of Wales Act 1998 and section 79 Government of Wales Act 2006). This gives heightened importance to the interaction between the conservation of AONBs and the needs of recreation and tourism, the local economy and local communities. The focus in Wales is now moving towards Natural Resource Management, which emphasises taking care of natural resources such as land, water, marine and biological systems, particularly on how the management affects the quality of life for both present and future generations. It’s about the long-term implications of actions - thinking about the future and not just about now. The intention is to manage the natural resources of Wales better to achieve

good outcomes for the environment, people, businesses and the economy. Natural Resource Management aims to ensure that the most is made in Wales of the opportunities that Wales' natural resources provide. This needs to respect the limits of natural processes that continue to be our life support system. The overall aim is to ensure that Wales has increasingly resilient and diverse ecosystems that deliver economic, environmental and social benefits. In both England and Wales natural resource management is moving towards the scale of river catchment management.

4.1.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for England has a “presumption in favour of sustainable development”. However this does not automatically apply in AONBs because (under NPPF paragraph 14 footnote 9) there are other specific policies in the NPPF that indicate that great weight should be given to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB and major development restricted (paragraphs 115 & 116). This does not constitute a favour against sustainable development in AONBs and indeed reinforces that change (i.e. development) will occur in many aspects of life and the environment but that where change does occur it must be managed in a manner which contributes to a better quality of life for current and future generations, without undermining the quality of the natural environment. Therefore sustainable management means a future Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which continues to justify its designation as a nationally important area of highly valued functioning landscape with distinctive features and Special Qualities, which is also a living, working area, with vibrant communities where people want to live and work and visit and where they will continue to want to do so.

## **4.2 Natural environment and Ecosystem approaches:**

4.2.1 The benefits we derive from the natural world are critically important to human well-being. The Management Plan adopts the ‘Ecosystem Approach’, being a central principle in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 2004). This focuses on the holistic and integrated management of land, water and living resources to promote conservation and sustainable use and the three objectives of the Convention:

- Conservation of biological diversity;
- Sustainable use of its components;
- Fair and Equitable Sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

4.2.2 The ecosystem approach provides a mechanism which can be used to look at whole ecosystems during the decision making process, and for valuing the ecosystem services they provide, ensuring that society can maintain a healthy and resilient natural environment for current and future generations. In the context of sustainable development, decisions need to be made within environmental limits and at an appropriate spatial scale, whilst recognising the cumulative impacts of decisions. River catchments are becoming recognised as an appropriate scale for this, including the Wye catchment.

### 4.3 Ecosystem services

4.3.1 Ecosystem services are the services provided by nature that benefit people. The environment is our life support system, important for its intrinsic value, as well as providing water, producing our food, energy and timber, sustaining our wildlife and creating employment and income worth billions of pounds (TEEB, 2010). Ecosystem Services (ESs) are the multiple benefits humans obtain either directly or indirectly from these ecological systems and include services pertaining to food provision, carbon sequestration, water regulation and many others, all of which are essential for human well-being (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), 2005; Troy & Wilson, 2006). The MEA is a widely accepted conceptual framework which categorised ecosystem services into four broad categories (Table 1).

**Table 1: Ecosystem Services (MEA, 2005)**

<b>Service Categories</b>	<b>Examples of specific services</b>
Provisioning	Food, fibre, fuel, bio-materials and clean water.
Regulating	Climate regulation, flood protection, pollination, air/soil/water quality
Cultural	Education, cultural heritage, sense of place, health, recreation, tourism and aesthetic value
Supporting	Soil formation, nutrient cycling, water cycling and primary production

4.3.2 Ecosystem services are part of the wider integrated ecosystem approach which also includes the other key elements of involving people and valuing the natural environment in decision making. The UK's existing ecosystems are the product of continuous interactions between people and their surrounding environments, driven by societal changes e.g. demographic, economic, socio-political, technological and behavioural. The historic environment itself is also an environmental resource that confers physical as well as more intangible ecosystem services. Therefore adopting an ecosystem approach is more than managing the environment as an integrated system; it involves managing societal and economic drivers as part of this system. This is fundamental to achieving sustainable development. A fully functioning landscape should continue to provide these services; therefore it also correlates closely with landscape scale management.

4.3.3 However, while the ecosystem services framework is a useful means of assessing the benefits that the AONB provides to people, these need to be examined in conjunction with the primary purpose of AONBs which is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. This should help to secure ecosystem services, but these are an additional benefit of AONB designation. The intrinsic value of natural beauty

therefore needs to be recognised alongside the ecosystem services approach. Both of these two sets of values are important, distinct and complementary.

4.3.4 A study of the main Ecosystems Services in the Wye Valley AONB has been carried out (Parrett, 2011). This identified the Broad Habitat Types in the Wye Valley AONB (see Table 4.) with Enclosed Farmland and Woodland accounting for nearly 88% of the land area combined.

#### **4.4 Landscape approach**

4.4.1 The landscape of the Wye Valley is the result of millions of years of natural evolutionary and climatic processes and thousands of years of human settlement and use. It is a rich mosaic of historical, social, economic, cultural, ecological, geological and geomorphological features.

4.4.2 The landscape approach as it relates to conservation, agriculture and other land uses seeks to address the increasingly complex and widespread environmental, social and political challenges that transcend traditional management boundaries. The landscape approach helps to bring together the disciplines associated with the humanities, and social and natural science in a way that creates policy useful to not only help deliver environmental outcomes but for the delivery of important social and economic objectives. To do this we have to really understand that meeting ground between people and place; the intended and unintended ways we interact with the environment upon which we depend as a species. This means not just viewing traditional policy areas at a landscape scale but seeing landscape as a framework where the skills and assets of people and the social and economic processes that drive them are fundamentally and intrinsically interconnected with nature and the physical environment.

4.4.3 The landscape approach and an understanding of landscape character guide the AONB Partnership's work. This fits well with the ecosystems approach as both encourage consideration of the links between various elements of the landscape in their management. The interaction between natural and cultural forces and the influence of our demand for goods and services impacts on the way we manage our natural resources. These activities in a landscape, particularly a Protected Landscape, should take account of the impacts they may have on the capacity of the landscape to maintain the ecosystem services. For example, the decisions that land managers take determine, to a great extent, whether society's ambitions for water, wildlife, healthy soil and food production can be achieved. The extensive nature of the Wye Valley AONB can help secure the sustainable management of healthy, resilient and productive ecosystems.

4.4.4 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) promotes the protection, planning and management of landscapes and reinforces the approach to landscape character assessment. In line with the Convention and the principles of sustainable development, this Management Plan uses an understanding of landscape character to help guide local activity and ensure that planning decisions and management practices

conserve and enhance the distinct character and special quality of the AONB's landscapes.

4.4.5 Conservation and enhancement of the character and quality of the AONB landscape lie at the heart of this Management Plan. There are four landscape management strategies that can be used:

**Conserve** - for landscapes in good condition with strong character where the emphasis is on protecting the key characteristics of the area.

**Enhance** - for landscapes where some features have fallen into decline. Management should aim to reintroduce features, improve their management and remove features that detract from the overall character.

**Restore** - for landscapes where features have been lost or are in a severe state of decline. Management should aim to repair and re-establish characteristic features.

**Create** - for landscapes where condition is poor and character weak beyond repair. Management should consider creation of a new landscape.

4.4.6 In taking forward these approaches, AONB management tends to focus on large or 'landscape scale' initiatives rather than small sites. Initiatives also tend to be integrated to include many different interests. Sharing management experience beyond the AONB boundary, into the surrounding catchment and/or beyond, is also encouraged where resources allow.

## **4.5 The setting of the AONB**

4.5.1 The AONB is not an isolated landscape. It is connected to the surrounding landscapes, towns and countryside, ecologically, economically, socially and through the action of natural processes such as hydrology and pollination. Development and other activities within the setting of the AONB may have an impact on all these processes as well as effecting views into and out of the AONB.

## **5. MANAGEMENT OF THE WYE VALLEY AONB**

### **5.1 AONBs in the Wider World**

5.1.1 There are more than 100,000 protected areas worldwide. Each contributes in its own way to sustaining life on Earth, including providing a wide range of benefits to people and the environment. These may embrace protection of biodiversity, soil and land productivity; climate regulation; local culture and identity; recreation and well-being. Despite their significance, collectively protected areas cover only 12% of the Earth's land surface. An even smaller percentage of the world's marine environments are protected.

5.1.2 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are part of a family of designated protected landscapes in the UK, which include the AONBs of England,

Wales and Northern Ireland, the National Parks of England, Scotland and Wales and the National Scenic Areas of Scotland. Together they cover nearly 5 million hectares or 20% of the UK land area. Their future relies on sustaining people's relationship to the land and its resources.

## 5.2 International protected area policy

5.2.1 Protected areas remain the fundamental building blocks of virtually all national and international conservation strategies supported by governments and international institutions such as the **Convention on Biological Diversity**. They provide the core of efforts to protect the world's threatened species and habitats and are increasingly recognised as essential to the provision of ecosystem services, biological resources and climate change mitigation strategies.

5.2.2 AONBs are recognised as **Category V Protected Landscapes** under IUCN's (International Union for Conservation of Nature) global protected area framework. A Category V Protected Landscape is "*a protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values*". They offer a unique contribution to the conservation of biological diversity particularly where conservation objectives need to be met over a large area with a range of ownership patterns and governance; acting as models of sustainability and promoting traditional systems of management that support particular species.

5.2.3 The importance of all landscapes is recognised by the **European Landscape Convention** (ELC), ratified by the UK government in 2006. Article 1 defines 'landscape' as "*an area perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors*". General measures include:-

- Recognition of landscapes in law as an essential component of people's shared heritage;
- Implementation of landscape policies aimed at landscape protection;
- Procedures established for participation of the general public and local authorities in landscape protection;
- Landscape integrated into planning and other policies.
- A range of other measures on identification and assessment of landscape; raising awareness and European cooperation

5.2.4 UK government policy reflects these aspirations through an implementation strategy drawn up for Defra by Natural England (NE) and English Heritage and through various position statements. NE's Position on Protected Landscapes (April 2010) states "This holistic and interdisciplinary [ELC] approach is at the heart of managing AONBs and National Parks in England. It emphasises the integration of people and nature over time, and the importance of involving local communities living in or near to them in their management." Welsh Government also issued a Policy Statement for Protected Landscapes in 2014 which notes "The Convention

recognises the importance of all landscapes but also supports international systems of planning, management, conservation and protection for nationally important landscapes.” The European Science Foundation proposes that landscapes offer a new and unifying way of approaching the major challenges facing our society in the future and could become the basis for sustainable development.

5.2.5 The Europarc Federation is the main NGO representing the protected areas of Europe, uniting national parks, regional parks, nature parks and biosphere reserves in 35 countries, with the common aim of protecting Europe's unique variety of wildlife, habitats and landscapes. EUROPARC has around 400 member organisations from hundreds of protected areas. It provides a forum to share professional experience, collaborate on technical projects and progress common aims, across the field of natural, cultural and landscape protection.

### **5.3 AONB Family**

5.3.1 The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) was established in 1998 as an independent organisation to act on behalf of AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and, in doing so, represents those involved in the planning and management of 8000 square miles of the UK's finest landscapes.

5.3.2 The vision of the NAAONB is “*The natural beauty of our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty is valued and secure, the communities within and adjacent to them are thriving, and the relationship between people and these nationally important places is understood and supported at all levels*”. Its role is therefore to raise the profile of AONBs to ensure that their conservation and enhancement is kept on the agenda of all those involved in AONBs at a national level.

5.3.3 The NAAONB has four common objectives, which the Wye Valley AONB Partnership, as a member of the NAAONB, has signed up to:

1. Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, ensuring they can meet the challenges of the future
2. Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty
3. Promote public understanding and enjoyment of the nature and culture of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and encourage people to take action for their conservation.
4. Value, sustain, and promote the benefits that the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty provide for society, including clean air and water, food, carbon storage and other services vital to the nation's health and well-being.

5.3.4 The Association of National Park Authorities is the umbrella organisation for UK National Park staff and members. The two organisations are increasingly working together to share good practice in the planning and management of Britain's nationally protected landscapes.

5.3.5 The Wye Valley AONB Partnership is also engaged in Protected Landscapes Fora in Wales and South West England and with neighbouring AONBs on joint projects and initiatives.

5.3.6 The existence of these national and international networks provides the opportunity to share good practice with other Protected Landscapes around the experience of looking after these special areas.

## 5.4 Responsibility for the AONB

5.4.1 Most of the Wye Valley AONB is in private ownership. Therefore much of the responsibility for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB rest with the residents, landowners and land managers, be they farmers or gardeners. Similarly the many visitors to the AONB should have a responsibility to care for the outstanding landscape they have chosen to spend some of their time (and probably money) in. The Government has designated the Wye Valley as an AONB because it recognises that it is in the public interest to protect such an important area for current and future generations.

5.4.2 Administratively the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is very complex, being the only protected landscape to straddle the English Welsh border. It lies in the three counties of Herefordshire (45.5%), Monmouthshire (36%) and Gloucestershire (18.5%), each in a different region; the Midlands, Wales and the South West of England respectively. However, the cross-border nature of the AONB does also present a strength in the range and experience that the various partners are able to bring to the management of this internationally important landscape designation.

5.4.3 All **public bodies have a ‘duty of regard’** to the purpose of AONBs, under the Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000. This applies to government and relevant authorities, including local planning authorities, parish, town and community councils and the holders of public office.

5.4.4 **Central Government** responsibility for AONBs remains substantial. This comes through the provision of legislation and the policy context whereby the purposes of the designation can be met. From Whitehall and the Welsh Government there is also direct involvement, guidance and funding through departmental and agency functions delivered, for example by Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and the Forestry Commission.

5.4.5 The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 sets out the procedure for future designation (by Natural England) and incorporates significant measures designed to address increased pressures on protected landscapes that had rendered the provisions of the 1949 act inadequate.

5.4.6 Government policy reaffirms the special treatment for AONBs in other major policy areas: the significance of AONBs in the context of land use planning is

considered in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012) and Planning Policy Wales (PPW 2012); the Rural Economy Growth Review (Defra 2011) supports the important role of AONBs in economic development and rural tourism; Making Space for Nature (2010) and subsequently the Natural Environment White Paper (2010) recognises the role protected landscapes play in reconnecting people with nature and the contribution they can make to a coherent and resilient ecological network requiring more and bigger sites that are better managed and joined. Other public bodies such as Cadw, English Heritage, the Forestry Commission and Visit England and Visit Wales focus their activities through protected landscape strategies or joint accords to ensure their work reflects the distinctive nature of each AONB and helps deliver the priorities identified in AONB management plans.

5.4.7 From April 2011 resources and responsibility for funding and strategic oversight of AONB Joint Advisory Committees, Conservation Boards and the National Association for AONBs, transferred from Natural England to Defra. Natural England retains a role in delivering protected landscapes policy and a statutory role in respect of AONBs including powers to designate AONBs and vary their boundaries. NE are the government's statutory consultees on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects as well as Neighbourhood Plans. In April 2013 Natural Resources Wales took over the responsibilities for AONBs from its predecessor organisation Countryside Council for Wales.

5.4.8 The Water Framework Directive (WFD) Regulations in England & Wales place a duty on public bodies to have regard to River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs). The aim of the Directive is to safeguard and improve water quality. It will do this through the RBMPs which develop the links between surface and groundwater, and water quantity and water quality. The Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are the lead agencies for ensuring that the Directive is implemented. The River Wye Catchment and the Wye Valley AONB come within the Severn River Basin District. The Wye Catchment Partnership was established in 2014 with support from Defra and the Welsh Government to bring the farmers, foresters, planners, charities, statutory bodies and people who have an interest in the Wye together to secure better outcomes for the Wye catchment and the environment we rely on. The partnership is hosted by NRW and the Wye and Usk Foundation.

5.4.9 It is anticipated that the **Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)** and European Rural Development Programme funding may play an increasing role in the support for delivering AONB initiatives over the period of this plan. This creates a number of challenges for the AONB. There are different regional and national funding streams and organisational priorities that abut in the AONB. Co-ordination of strategic and AONB wide initiatives can therefore be complicated and protracted. However the AONB is uniquely placed to advise on these cross-border issues and the implementation and review of national and regional schemes. The same applies to Local Nature Partnerships.

5.4.10 The **local planning authorities**, Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County

Council, are central to achieving the purposes of the AONB designation. They deal with all planning issues in the AONB and other local authority functions, such as Public Rights of Way, highways, countryside services, tourism, public transport, etc. Their responsibility was reaffirmed in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, section 84.4, by which they are empowered to “take all such action as appears to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB”. Part of the way they achieve this is by acting jointly through their support for the Joint Advisory Committee.

5.4.11A new ‘**Duty to Co-operate**’ applies to all local planning authorities in England and to a number of other public bodies, under Section 110 of the Localism Act. The new Duty

- Relates to sustainable development or use of land that would have a significant impact on at least two local planning areas or on a planning matter that falls within the remit of a county council,
- Requires that councils set out planning policies to address such issues,
- Requires that councils and public bodies ‘engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis’ to develop strategic policies,
- Requires councils to consider joint approaches to plan making.

The ‘Duty to Co-operate’ also covers a number of public bodies including the Civil Aviation Authority, Historic England, Environment Agency, Highways Agency, Highway Authorities, Homes and Communities Agency, Integrated Transport Authorities, Natural England and Primary Care Trusts.

5.4.12 **Local communities**, including all people that live and work in the AONB, can play an active role in caring for the Wye Valley AONB. This Management Plan identifies some of the priorities for action and ways to get involved, including the Charter in section 12.2. This Plan can also aid community planning, by helping to inform neighbourhood and parish plans and community strategies. This will also help local Town, Parish & Community Councils fulfil their Section 85 ‘duty of regard’.

## 5.5 Management and Governance of the Wye Valley AONB

5.5.1 A **Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)** has overseen the Wye Valley AONB since 1972. Unlike a National Park Authority the JAC is not a planning authority. The role of the JAC is one of advising and guiding the statutory authorities regarding particular issues within the AONB. The constitution and membership of the JAC reflects the trans-national and trans-regional nature of the AONB (see Appendix I). While the complex nature of the AONB is an administrative challenge, in practice the JAC has for many years been a strong partnership based on the tremendous goodwill towards the Wye Valley. This committee meets formally three times per annum and hosts a winter seminar and late summer study tour for the wider **AONB Partnership**, which encompasses the local partner organisations involved in the AONB.

5.5.2 The JAC is supported by a Technical Officers Working Party (TOWP), which comprises representatives of the four local authorities involved, plus a range of relevant Government agencies (see Appendix I). The core costs of managing the **Wye**

**Valley AONB Unit** are jointly funded by Defra and Natural Resources Wales grant aid with match funding contributions from the four local authorities. The AONB Unit are a small team of dedicated staff employed by the local authorities on behalf of the JAC and consist of an AONB Officer, an AONB Finance and Administration Officer, an AONB Community Links Officer, an AONB Development Officer and an AONB Information Officer. The AONB Unit staff work from the AONB Office in Monmouth, which is near the geographic centre of the Wye Valley AONB. The core budget for the AONB unit is approximately £250,000 per annum, with additional funds depending on varying levels of partnership funding for specific projects and initiatives.

5.5.3 The AONB Unit convenes and services a variety of **AONB Topic Groups** and project partnerships which include a wide range of relevant experts and interested partners, often not directly engaged with the JAC or TOWP. These Topic Groups work as either steering or advisory groups on specific projects and topics, or ‘task and finish’ groups for particular issues or initiatives. The membership of these groups broadens the AONB Partnership considerably.

5.5.4 The AONB’s designation, landscape assets and management structures present opportunities to positively address the challenges in the area, both those identified in this Management Plan and unanticipated ones. For example the AONB attracts resources by being a target area for agri-environment schemes, benefiting landowners, biodiversity and wider society. There are many decisions affecting the landscape over which the AONB Partnership does not have direct influence, however it seeks to improve understanding to enable better decisions to be taken. The format and nature of the AONB Partnership makes it well placed to spread information and bring people together quickly in response to environmental changes and challenges. An independent assessment by Land Use Consultants (LUC) on The Value of AONB Partnerships (July 2013) has endorsed this approach.

5.5.5 Many of the principles of this Management Plan can be applied to landscapes outside the AONB boundary. Where appropriate, the Wye Valley AONB Partnership works with partners to deliver projects across a wider area than just the AONB, ensuring that the context of the AONB is recognised. Many projects also operate collaboratively with adjacent protected landscapes to make best use of available resources.

## **6. OVERVIEW OF THE AONB**

### **6.1 Introduction**

6.1.1 This section provides a description of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) with its landscape features and Special Qualities and the activities and pressures affecting the AONB. A separate State of the AONB Report complements this Management Plan and sets out the current state of the Special Qualities.

## **6.2 The Landscape Character of the AONB**

6.2.1 The main elements and features that contribute to the landscape character of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) have been independently assessed in the three counties of Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire. Herefordshire Council and Forest of Dean District Council each have Landscape Character Assessments, while Monmouthshire County Council has LANDMAP, developed under the leadership and methodology of the Countryside Council for Wales (now Natural Resources Wales). The former and the latter were adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in the respective councils' Unitary Development Plan and Core Strategies and Local Development Plans. The various character areas and landscape types identified by the three assessments were amalgamated into sixteen Landscape Management Zones within the AONB (see Map 2). Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) has also been completed in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Monmouthshire, albeit to different methodologies. But the Gloucestershire methodology was extended over the whole AONB.

6.2.2 In England also National Character Areas have been profiled by Natural England. There are two that cover the Wye Valley AONB; South Herefordshire & Over Severn (no. 104) and Forest of Dean and Lower Wye (no. 105). NCA 104 covers 12,836 ha of the Wye Valley AONB (25% of the NCA) while NCA 105 contains 8,041 ha of the AONB (26% of that NCA).

6.2.3 The key features of the sixteen Wye Valley AONB Landscape Management Zones (LMZ) are outlined in Table 2 and Map 2. These are cross-referenced to the Special Qualities [SQ] of the AONB, which are detailed in Table 8, along with the ecosystem goods and services they provide.

**Table 2: Wye Valley AONB Landscape Management Zones and Features**

<b>LMZ ID</b>	<b>Landscape Management Zone (LMZ)</b>	<b>LCA ref [NCA no.]</b>	<b>Features and link to Sp</b>
LMZ01	Woolhope Dome	<p><i>HC Character Areas:</i> Woolhope Dome</p> <p><i>Landscape Types:</i> Principal Wooded Hills Wooded Hills and Farmland Principal Timbered Farmlands Principal Settled Farmlands [NCA 104]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ancient broadleaved &amp; mixed wood</li> <li>• Varied topography [SQ9]</li> <li>• Hedgerow network often with matur</li> <li>• Mixed farming [SQ1]</li> <li>• Traditional orchards with locally dis</li> <li>[SQ1, SQ27]</li> <li>• Streams [SQ3]</li> <li>• Irregular field patterns, often linked</li> <li>• Scattered settlement pattern [SQ20]</li> <li>• Commons [SQ26]</li> <li>• Filtered and medium distance views</li> <li>• Grey and brown Silurian limestone s</li> </ul>
LMZ02	Herefordshire Floodplain (Wye Meadows)	<p><i>HC Character Areas:</i> Central Herefordshire Archenfield</p> <p><i>Landscape Types:</i> Riverside Meadows Principal Settled Farmlands [NCA 104]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Floodplain grassland with mature tre</li> <li>• Streamside and hedgerow trees, trad</li> <li>• Ditches and wetland habitats [SQ5]</li> <li>• River bank vegetation, mud cliffs an</li> <li>• River channel islands, beaches and r</li> <li>• Minimal settlement [SQ20]</li> <li>• Bridges [SQ3]</li> </ul>
LMZ03	Sollers Hope Ridges and Valleys	<p><i>HC Character Areas:</i> Central Herefordshire Archenfield Leadon Vale</p> <p><i>Landscape Types:</i> Principal Settled Farmlands Wooded Estatelands Principal Wooded Hills Estate Farmlands [NCA 104]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hedgerows with mature trees [SQ5,</li> <li>• Mixed farming [SQ1]</li> <li>• Fragments of ancient woodland [SQ</li> <li>• Varied topography [SQ1]</li> <li>• Medium to long distance views [SQ</li> <li>• Clustered settlement pattern [SQ20]</li> <li>• Parkland [SQ19]</li> <li>• Narrow lanes with hedges and hedge</li> <li>• Remnants of traditional orchards [SQ</li> <li>• Red soils of Devonian Old Red Sand</li> </ul>
LMZ04	Hentland Ridges and Valleys	<p><i>HC Character Areas:</i> Archenfield</p> <p><i>Landscape Types:</i> Principal Settled Farmlands Timbered Plateau Farmland Principal Timbered Farmland Sandstone Farmlands Wooded Estatelands [NCA 104]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hedgerows with mature trees [SQ5,</li> <li>• Mixed farming [SQ1]</li> <li>• Fragments of ancient woodland [SQ</li> <li>• Varied topography [SQ1]</li> <li>• Filtered medium distance views [SQ</li> <li>• Clustered settlement pattern [SQ20]</li> <li>• Estate parkland [SQ19]</li> <li>• Narrow lanes with hedges and hedge</li> <li>• Red soils of Devonian Old Red Sand</li> </ul>

LMZ05	Kings Caple Lowlands	<p><i>HC Character Areas:</i> Archenfield</p> <p><i>Landscape Types:</i> Principal Settled Farmlands Principal Wooded Hills [NCA 104]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hedgerows define field boundaries [SQ11]</li> <li>• Arable, horticultural and mixed farming [SQ11]</li> <li>• Open aspects with medium distance views [SQ11]</li> <li>• Steep northern wooded slope to river [SQ11]</li> <li>• Red soils of Devonian Old Red Sandstone [SQ11]</li> </ul>
LMZ06	Archenfield Lowlands	<p><i>HC Character Areas:</i> Archenfield</p> <p><i>Landscape Types:</i> Principal Settled Farmlands Sandstone Farmlands [NCA 104]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hedgerows define field boundaries [SQ11]</li> <li>• Arable, mixed farming and orchards [SQ11]</li> <li>• Medium distance views [SQ11]</li> <li>• Clustered settlement pattern [SQ20]</li> <li>• A40 cluster of light industrial use [SQ11]</li> <li>• Red soils of Devonian Old Red Sandstone [SQ11]</li> </ul>
LMZ07	Ross-on-Wye	<p><i>HC Character Areas:</i> Archenfield</p> <p><i>Landscape Types:</i> Urban [NCA 104]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctive Spire and skyline [SQ11]</li> <li>• Devonian Old Red Sandstone buildings [SQ11]</li> <li>• Mix of stone and rendered buildings [SQ20]</li> <li>• Cultural association with Wye Tour [SQ11]</li> </ul>
LMZ08	Walford Lowlands	<p><i>HC Character Areas:</i> Archenfield</p> <p><i>Landscape Types:</i> Principal Settled Farmlands [NCA 104]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hedgerows define field boundaries [SQ11]</li> <li>• Arable and horticultural farming [SQ11]</li> <li>• Open aspects with medium distance views [SQ11]</li> <li>• Estate parkland [SQ18, SQ19]</li> <li>• Linear settlement pattern [SQ20]</li> <li>• Red soils of Devonian Old Red Sandstone [SQ11]</li> </ul>
LMZ09	Wye Gorge	<p><i>HC Character Areas:</i> Archenfield Forest of Dean</p> <p><i>Landscape Types:</i> Principal Wooded Hills Wooded Hills and Farmland Principal Settled Farmlands Forest Smallholdings and Dwellings Unenclosed Commons <i>Forest of Dean Character Areas:</i> The Wye Valley - Common Grove to The Slaughter The Wye Valley - Redbrook to Brockweir The Wye Valley - Brockweir to Tutshill Monmouthshire Landscape Character Area: The Wye Valley</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ancient, semi-natural and mixed broadleaf woodlands [SQ2, SQ18]</li> <li>• Ancient and extensive tree cover patterns [SQ11]</li> <li>• Steeply sloping topography [SQ1]</li> <li>• Tributaries and cascades [SQ3]</li> <li>• Dramatic limestone cliffs [SQ9]</li> <li>• Quartz conglomerate outcrops [SQ8]</li> <li>• Narrow floodplain pastures on the valley floor [SQ11]</li> <li>• Hedgerow network often with mature trees [SQ11]</li> <li>• Mixed farming [SQ1]</li> <li>• Linear settlements bordering valley floor [SQ20]</li> <li>• Small clusters of historic squatter settlements surrounded by intricate pattern of small lanes and small deciduous woodland [SQ11]</li> <li>• Predominantly unwooded Coppett Hill [SQ11]</li> <li>• Long panoramic views from high vantage points [SQ11]</li> <li>• ‘picturesque’ views from valley floor [SQ11]</li> <li>• Long history as an important route with archaeological remains including Offa’s Dyke. [SQ14, SQ15]</li> </ul>

		[NCA 105]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rich heritage of local natural resources [SQ16, SQ22]</li> <li>• Ancient meanders preserved as the core [SQ10]</li> <li>• Woodlands and riverine habitats of high value [SQ2, SQ3, SQ4, SQ5]</li> <li>• Tintern Abbey [SQ15]</li> <li>• Cultural association with Wye Tour [SQ11]</li> <li>• Strong sense of place due to distinctive landscape [SQ12, SQ18]</li> </ul>
LMZ10	Dean Edge Limestone Hills	<i>Forest of Dean Character Areas:</i> Bicknor Hills High Meadow Woods and Staunton Coleford and Christchurch Newland Hills [NCA 105]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rolling landscape of interlocking coombes from Carboniferous Limestone and Old Red Sandstone</li> <li>• Large areas of mixed and coniferous woodland</li> <li>• Generally poor soils and hilly landscape</li> <li>• Fields defined by well-maintained hedgerows and copses on steeper slopes [SQ5, SQ18]</li> <li>• Small villages are well integrated with the landscape</li> <li>• Scowles and other remnants of mining</li> <li>• Medium and long distance views [SQ12, SQ18]</li> </ul>
LMZ11	River Trothy Convergence	<i>Monmouthshire Landscape Character Area:</i> River Trothy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flat valley floor convergence of the River Trothy [SQ3, SQ10]</li> <li>• Lines of alder and willow enclose river banks</li> <li>• Little settlement [SQ20]</li> <li>• Arable and permanent grassland. [SQ12, SQ18]</li> </ul>
LMZ12	Llangovan Foothills	<i>Monmouthshire Landscape Character Area:</i> Llangovan Foothills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large fields with mature hedgelines, field trees [SQ5, SQ18]</li> <li>• Limited settlement and traditional farmsteads</li> <li>• Long distance views [SQ11]</li> </ul>
LMZ13	Devauden Escarpment	<i>Monmouthshire Landscape Character Area:</i> Devauden Escarpment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prominent and steep escarpment [SQ12, SQ18]</li> <li>• Substantial woodland cover [SQ2]</li> <li>• Mixed farming and pasture with mature hedgerows</li> <li>• Scattered settlement and clustered villages</li> <li>• Long panoramic views to the north and south [SQ12, SQ18]</li> </ul>
LMZ14	Trellech Sandstone Plateau	<i>Monmouthshire Landscape Character Areas:</i> Chepstow Parkland Trellech Grange Trellech forest and commons Tredunnoch Trellech Plateau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High hills and ridges with inward looking valleys</li> <li>• Flat or gently rolling plateau centred on the Trellech Plateau</li> <li>• Large woodland blocks of relict ancient woodland plantations eg. Chepstow Park Wood</li> <li>• Mixed arable and pastoral farming [SQ12, SQ18]</li> <li>• Red soils of Devonian Old Red Sandstone</li> <li>• Strong network of thick hedges, hedgerows and field lines [SQ5]</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Woodlands enclose fields of permanent unimproved and semi-improved grass</li> <li>• Sparse settlement outside Trellech w [SQ20]</li> <li>• Estates with associated parkland [SQ</li> <li>• Distinctive settlement pattern related [SQ4]</li> <li>• Intricate network of narrow winding and mature hedges [SQ5, SQ22]</li> <li>• Springs, streams, wetland, marshland Cleddon bog [SQ3, SQ10]</li> <li>• Distinct sense of place from the relation and settlement [SQ12]</li> <li>• Evidence of early occupation, Iron Age medieval village of Trellech [SQ13,</li> <li>• Long views and vistas across the Severn Beacons from high land [SQ11]</li> </ul>
LMZ15	Dean Edge Limestone Plateau	<p><i>Forest of Dean Character Areas:</i> Tidenham Chase St Briavels Common [NCA 105]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gently undulating plateau with expansive fields [SQ1]</li> <li>• Strong field pattern of large or moderate fields [SQ1]</li> <li>• Distinctive stone walls and ancient</li> <li>• Dispersed isolated farms which are often associated with modern barn</li> <li>• Villages sited at the edge of the plateau</li> <li>• Redundant Limestone quarries local</li> <li>• Small enclosures of semi-natural, woodlanes, small woodlands and 'squatter' Common [SQ4, SQ5, SQ20, SQ22]</li> <li>• Heathland landscapes at Tidenham</li> </ul>
LMZ16	Caerwent Limestone Plateau / Hinterlands	<p><i>Monmouthshire Landscape Character Area:</i> Caerwent Hinterland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gently rolling landscape with occasional valleys [SQ1]</li> <li>• Ancient, semi-natural and mixed countryside [SQ2]</li> <li>• Mixture of arable and pastoral farms and large country estates [SQ20]</li> <li>• Remnant parkland of large country</li> <li>• Long views towards the Severn Estuary</li> <li>• Nucleated village of St Arvans [SQ</li> <li>• Chepstow Racecourse an important</li> </ul>

## 6.3 The State of the AONB Report

6.3.1 Reporting on the state of the AONB provides a baseline for determining and understanding the Special Qualities and the pressures on the AONB. The State of the AONB Report establishes a foundation for measuring change – beneficial or adverse – in the state or condition of the AONB. Therefore it forms the starting point for associated monitoring procedures.

6.3.2 The State of the AONB Report will be available separately and complements the following sections:

6.3.3 **Special Qualities** - These are listed in Section 2.1.9 above and Table 8 below identifies the Special Qualities of the AONB and their nature, quality, extent and condition. These have been cross referenced with the features of the Landscape Management Zones in Table 2 above that are crucial to the long-term well-being of the AONB.

6.3.4 **Changes or threats**-these are identified in Table 9 and represent the social, environmental and economic facets of the AONB and its communities that are significant sources of pressure for change on the Special Qualities of the AONB.

6.3.5 **Ecosystem goods and services** - these are also in Table 8 and identify the ecosystem function provided by the respective Special Qualities.

6.3.6. **Activities / Pressures** - these are highlighted under Table 9. These need to be understood in terms of their interaction, whether positive or negative, on the Special Qualities of the AONB and their occurrence in the various Landscape Management Zones. Many of the ‘changes or threats’ identified in Table 8 arise directly from these activities and pressures.

6.3.7 **Air, Soil and Water quality**: In previous AONB Management Plans these were categorised as separate Special Qualities. However, water quality is a constituent part of SQ3 The river & tributaries. Soil quality varies across the AONB and is determined by the underlying Geological Special Qualities, SQ 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. Air quality is not a unique or defining feature of the Wye Valley and is dependent on weather and occasionally temperature inversions in the Wye Gorge. The government provides guidelines and codes of good practice on the management and maintenance of air, soil and water quality. The following Ecosystem Goods & Services are also listed in Table 8 which helps identify what consideration need to be given and how the Plan addresses these elements.

- Air Quality
  - Regulating Services: Climate regulation, Air quality regulation, Pollution control, Pollination, Noise regulation, Local climate regulation.
- Soil Quality
  - Provisioning Goods: Food, Fibre, Fresh water, Biofuels, Timber
  - Regulating Services: Water quality regulation, Erosion control, Pollution control, Soil quality regulation, Water regulation, Flood regulation, Wild species diversity.

- Water Quality
  - Provisioning Goods: Fresh water, Water
  - Regulating Services: Climate regulation, Water quality regulation, Pollution control, Disease and pest control, Water regulation, Flood regulation, Local climate regulation, Wild species diversity

Consequently, while not specific Special Qualities, Air, Soil and Water quality are important parameters for a healthy functioning landscape and underpin the Ecosystems Approach.

## 6.4 Statistics for the AONB

**6.4.1 Data:** The fundamental challenge with the use of any statistics for the AONB is the correlation of the data with the AONB boundary. The boundaries of the AONB do not generally follow any standard geographical data collection unit (such as post code areas, Wards, Parishes or Local Authority Areas). Therefore there is very little data collected that relates directly to the AONB. Greater effort is being made by government agencies to ensure that monitoring by partners is coordinated and data disaggregated for the AONB. This will help avoid wasting effort through slightly different methodologies or monitoring subjects being pursued in different areas where they could have been linked up. However data is rarely compatible between England and Wales making it is extremely difficult to gain consistently accurate statistical information for the whole AONB.

**6.4.2 Census data:** The 2011 census provides a large amount of information about the population within the Wye Valley AONB, which totals 29,300 people in 13,450 dwellings. The 2001 census data gave a population of 26,374, up from 24,370 in 1991, with 11,129 households up from 9,429 households in 1991. The full comparisons between 2011 and earlier censuses is not currently available but will be included in the separate State of the AONB Report.

**6.4.3 Land types and Habitats in the Wye Valley AONB:** Phase 1 Habitat mapping is being completed for the AONB. However the final data is not yet available, so it is not possible to provide AONB wide information on habitats and land uses. This data will be analysed as soon as it is available to provide a more definitive AONB wide breakdown of habitats and evidence for project development, delivery and monitoring. Meanwhile the identification of land types below (Table 3) is a reworking of an exercise developed by Dr George Peterken and used in previous Management Plans and originating in the AONB Nature Conservation Strategy 1999. Listed are all the land types that could be differentiated on the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 maps, then tallied for each of the 326 intersections of the 1km grid that fall within the AONB. Each intersection represents 100 ha, e.g., the area of conifer woodland is estimated at 2,000 ha. The accuracy of the estimates diminishes with the area of each land type. Thus, there is a level of confidence that the area of farmland (including orchards) is 62-63% of the AONB, but the area of marshland is unlikely to be exactly 100 ha, though it must be very small, and some very small habitats (e.g., heaths) failed to coincide with a grid intersection.

6.4.4 The OS classification itself will be approximate. Thus, it fails to pick up important habitats (eg cliffs), and the balance between woodland types may be both approximate and out-of-date. Compared to the previous estimates, there is less woodland, more farmland, and more small fields, less orchards and less development. Some of this will be due to different OS editions, but some will reflect the changing judgements about what to assign where.

6.4.5 The collation of data on Geographical Information Systems (GIS) for the State of the AONB Report will in time validate and/or supersede these estimates. However as estimates they provide a useful indication of land types in the AONB.

**Table 3: Land types in the Wye Valley AONB**

Aggregated land types	Land Types	Number of grid intersections for each land type	Number of grid intersections for each aggregated land type	Proportion of AONB %
Woodland	Broadleaved	31	83	25.4
	Mixed	24		
	Conifer	20		
	Scrub	8		
Non-intensive	Marsh	1	23	7.1
	Small fields	19		
	Parkland	3		
Farmland	Undifferentiated	199	203	62.3
	Orchards	4		
Open water	Rivers	4	5	1.5
	Pools	1		
Development	Rural houses	3	12	3.7
	Roads	4		
	Urban	5		
TOTAL		326		100

6.4.6 The above data was used in the Wye Valley AONB Ecosystem Goods and Services report 2011 to identify the ‘Broad Habitat types’ for the AONB, as outlined in the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA). Table 4 shows how the AONB contains 7 of the 8 ‘Broad Habitat types’.

**Table 4: Broad Habitat types in the Wye Valley AONB**

Broad Habitat type (UK NEA)	Examples in Wye Valley AONB
Enclosed Farmland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Farmland: c. 20 300 ha, 62.3% of AONB</li> </ul> Major Agricultural Land Uses include: Crops & Fallow: (43%) Permanent Grass: (35.5%) Temporary Grass (9.5%) Other (including set aside) (12%)*
Woodlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Woodland: c8310ha, 25.4% of AONB.</li> </ul>

	Of which: Broadleaved: 3100 ha Mixed: 2400 ha Conifer: 2000 ha Scrub: 800 ha SSSI: 2267 ha Wye Valley Woods SAC: 916ha Public Forest Estate: 5082ha
Semi-Natural Grasslands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grassland: c2300 ha, 7.1% of AONB</li> <li>Small Fields: 1900 ha</li> <li>Parkland: 300 ha</li> <li>Marsh: 100 ha</li> </ul>
Urban	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Houses, Roads, Urban approx. 1200 ha, 3.1% of AONB.</li> </ul>
Freshwaters – Openwaters, Wetlands and Flood Plains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>River Wye, tributaries and pools, 1.5% of AONB.</li> <li>Flood Plain Habitat, particularly in Herefordshire Wye meadows.</li> </ul>
Mountains, Moorlands and Heaths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some Bog and Lowland Heath habitat such as Cleddon bog and Broad Meend Heath.</li> <li>Inland rock and scree habitats present in cliffs throughout the Wye Valley gorge as well as some limestone pavement.</li> </ul>
Coastal Margins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited area of salt marsh and intertidal sediments on tidal reach of the Wye.</li> </ul>
Marine	N/A

6.4.7 **Priority Habitats** have been identified by Natural England for the English part of the AONB (see Table 5). The former UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats lists identifies those habitats that are the most threatened and requiring the greatest conservation action. Currently the comparable information is not available for the Welsh side of the AONB, although there is a NERC Section 42 list of Priority Habitats in Wales. However the England data shows that Tradition Orchards make up nearly 1% of the total English resource of that Priority Habitat. Also grassland habitats make up approximately 1% of the national resource, whereas woodlands are less than 0.5% of the resource. Of the Priority Habitats in SSSIs nearly 65% are in Favourable condition and a further 35% in Unfavourable but recovering status (see Table 6).

**Table 5: Priority Habitat on English side of AONB**

<b>Priority Habitat (on English side of AONB)</b>	<b>Total Area (ha)</b>	<b>% of total PH resource</b>	<b>% of AONB</b>
Deciduous Woodland	3,067	0.42	14.60
Traditional Orchards	136	0.87	0.65
Good Quality Semi-improved Grassland*	112	0.22	0.53
Lowland Meadows	93	0.26	0.44
Mudflats	30	0.04	0.14
Lowland Dry Acid Grassland	12	0.08	0.06
Lowland Heathland	12	0.02	0.06

Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh	6	0.00	0.03
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	4	0.01	0.02
Purple Moor-grass and Rush Pastures	4	0.04	0.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,476</b>		16.6

\*(Non-priority Habitat)

**Table 6: Condition of Priority Habitats in England**

Priority Habitat (on English side of AONB)							
area (ha)	Condition within SSSIs				Outside SSSIs		
Total English Priority Habitat	Total in SSSIs	Total Favourable	Total Un-favourable recovering	Total Un-favourable	Total outside SSSIs	Total Within HLS *	Non-SSSI, Non-HLS
3,364	879	567	308	5	2,485	243	2,242

6.4.8 **Agricultural statistics:** According to the DEFRA Agricultural Census for June 2010, agricultural land use amounts to 13,777ha of the English part of the AONB (65%). A large amount of information is being gathered from the June Agricultural Census in both England and Wales. This will be included in the State of the AONB Report. The land use and cropping split for England is shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: AONB land use and cropping in England**

	Crops & Bare Fallow	Temporary Grass	Permanent Grass	Rough grazing	Woodland	Other
Total	6,306ha	986ha	5,651ha	100ha	527ha	206ha
% of AONB in England	30%	5%	27%	0.5%	2.5%	1%
% of agric. area	46%	7%	41%	0.7%	3.8%	1.5%

**Table 8: Special Qualities of the Wye Valley AONB**

Special Qualities [SQ]	Recognition	Extent	Condition [data / reason]	Changes or threats	P: Pr	
1	<b>Overall Landscape</b>					
	16 Landscape Management Zones (see Table 1) with key feature	Outstanding (see county Landscape Character Assessments and LandMap)	Whole AONB	CQC headline indicator for both JCAs is Maintaining and Enhancing	Sustainable-land management &/or ownership that conserves or enhances key landscape characteristics and features Inappropriate land management may degrade or destroy landscape features; (including neglect, addition of inappropriate features, ongoing loss & decline of elements that define landscape character resulting in increased uniformity and loss of distinctiveness)	P: Food* Genetic r Water*, Bioenerg R: Clima Erosion c Pollution control†, regulation regulation regulation defence† C: Recre Cultural l Sense of
	<b>Biodiversity</b>					
2.	Woodlands	Diversity of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) and Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) including 35 SSSIs and many ancient / veteran trees (see SQ18). Some plantation and other woodland. 50 SMs and 33 Listed Buildings within woodlands.	25% woodland cover in AONB. 6083 ha of Ancient woodland >2ha covers 18.65% of AONB. SSSIs cover 1679 ha. 5% of AONB. Public Forest Estate (PFE) cover 16% of AONB	Varied; much ASNW under managed, some PAWS being restored [in English part of AONB 67% of SSSIs meet NE PSA targets, sites ranging from 0-100%. 93% PFE SSSIs meet PSA targets]	Changes in land management, including neglect of much private small woodland and road & bank side trees Ongoing degradation of ancient woodland sites by the continuing existence of conifers and other non-native species, including continued replanting of ASNW with conifers Degradation of features of the historic environment Fragmentation of ancient woodland sites by land use changes Climate change	P: Timber diversity R: Clima regulation Air & wa regulation C: Recre Cultural l Employ
		Wye Valley Woodlands SAC	913.62ha 3% of AONB	Unfavourable to fair; [woodland SAC / SSSI condition; NRW, in English part of AONB 72% of SSSIs meet NE PSA targets, sites ranging from 0-100%;	Degradation through neglect Degradation by specific alien &/or expanding species (eg. cherry laurel, Himalayan balsam, deer, grey squirrel)	
3.	The river & tributaries	Main river SAC and SSSI, 6 SMs and 70 Listed Buildings within Flood Zone 3. Nationally important for	58 miles (92km) of main river (1.3% of AONB) and a similar length of tributaries and streams	Of 11 SAC features 5 are in unfavourable condition, 36% of SSSI meets NE PSA target [condition of	Degradation of natural processes, including constraints on flooding	P: Food* Bioenerg R: Clima quality re C: Recre Cultural l Employ

		water based recreation and one of the key reasons why people visit the AONB. Wye voted 'best river in England & Wales' 2010 by the Our Rivers Campaign, (run by RSPB, WWF-UK, the Angling Trust and the Salmon and Trout Association)	2,790 ha of Flood Zone 3 floodplain	salmon & white clawed crayfish unfavourable, sediment levels & diffuse pollution of concern] (NE, NRW), Water quality is good, although river & many streams suffering from some pollution.	Land use impacts may degrade or destroy features e.g. loss of riverside grassland, siltation from poor soil management, loss of historic environment features, engineering for recreational interests etc. Invasive alien species Diffuse Pollution, including the leaching of chemicals from agricultural land Point source pollution, including increased development overflowing old drainage and sewerage systems Changes through climate change and altered seasonal rainfall. Spread of disease, such as <i>Phytophthora</i> infection of riparian alders	
4.	Species-rich grassland, including small field pattern of un/semi-improved grassland, often bounded by drystone walls or old hedges	Very few SSSIs, 133 CLWS Target area for HLS	4.4% of AONB inc 250 ha Hewelsfield & St Briavels Common	Prone to neglect [Hewelsfield & St Briavels Common Parish Grassland survey]	Continuing degradation through neglect and/or Change in ownership &/or land management (including overgrazing or incorporation into 'garden') Development of land for housing	P: Food* resources R: Climate regulation Erosion c and pest C: Recre Cultural h Employment
5.	Boundary habitat diversity & connectivity, e.g. between grassland & woodland, farmland & heathland, tidal river & ASNW, hedges &/or drystone walls, lanes, banks, verges and fields & woods	Varied, locally or regionally important as landscape &/or habitat, heritage &/or socio-economic feature	Throughout AONB	Varied	Damage and degradation through change in ownership &/or land management, including removal, inappropriate activity, road widening	P: Food* Genetic r Health pr R: Climate Erosion c Pollution control†, regulation regulation regulation defence† C: Recre Cultural h Sense of
<b>Geological</b>						
6.	Silurian Rocks	Grey / Brown rocks and soils (series of alternating limestones and shales)	Woolhope Dome	Exposures in small old quarries	Little used as a traditional building material	P: Food* Genetic r R: Climate regulation Erosion c and pest C: Recre Cultural h Employment
7.	Devonian - Lower Old Red Sandstone	Good; creates fertile red soils of	Underlies about 60% of AONB	Good Outcrops, eg Wilton Road, Ross	Vernacular building material, although rarely used in modern	P: Food* Genetic r

		South Herefordshire			architecture due to softness of rock	R: Climate regulation Erosion control and pest control C: Recreation Cultural Heritage Employment
8.	Quartz Conglomerate outcropping between Lower and Upper Old Red Sandstone	Good, (Quartz Conglomerate overlain by Tintern Sandstone)	Prominent seams between Tintern and Ross	Good Outcrops, eg Coppett Hill & Doward	Traditionally used locally in millstones and in drystone walls, limited modern use	P: Genetic diversity R: Climate regulation regulation C: Recreation Cultural Heritage Employment
9.	Carboniferous Limestone	Good (overlain by Carboniferous Coal Measures)	Underlies about 25% of AONB south of Ross	Good Outcrops, especially cliffs and quarries	Quarrying; two working quarries in, and one bordering, AONB Loss of working small quarries	P: Food* Genetic diversity R: Climate regulation Erosion control and pest control C: Recreation Cultural Heritage Employment
10.	Riverine geomorphology	Good, incised meanders & superimposed drainage globally important examples for educational purposes	Along length of river	Good	Natural processes, including flooding and movement of meanders Invasive alien species Land use impacts may degrade or destroy features e.g. siltation, engineering for recreational interests or flood defence	P: Food* R: Climate quality regulation C: Recreation Cultural Heritage Employment
<b>Visual and Sensory</b>						
11.	Picturesque, extensive & dramatic views.	72 viewpoints identified. 20 included in Overlooking the Wye Landscape Partnership Scheme including 4 SMs at Piercefield.	Throughout AONB but majority overlooking the Wye	Varied; some spectacular, some overgrown, some inaccessible, health & safety poor at some [Assessment of Historic & Picturesque Viewpoints in AONB, 2001]. Overlooking the Wye Landscape Partnership Scheme conserved &/or enhanced 12.	Changes in ownership &/or land management may degrade or block both physical access to viewpoints and/or the view window Inappropriate land management may degrade or destroy the landscape viewed from a viewpoint including large single structures	P: Genetic diversity R: Erosion control C: Recreation Cultural Heritage Sense of place
12.	Overall sense of tranquillity, sense of remoteness and naturalness / wildness	Varied	Much of AONB	Poor to good, with localised disturbance from heavy traffic and individual vehicles and military aircraft	Changes in land management including new or expanding development and intensification of use (i.e. inappropriate tourism and recreation or increasing road or air traffic)	C: Recreation Cultural Heritage Sense of place

				[CPRE & CCW maps]	Change driven by new standards and legislation e.g. street lighting, highway construction may lead to loss of tranquillity and sense of remoteness	
	<b>Historic Environment</b>					
13.	Prehistoric sites from Palaeolithic to Iron Age	Palaeolithic occupation at Arthur's Cave 18 SMs	Standing stones at 3 sites. 11 Iron Age hillforts spread throughout AONB	Varied	Neglect or continuing unsympathetic management may degrade or destroy archaeological features eg. damage to archaeological horizons through deep ploughing, irresponsible treasure hunting or continued neglect which may lead to tree and shrub root damage	P: Food* Species c R: Erosio C: Recrea Cultural I Sense of
14.	Roman and early Medieval sites including Offa's Dyke	Romano-British settlements and industry, Offa's Dyke early medieval boundary of unique cultural and historical importance	Throughout AONB, Offa's Dyke on eastern crest of Lower Wye Valley	Varied, Offa's Dyke very well preserved in some places but 4 sections of Dyke on English Heritage's Register of Heritage at Risk	Inappropriate land management may degrade or destroy archaeological features visitor access, Offa's Dyke Path National Trail erosion	P: Food* Species c R: Erosio C: Recrea Cultural I Sense of
15.	Medieval Defensive and Ecclesiastical sites and associated landscapes	Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest in Cadw Register of Historic Landscapes. Goodrich & Chepstow Castles and Tintern Abbey in state ownership.	Lower Wye Valley from Ross to Chepstow	Fair to good 6 churches on English Heritage's Register of Heritage at Risk	Changes in the visiting regime and increases in popularity of various sites. Inappropriate land management may degrade or destroy archaeological features	P: Geneti R: Erosio C: Recrea Cultural I Employ
16.	Post-medieval industrial sites and associated landscapes	Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest in Cadw Register of Historic Landscapes	Throughout AONB.	Some sites under management, others suffering from neglect	Inappropriate land management may degrade or destroy archaeological features Changes in the visiting regime and increases in popularity of various sites.	P: Geneti R: Erosio C: Recrea Cultural I Sense of
17.	Railway heritage	Line closed 1958	Disused line through length of AONB	Redundant track bed with decaying infrastructure	Further neglect of structures	P: Geneti R: Erosio C: Recrea Cultural I Employ
18.	Ancient trees	Significant numbers of ancient pollards and mature trees in hedges, woods and parkland 2,347 in total (av 7/km <sup>2</sup> )	Throughout AONB	Poor	Neglect or inappropriate management may damage or destroy trees	P: Timbe R: Clima regulation quality re regulation C: Recrea Cultural I Employ

19.	Historic / registered parks and gardens	10 registered parks and gardens; Sufton Court, Hill Court, The Kymin, Troy House, High Glanau, The Argoed, Wyndcliffe Court, Piercefield, Itton Court, Mounton House, plus 48 of local significance in AONB	Through-out AONB	Fair to good none on EH 'risk register'	Inappropriate land management may degrade or destroy historic features (including the degradation of identified designed landscape)	P: Food* Genetic r Water*, R: Clima Erosion o Pollution control†, regulation regulation regulation defence† C: Recre Cultural l Sense of
20.	Vernacular architecture: Farmsteads Commoners cottages, Estate houses	Varied – no one dominant style due to varying geology	Through-out AONB, dependant on geology	Varied, dependant on geology & building materials	Inappropriate management may degrade or destroy historic features	P: Geneti R: Clima Erosion o Pollution regulation Wild spe C: Recre Cultural l Sense of
<b>Language</b>						
21.	Welsh language & accent; Forest of Dean & South Herefordshire dialects & accents	Usage diminishing. Welsh taught in schools in Monmouthshire.	Varied through-out AONB	Welsh usage consolidating in Monmouthshire [2011 Census].	Loss of local identity can further erode traditional usages Influences of universal education and media	C: Recre Cultural l Sense of
<b>Access and Recreation</b>						
22.	Old tracks: often in sunken ways &/or bounded by drystone walls	Some in Rights of Way network, some County Road (Highways), some other highways, remainder private. No formal cataloguing and assessment	Through-out AONB	Variable	Degradation of surface and/or boundary features due to changes in levels of usage &/or ownership or management, eg. water erosion, deep rutting and waterlogging, hard surfacing, widening, etc. Blockage and/or obstruction Unclear classification and misleading signage	P: Geneti R: Water Air quali regulation regulation regulation C: Recre Cultural l Sense of
23.	Offa's Dyke Path	National Trail	Monmouth to Chepstow (35km)	Premier national walking route	Erosion due to excessive usage leading to damage to Offa's Dyke earthwork Blockage and/or obstruction	C: Recre Cultural l Sense of
24.	Wye Valley Walk	Regional Route	Through length of AONB (70km / 45miles) [T1.1-76]	Good	Degradation of route due to erosion and excessive usage and/or river flooding and/or landslips Blockage and/or obstruction Some sections still on Permissive Paths	C: Recre Cultural l place*, E
25.	Access land	Good	Forestry Commission woodland and Woodland Trust	Good	Changes in legislation or sale removing access rights	P: Food* Genetic r Water*,

			holdings eg. Haugh Wood, Chase Wood & lower Wye Valley woods			R: Climate Erosion c Pollution control†, regulation regulation C: Recre Cultural l Sense of
26.	Small commons; largest are Coppet Hill, Broadmoor, Staunton Meend, Whitelye, The Hudnalls	Generally good	12 scattered through -out AONB (260ha in England)	Generally good	Obstruction to access	P: Food* Genetic r Health pr R: Climate Erosion c Pollution control†, regulation regulation species d C: Recre Cultural l Sense of
					Lack of, or inappropriate, management	
	<b>Other</b>					
27.	Orchards	Traditional orchards mostly cider apples and perry pear also commercial apple standard and bush orchards	Throughout AONB, dependant on geology and topography. New commercial orchards being planted.	Many traditional orchards redundant or underused. New commercial planting of bush orchards	Lack of, or inappropriate, management practices, may damage or destroy trees, including weather damage or harmful grazing by stock, particularly horses	P: Food* Genetic r Health pr R: Climate Erosion c Pollution control†, regulation regulation regulation C: Recre Cultural l Sense of
					Development of land for housing	

**Table 9: ACTIVITIES & PRESSURES in the Wye Valley AONB**

<b>Activities in the AONB</b>	<b>Pressures in the AONB</b>	<b>Positive Impacts in the AONB</b>	<b>Negative Impacts in the AONB</b>
<b>Enjoyment</b>			
<b>Recreation</b>			
Boating (motorised water craft, including cruise boats, motor launches & jet skis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing use of river, particularly around Symonds Yat and between Chepstow and Tintern</li> <li>Demand for standardised launch facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic generation from pleasure cruises</li> <li>Local spend of users</li> <li>Gives a different perspective to appreciate Special Qualities of AONB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorly developed and channel engineering, landscape character</li> <li>Wash from damage riverbank</li> </ul>
Canoeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing use of river, particularly between Kerne Bridge and Monmouth</li> <li>Lack of launch facilities</li> <li>Demand for standardised launch facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic generation from canoe hire</li> <li>Local spend of users</li> <li>Health benefits of canoeing</li> <li>Gives a different perspective to appreciate Special Qualities of AONB</li> <li>Provides access for disabled and less abled people into countryside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kerne Bridge at Yat reaching capacity</li> <li>Increased disturbance to other users</li> <li>Can be as a camping</li> <li>Poorly developed and channel engineering, landscape character</li> </ul>
Climbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concentrated on limestone cliffs in Upper and Lower Wye Gorge (SSSIs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic generation from guiding &amp; activity businesses</li> <li>Local spend of users</li> <li>Health benefits of climbing</li> <li>Gives a different perspective to appreciate Special Qualities of AONB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excessive development of routes, biodiversity and geology</li> <li>Can be as a camping</li> </ul>
Cycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promoted locally and nationally as a sustainable form of transport</li> <li>Vehicle speeds and size of many roads makes cycling dangerous</li> <li>Demand for off- road routes</li> <li>Requirement for standardised infrastructure and facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health benefits of cycling</li> <li>Reduced emissions of cycle journeys</li> <li>Economic generation from cycle shops and hire</li> <li>Cycle tracks in Public Estate Forest facilitate greater usage of overall forest area and integration with other users.</li> <li>Local spend of cyclists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased disturbance to wildlife</li> <li>Car-borne noise exacerbate parking honey-pots</li> <li>Poorly developed infrastructure can detract from character and historical features</li> </ul>
Field Sports		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic generation from shooting rights</li> <li>Local spend of participants</li> <li>Management can enhance biodiversity</li> <li>Facilitates appreciation of Special Qualities of AONB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poaching</li> <li>Disturbance</li> <li>Noise from</li> <li>Poorly developed can degrade landscape</li> </ul>
Fishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Salmon stocks depressed</li> <li>Demand for fishing lakes</li> <li>Seasonal elver fishing on tidal river extensively over-fished over decades due to inflated market price of product</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic generation from fishing rights</li> <li>Local spend of anglers</li> <li>Gives a different perspective to appreciate Special Qualities of AONB</li> <li>Provides access for disabled and less abled people into countryside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorly developed infrastructure, eg. stands, can degrade landscape</li> <li>Over-fishing depletes biodiversity</li> <li>Potential for river users, particularly</li> </ul>

Horse riding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disjointed Bridleway network leading to demand for correct signage, more accessible routes, including carriageways and permissive routes</li> <li>Use of verges for riding</li> <li>Demand for ménages, stables and paddocks</li> <li>Limited Rights of Way budgets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local spend of horse-riders</li> <li>Facilitates appreciation of Special Qualities of AONB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorly de stables and paddocks landscape character</li> <li>Excessive damage surfaces and</li> <li>Potential with other users, e.g. walkers, especially</li> <li>Over graz species rich grassla</li> </ul>
Rowing and rafting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rowing clubs and courses at Ross and Monmouth</li> <li>Raft Races along various stretches of river</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic generation from regattas and races</li> <li>Local spend of users</li> <li>Health benefits of rowing and rafting</li> <li>Gives a different perspective to appreciate Special Qualities of AONB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential river users, particu</li> </ul>
Sight-seeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on honey-pot sites such as Ross-on-Wye, Tintern Abbey and Yat Rock</li> <li>Demand for view-brew-loo facilities</li> <li>High percentage of car use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local spend of sight-seers</li> <li>Facilitates appreciation of Special Qualities of AONB</li> <li>Provides access for disabled and less abled people into countryside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landscap provision of faciliti parking</li> <li>Some site at peak times</li> <li>Can exacer surfaces and featur archaeological site</li> </ul>
Walking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demand for way-marked, self- guided trails</li> <li>High percentage of car use to start walk</li> <li>Honey-pot sites such as Haugh Wood, Symonds Yat and Tintern</li> <li>Access for all enhancements</li> <li>Open Access</li> <li>Limited Rights of Way budgets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local spend of walkers</li> <li>Allows appreciation of Special Qualities of area</li> <li>Dissipated throughout AONB</li> <li>Health benefits of walking</li> <li>Provides access for disabled and less-abled people into countryside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal d verges</li> <li>Potential between dogs and</li> <li>Excessive exacerbate erosion</li> <li>Confusion waymarking can le with other users</li> </ul>
4x4 vehicles, trial motorcycles and off-road motorcycles driving off-tarmac	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing legal use of unclassified public roads and lack of clear signage</li> <li>Illegal use of public footpaths, bridleways and private land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local spend of driver / riders</li> <li>Facilitates appreciation of some Special Qualities of AONB</li> <li>Provides access for disabled and less-abled people into countryside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confusion waymarking can le with other users</li> <li>Can exacer surfaces and featur</li> <li>Illegal tra habitats and featur</li> <li>Adversely in vicinity</li> <li>Disturban wildlife</li> </ul>

<b>Tourism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Wye Valley’ a known brand and destination with estimated 2.5 million visitor days p.a.</li> <li>• Focus on honey-pot sites such as Ross-on-Wye, Tintern Abbey and Yat Rock</li> <li>• High percentage of car use</li> <li>• Increase in day trippers and long term decline in long stay visitor numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic generation for many sectors in local community , including food and accommodation providers</li> <li>• Local spend of tourists &amp; visitors</li> <li>• Facilitates appreciation of Special Qualities of AONB</li> <li>• Can be dissipated throughout AONB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cumulative tourism infrastructure degrade landscape</li> <li>• Incremental improvements to tourism infrastructure may urbanise and detract from rural character</li> <li>• Increased dependence on private</li> </ul>
<b>Land management</b>			
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farms need to assess their practices and enterprises against legislation and cross-compliance</li> <li>• Diversification to continue employment</li> <li>• Changes in land ownership and land management</li> <li>• Increasing farm sizes through amalgamation</li> <li>• Increasing numbers of new hobby farmers</li> <li>• Increasing numbers of farmers, particularly hobby farmers, who are not engaged through the usual channels may be hard to reach in terms of encouraging specific management</li> <li>• New technologies &amp; practices e.g. biofuels, polytunnels and carbon reduction</li> <li>• Traditional farm buildings redundant for modern agricultural use sold off &amp;/or converted, leading to reinvestment in business and modern agricultural buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic generation of agricultural enterprises and spend of employees</li> <li>• Landscape custodianship of farming</li> <li>• Provision of local food and materials</li> <li>• Diversification allowing farmers to continue farming</li> <li>• Enhanced biodiversity, landscape, historic environment and diffuse pollution measures through agri-environment schemes, Catchment sensitive Farming or the Campaign for the Farmed Environment and/or new technologies</li> <li>• New access established with agri-environment schemes</li> <li>• Ecosystem services including pollination, opportunities for recreation and spiritual refreshment, flood storage and water regulation</li> <li>• Sensitive barn conversions can deliver positive benefits in terms of the historic environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential loss of biodiversity and/or biodiversity technologies</li> <li>• Inappropriate management practices may destroy landscape and archaeological features</li> <li>• Overstocking, continued production, under-planting</li> <li>• Loss of traditional farming practices</li> <li>• New farm buildings permitted developments may detract from rural character and scale</li> <li>• Poorly designed conversions can detract from rural character &amp;/or impact on species roosts/nests (e.g. owls)</li> <li>• Abandonment of parkland and other landscapes leading to loss of heritage and character</li> </ul>
Forestry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timber prices, particularly for firewood, are buoyant and markets strong</li> <li>• Neglect of much private small woodland, also road &amp; bank side trees</li> <li>• Degradation of ancient woodland sites by the continuing existence of conifers and other non-native species</li> <li>• Spread of species and pathogens, eg. deer, grey squirrel, boar and Chalara, Ramorum, Phytophthora etc.</li> <li>• Fragmentation by land use changes</li> <li>• Loss of woodland management skills</li> <li>• Increasing potential of the developing wood-fuel market and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic generation of forestry products, increasing labour and skills resource</li> <li>• Large area of woodland in public or voluntary sector ownership (eg , NE, FC, WT, WiT, WG)</li> <li>• Restoration to native woodland of plantations on ancient woodland sites’</li> <li>• Public access to woodlands facilitates appreciation of Special Qualities of AONB</li> <li>• Ecosystem services including carbon sequestration, flooding, water quality &amp; quantity amelioration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of management of private woodland</li> <li>• Trees obstructing roads and picturesque views</li> <li>• Deer and other animals impact on biodiversity and wildlife in woods</li> <li>• Inappropriate operations &amp;/or timber felling operations, planting methods and installations may detract from landscape features and archaeological features</li> <li>• Impacts of tree species can detract from rural character</li> </ul>

	supply chain and consequential increase in woodland management		
<b>Economic &amp; Development</b>			
Telecommunications and other utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applications for new masts or power-lines</li> <li>• Telecommunications companies not covered by Section 85 of CRoW Act.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased ease of communications in valley.</li> <li>• Advances in mast designs can be more sympathetic to surroundings and landscape character</li> <li>• Undergrounding of electricity cables enhances landscape character</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual impact of standardised masts and poorly designed antennas</li> </ul>
Energy, including renewables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimal energy generated in AONB, but traditionally waterpower and wood-fuel</li> <li>• Renewable energy promoted locally and nationally as part of sustainable development</li> <li>• Demand for woodfuel, energy crops, small scale hydro, solar water heating and small scale / domestic wind turbines and larger Solar (PV) Farm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landscape and biodiversity benefits of increasing use of coppice</li> <li>• Development and use of renewable energy can increase environmental awareness and appreciation</li> <li>• Use of historic mill locations for hydro-electricity and the management of woods for wood-fuel can bring in funds for the beneficial management of these features and landscapes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New and emerging techniques (eg. new scale wind farms, S) can degrade landscape and have impact on biodiversity with turbines, habitats</li> <li>• Re-use of historic locations can cause damage to structures and architecture</li> </ul>
Mineral development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mineral reserves and consents for existing Limestone extraction remain at one large scale quarry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to interpret geodiversity, mineral heritage and Special Qualities of AONB</li> <li>• Opportunities to use more local stone in buildings and development to enhance local character</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large scale extraction can detract from landscape and cause damage to landscape</li> </ul>
Housing & the built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing allocation demands leading to Market towns encroaching on AONB and in-fill in villages</li> <li>• Location of housing and development in places which are dependent on car use</li> <li>• Unsympathetic and standardised designs of much modern housing and business premises</li> <li>• Lack of Village Design Statements for many settlements</li> <li>• Redundant farm buildings being converted to residential dwellings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Places for people to live and work in or near to the spectacular landscape of the AONB, facilitating appreciation of Special Qualities of AONB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor design of curtilage can detract from character, eg. urban sprawl with oversized windows on hillsides engineered turning points, excessive and inadequate landscaping</li> <li>• Poor location of development encourages additional highway infrastructure</li> </ul>
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly locally in market towns or commute (Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff). Highest employment in service industries of tourism, public administration, finance and transport with small numbers in agriculture &amp; forestry</li> <li>• Farm incomes declining.</li> <li>• Need for growth</li> <li>• Movement, such as Transition Towns, towards more sustainable communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment predominantly based on servicing the enjoyment and appreciation of the Special Qualities of the AONB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demands for development and employment, urban sprawl, environmental and climate change can have detrimental impact on landscape</li> </ul>
Transport & Traffic [inc emissions]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic volumes; A40 busy at all times of the day and, along with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most parts of AONB accessible by road, facilitating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual impact of transport infrastructure</li> </ul>

	<p>A49 and A4136, carries much freight traffic. A466 and B roads are less busy, outside of commuting times, though congestion can be caused by dawdling drivers. Agricultural vehicles can also hold up traffic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reliance on private car use and commuting</li> <li>● Demands for standardised upgrades of road network, from A40 dual carriageway to unsurfaced byways</li> <li>● Rural bus services patchy</li> <li>● Wider issue of pollution and carbon footprint of the area.</li> </ul>	<p>appreciation of Special Qualities for people of all levels of personal mobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rural bus services facilitate access and appreciation of the Special Qualities of the AONB</li> </ul>	<p>standardised concrete barriers, lighting &amp; ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Low / poor existing surfaces &amp; bridges can detract character</li> </ul>
Waste disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All waste for landfill exported</li> <li>● Government policy to divert waste from landfill eg. to community composting schemes or small-scale energy-from-waste schemes such as anaerobic digestion plants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No new landfill sites in AONB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There may be awareness of need to recycle.</li> </ul>
<b>Community and Social</b>			
Local services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Viability of village and rural services and facilities</li> <li>● Mobility of residents, including out commuting, increases competition between village, market town and city facilities</li> <li>● Internet consumerism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Many good village shops &amp; busy market towns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Loss of local community coherence</li> <li>● increasing social isolation</li> <li>● Deliveries of goods may increase</li> </ul>
Local housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Quantity of second homes and holiday lets</li> <li>● Attractiveness of area for both commuting and retirement</li> <li>● Lack of affordable housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Entrepreneurs and fresh ideas brought into area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Migration from area</li> <li>● Loss of population force</li> <li>● Loss of income and skills</li> <li>● Imbalanced demographics</li> </ul>
Community facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pubs &amp; garages threatened by competition from supermarkets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Good village halls &amp; pubs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Loss of local community coherence</li> <li>● increases social isolation</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>			
Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increasing greenhouse gas emissions leading to anticipated global warming and species migration</li> <li>● Considerable uncertainties over the nature of positive and negative impacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● New opportunities for agriculture and tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Impact on Semi-natural Woodland habitats,</li> <li>● River &amp; tides likely to increase</li> <li>● Water quality more</li> <li>● Increased more landslips</li> <li>● Increased historic environment</li> <li>● Changes to and practices may character</li> </ul>

<b>Pollution</b>			
Water pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diffuse and point source pollution from urban (domestic and business) and agricultural sources</li> <li>Ploughing of floodplain, steep valley slopes and other vulnerable soils</li> <li>Water abstraction reduces river flows and dilution of pollutants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incidents can be used to raise awareness of pollution issues and best practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pollution degrade wildlife habitat character</li> <li>Agricultural practices can lead to contamination</li> <li>Soil erosion and loss of topsoil and sediments</li> </ul>
Light pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanding towns on edges of AONB</li> <li>Demand for standardised highway lighting, particularly at junctions</li> <li>Increasing use of 'security' lighting on exterior of buildings, and floodlighting of games pitches and riding arenas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examples of bad practice can be used to promote best practice</li> <li>Good practice enhances 'Dark Sky' experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorly designed standardised lighting can degrade landscape character</li> <li>Poorly located lighting can confuse landscape character</li> </ul>
Noise pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heavy freight &amp; traffic using main roads</li> <li>Domestic / garden noise from lawnmowers, strimmers, chippers etc.</li> <li>Military training flight path down valley</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examples of bad practice can be used to promote best practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Localised noise</li> </ul>
Visual pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demand for more obtrusive signage</li> <li>Bi-lingual signs require larger signs to accommodate extra wording</li> <li>Increasing use of plastic for some modern agricultural practices</li> <li>Poor design of large buildings, eg barns and business warehouses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examples of bad practice can be used to promote best practice</li> <li>Undergrounding of electricity cables removes visual obstructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorly designed development in and around AONB can degrade landscape character</li> <li>Agricultural practices in sensitive areas of plastic can degrade landscape character</li> </ul>
Fly tipping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Persistent levels of localised flytipping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fly tipping can degrade wildlife and the SpA AONB</li> </ul>

## **PART 2 STRATEGY**

### **7. INTRODUCTION**

The following pages develop the strategy for the AONB Management Plan 2015-2020. However, they should not be read in isolation to the preceding Part 1 – Outline.

#### **7.1 Themes and aims**

7.1.1 Five main themes were established in the first statutory AONB Management Plan 2004-2009 and retained in 2009-14. Following review these five themes have been continued in this Management Plan for 2015-2020. Each theme is summarised in the five following paragraphs.

##### 7.1.2 Theme 1: Our unique landscape

Conserving and, where necessary, enhancing the natural beauty of *our unique landscape* is the primary theme. This addresses the components of natural beauty: the landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, historic environment and the cultural heritage.

The aim for each component is as follows:-

- to conserve and, where necessary, enhance the natural beauty of the landscape in the Wye Valley AONB, with its natural and cultural features and processes and the Special Qualities and features of the Landscape Management Zones.
- to conserve, and where appropriate enhance, the biodiversity of the AONB
- to conserve and enhance sites that are important for the scientific and general understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the geodiversity heritage of the AONB.
- to conserve and sympathetically manage the historic environment and cultural heritage of the AONB and promote engagement with and understanding of it.

Additionally the dominant land uses that sustain the landscape need to be considered.

The aims for this are:-

- to foster viable farming enterprises that manage the land in ways that conserve and enhance the natural resources and local distinctiveness of the AONB, and
- to ensure woodlands and trees throughout the Wye Valley AONB are managed sustainably in a way that protects and enhances the outstanding ancient woodland character of the area, and provides economic, environmental and social benefits.

##### 7.1.3 Theme 2: Development and Transport

Planning the protection of the AONB through appropriate *development and transport* is the second theme. This addresses the development, infrastructure and protection of the landscape with the aim for each component as follows:-

- Ensure that all development with and impacting on the AONB is compatible with the aims of AONB designation.
- Ensure all minerals development within the AONB is compatible with the aims of AONB designation
- Ensure the most sustainable, effective and efficient use and supply of services and energy within and impacting on the AONB, compatible with the aims of AONB designation
- Ensure transport in the AONB is sustainable and integrated and compatible with the purposes of AONB designation.

#### 7.1.4 Theme 3: Vital communities

Safeguarding rural industries and local socio-economic needs that maintain *vital communities* is the third theme. This addresses the vibrancy of the local communities and the viability of local businesses that sustain the landscape features. The aim is:-

- to engender thriving local communities that have a high quality of life with a healthy economy that supports the natural beauty of the area.

Farming and forestry have already been covered above, but other aspects of the rural economy and rural regeneration also need to be considered. The aim is:-

- to foster viable rural enterprises that derive benefit from and enhance the natural resources and local distinctiveness of the AONB.

Tourism is included under the next theme.

#### 7.1.5 Theme 4: Enjoying the AONB

Promoting and ensuring that the general public are *enjoying the AONB* in sustainable ways is the fourth theme. This addresses the enjoyment of the special landscape features by everybody. The aims are that:-

- Sustainable tourism, based upon the natural beauty and local distinctiveness of the AONB, continues to enrich the lives of visitors, operators and employees while contributing positively to the conservation and enhancement of the area.
- People continue to enjoy active recreation in the Wye Valley that does not detract from the natural beauty of the area.
- People's appreciation and understanding of why the area is designated is increased.

#### 7.1.6 Theme 5: Achieving success together

Managing and governing the AONB effectively to ensure we are *achieving success together* is the fifth theme. This addresses the need to manage and co-ordinate the above aspects to maximise the benefits for everyone. The aim is:-

- to continue proactive and imaginative achievements in the Wye Valley AONB through successful and productive partnerships.

This includes a Charter for Residents and visitors that identifies what you can do to help support the AONB.

## 7.2 **Structure of the Strategy**

7.2.1 In the following pages each theme outlined above is divided into topics drawn from the bullet points identified. Each topic has a brief outline which highlights

significant issues. These must be read in conjunction with Part 1. The aim for that topic is given, based on the Vision. The Strategic Objectives for that topic are then listed; these are the policy proposals for the Management Plan. A separate Action Plan for the Wye Valley AONB is available which outlines the delivery of this Plan and the monitoring and evaluation programme.

7.2.2 This Management Plan is considered a higher tier plan in relation to the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA). The HRA concludes that there are no likely significant effects on any European sites (SACs & SPAs). However, there are instances where uncertainty remains and the HRA document highlights that in such instances it is acceptable to defer the HRA down to the lower tier plan or project level, when more detail will be available. This will ensure that actions do not compromise the conservation objectives of any European sites.

### **7.3 Interpretation of Strategic Objectives**

7.3.1 All the Strategic Objectives in the Management Plan must be interpreted in the light of:

- the statutory purpose of the Wye Valley AONB designation, that is to conserve and enhance the area's natural beauty
- the 20 Year Vision for the AONB
- the aim of the theme's topic
- the accompanying text to the topic
- the texts and tables of Part 1 of the Management Plan

7.3.2 Where there are any doubts or conflicts, Strategic Objectives should be interpreted using a 'purposive' approach which returns to the statutory purpose of the AONB designation, '*to conserve and enhance natural beauty*'.

7.3.3 In practical terms this means that:

- where there may be more than one possible interpretation of a Strategic Objective, the one which reflects the aim behind the Strategic Objective, (which will always be to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB) must be applied.
- where there appears to be an irreconcilable conflict between two or more Strategic Objectives, or an action under one Strategic Objective conflicts with another, the interpretation which achieves the statutory purpose of the AONB shall be made.
- where any action, plan or project, decision, (& etc.) could be interpreted as being supported by any particular Strategic Objective (or policies), but its exercise would conflict with conserving and enhancing natural beauty, the statutory purpose to conserve and enhance natural beauty shall override any support provided by the Strategic Objective.

## THEME 1

### **8. OUR UNIQUE LANDSCAPE – conserved & enhanced**

This section outlines the aims and strategic objectives for landscape, biodiversity, and heritage, and for farming and woodlands, for the Wye Valley AONB.

#### **8.1 LANDSCAPE**

8.1.1 The character and quality of the landscape, crafted by successive generations of land management, underpins the AONB designation and supports a host of environmental, social and economic benefits. From contributing to our health and wellbeing to supporting the tourism industry, the landscape is a changing backdrop to our daily lives. By conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape, and the condition of its characteristic features, the public will continue to benefit from the AONB now and into the future.

8.1.2 A common understanding of what makes each landscape special enables people to plan ahead to conserve and enhance the distinct character and unique sense of place of that landscape, whilst enabling adaptation to changing conditions and supporting the needs of people and local communities. For example, landscape qualities are increasingly used in marketing agricultural products and diversification enterprises, securing financial rewards for those who manage the character of the area which also enhances recreation and rural tourism.

8.1.3 LandMap and the Landscape Character Assessments covering the lower Wye valley identify the characteristics that make the landscape of the Wye Valley AONB so distinctive. These are used to define sixteen Landscape Management Zones in the AONB. Table 1 outlines the Features of each of the AONB Landscape Management Zones. Historic Landscape Character Assessments and National Character Areas in England have also been produced. These can all help inform management and identify the choices and opportunities to plan and monitor proactively for change in a dynamic and evolving landscape.

8.1.4 There are many pressures on the natural beauty and landscape characteristics of the AONB. These are summarised in Table 9. Standardisation, urbanisation, climate change, pest and diseases and the speed and scale of change in modern technology can all have an erosive effect on the distinctive character of an area. Table 1 and Table 8 highlight the ecosystem services that the landscape features and Special Qualities provide as a healthy functioning landscape. Where these are under threat and the landscape is in danger of not functioning, mitigation and positive action should be targeted. There will be significant change to the landscape in the long term from climate change. While not all changes are predictable, the aim of adaptation actions should be to retain a functioning landscape, with a focus on resilience and robustness. The qualities for which the AONB is designated will remain important in the future, but climate change will intensify pressure on ecosystem services and functions. More

joined-up action, at local and regional levels, will be needed to make the landscape and ecological network more resilient to changing pressures. In this way the decline in habitats and species, degradation of landscapes and erosion of natural resources can be halted and declines reversed where appropriate. Much of this can be achieved through the landscape approach and the adoption of Green Infrastructure (GI). Green Infrastructure, like the landscape approach, provides a multi-functional approach for environmental and economic issues as well as addressing social, health and well-being and climate change matters.

8.1.5 The Guiding Principle of the landscape scale approach identifies the four landscape management strategies of Conserve, Enhance, Restore and/or Create. This will help conserve and enhance the features and Special Qualities that maintain the uniqueness and natural beauty of the AONB. In and around the AONB this should concentrate on and support the characteristic semi-natural habitats linked and connected by a network of habitats such as woods, trees, hedgerows, drystone walls, rivers, ditches and ponds.

**AONB Aim:** Conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape in the Wye Valley AONB with its natural and cultural features and processes and the Special Qualities and features of the Landscape Management Zones.

### Landscape Strategic Objectives

<b>WV-L1</b>	Promote and develop policies and initiatives to conserve, enhance, restore or create the features and elements that maintain the Special Qualities, landscape character and natural beauty of the AONB. Ensure their sustainable management and mitigate, reduce or remove detrimental features <i>[see also WV-L2, WV-P3, WV-P4 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-L2</b>	Encourage and enhance appropriate landscape scale and green infrastructure action by all particularly on consolidating ecosystem services and positively contributing to habitat connectivity that allows wildlife to adapt to the effects of climate change <i>[see also WV-L1, WV-B2, WV-B3, WV-P3, WV-P4, WV-P5 and WV-P7]</i>
<b>WV-L3</b>	Promote and encourage the use of the Landscape Character Assessments and Historic Landscape Characterisation to inform local distinctiveness in development plans, strategies, guidance and landscaping schemes <i>[see also WV-D2, WV-D3, WV-M2, WV-U4, WV-C3 and WV-S4]</i>
<b>WV-L4</b>	Ensure the establishment and collection of sufficiently comprehensive baseline data to monitor landscape condition and direction of change <i>[see also WV-H2, WV-P8]</i>
<b>WV-L5</b>	Support measures which increase public awareness and appreciation of the natural beauty and importance of the Wye Valley AONB

[see also <i>WV-A1</i> ]
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## 8.2 BIODIVERSITY

8.2.1 The Wye Valley AONB is particularly rich in wildlife and has a high concentration of designated sites covering approximately 10% of the AONB. There are 3 sites of international importance designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the European Union's Habitats Directive in the AONB. The 3 SACs are the entire River Wye, over 900 hectares of ancient semi-natural woodland in the heart of the Wye Gorge, and a collection of sites in the lower Wye Valley used as roosts by Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats. Within a 10mile/16km radius of the AONB there is also the Severn Estuary SAC, Special Protection Area (SPA) & Ramsar site downstream from the AONB, the River Usk SAC to the west and Walmore Common Ramsar Site to the east. Of national importance in the AONB are 45 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) including 4 National Nature Reserves (NNRs). The majority of the SSSIs cover ancient semi-natural woodland spread throughout the AONB. The conservation of these sites is overseen by Natural England (NE) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW). Also of importance in the AONB are 3 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), managed by the respective local authority, and 204 County local/key wildlife sites, a few of which are managed as nature reserves by Gwent Wildlife Trust, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust or Herefordshire Wildlife Trust in their respective counties, and Plantlife and the Woodland Trust, with the rest on private land. Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (section 40) public bodies have a duty to conserve biodiversity. NE and NRW have a duty to report on the condition of SSSIs and whether they are in favourable condition (see Table 5 and Table 6). Species-rich grasslands are an important visual element in the AONB as part of the landscape of small fields, in churchyards, along road verges or other public areas, but they also play a vitally important part in providing the biodiversity of the area, protecting endangered plant species, providing habitat for bees and other pollinators and occupying a vital place in the ecosystem of the area.

8.2.2 About half of the SSSIs on the English side of the AONB are in their optimal ('favourable') condition from a biodiversity perspective (NE 2012). This is due to many factors ranging between local, regional, national and global impacts. Much of the River Wye SSSI in the AONB is of good ecological status under the Water Framework Directive. However there is still a notable section of the river between Ross and Monmouth that is rated as poor ecological status largely due to diffuse inputs from agriculture. The Wye Catchment Partnership has a shared understanding of the principal problems and their causes and acts as a focal hub in delivering action to correct the identified issues, including delivery of the Wye Nutrient Management Plan. Therefore it is particularly important to consider the options where the condition of SSSIs is significantly affected by management of the wider landscape in which they occur. There may also be an intensification of pressure on land and wildlife, and consequently on landscape and natural beauty, from visitor pressure, pests and diseases and climate change.

8.2.3 The aim of management actions and adaptations should be to retain the ecological value, with a focus on resilience and robustness. ‘Making Space for Nature: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network’, chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton (2010), identified that to make space for nature we need more, bigger, better and joined up sites to create a sustainable, resilient and more effective ecological network. The report also recognised AONBs as having great potential “to establish a coherent and resilient ecological network”. The Common Agriculture Policy and strategic planning policies are major tools in the creation of better ecological networks. They should ensure that existing wildlife is managed to the highest standards, that habitat improvement and creation becomes part of sustainable land management systems and businesses, and that land managers are provided adequate reward for to doing this.

8.2.4 An historic agreement on taking action to halt the alarming global declines of biodiversity was taken by 192 governments, including the UK, in Aichi, Japan in 2010. The resulting ‘Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020’ sets a new global vision and direction, with 5 strategic goals and 20 new global ‘Aichi’ targets. The five strategic goals are:-

- A: Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society.
- B: Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use.
- C: Improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity.
- D: Enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystems.
- E: Enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building.

8.2.5 "Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services" outlines the strategic direction for biodiversity policy for the next decade on land (including rivers) in England, building upon the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) published in June 2011. Outcomes will be delivered through actions in four areas:

- a more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea;
- putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy;
- reducing environmental pressures;
- improvement of knowledge.

Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire have been established through NEWP to work strategically on these outcomes.

8.2.6 In Wales the focus is on natural resource management, with the overall aim to ensure that Wales has increasingly resilient and diverse ecosystems that deliver economic, environmental and social benefits. This includes a Pollinator Action Plan, promoting, creating and enhancing diverse and connected flowering habitats across protected areas and the wider countryside.

8.2.7 The potential for the Wye Valley AONB to contribute positively to nationally and internationally important habitats and species is evident. The quality of the river

and riverine habitat, with migratory fish and otters, are of European importance. Similarly the near continuous woodlands interspersed with species rich grassland make a high quality connected landscape. The Wye Valley is an important European stronghold for both the Lesser Horseshoe bat and the Common Dormouse. There are also many other nationally rare species with a restricted UK distribution that are found within the AONB, for example, rare species of whitebeam trees (*Sorbus* Spp) within the gorge woodlands. There are also species that are of local importance and although some species have been lost there is still considerable floral diversity in a range of habitats.

8.2.8 The concentration of priority species and habitats in the Wye Valley has led the AONB Partnership to be a leading force facilitating, encouraging and delivering joined-up, collaborative and cooperative initiatives with local partners that maintain and enhance biodiversity, halt further degradation and, where possible, establish restoration. Exemplar initiatives since 2001 include landscape scale projects such as the Woolhope Dome Project, the Ravine WoodLIFE project and the Wye Valley Nature Improvement Area application. The AONB Partnership is well placed to help provide more resilient and coherent ecological networks in and around the AONB, with healthy and well-functioning ecosystems delivering multiple benefits for people and wildlife. Working at a landscape scale, properly planned ecological networks, including large restoration areas, can focus efforts on achieving a shift beyond conservation to enhancement and, where appropriate, restoration.

8.2.9 On-going monitoring of key species and habitats will be crucial to determining the effectiveness of various schemes and initiatives and overall delivery of biodiversity objectives. Where appropriate a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) may be required for a project or plan to identify more precisely the nature, scale or location of the proposal, and its potential effects and necessary changes, in order to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of any European site(s).

8.2.10 The Wye Valley New Naturalist (2008), written by Dr George Peterken provides some useful background on the area.

**AONB Aim:** Conserve, and where appropriate enhance and restore, the biodiversity of the AONB in robust ecological networks.

### **Biodiversity Strategic Objectives**

<b>WV-B1</b>	Contribute to the delivery of national, regional and local Biodiversity targets and priorities for key habitats and species relevant to the AONB, in partnership with relevant organisations <i>[see also WV-P4 and WV-P7]</i>
<b>WV-B2</b>	Encourage and support measures that contribute to the management of all statutory designated sites and County local/key wildlife sites so that they are in favourable condition and within robust ecological networks <i>[see also WV-L2, WV-B3 and WV-P5]</i>

<b>WV-B3</b>	Promote the adoption of schemes and initiatives that sustain, enhance and/or restore the characteristic biodiversity of the AONB, and that enable ecological systems and natural processes to accommodate and adapt to climate and other environmental change, including through landscape scale habitat connectivity <i>[see also WV-L2, WV-B2, WV-T3 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-B4</b>	Identify species and diseases considered to be detrimental to the biodiversity value of the AONB and encourage their monitoring, management and, where appropriate, their control <i>[see also WV-F6 and WV-W4]</i>
<b>WV-B5</b>	Support the identification and monitoring of key indicator species and priority species and habitats, in partnership with conservation organisations, relevant individuals and the Local Biological Record Centres <i>[see also WV-P8]</i>
<b>WV-B6</b>	Promote awareness, sources of advice and involvement in biodiversity conservation by landowners, land managers, businesses, local communities, schools and the public including of impacts from outside the AONB <i>[see also WV-A1]</i>

### 8.3 GEODIVERSITY

8.3.1 The Wye Valley AONB contains some excellent geology with good and clear examples of geological features in the form of a variety of bedrocks exposed in quarries, cliffs and rock outcrops, and the geomorphology associated with the river. The geology underpins the topography, soils and biodiversity that make the landscape of the Wye Valley so outstanding. Geodiversity, as well as biodiversity, contributes to the delivery of provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting ecosystem services. There are several geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Geological Sites (LGS) - formerly known as Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS). It is recognised that there are opportunities to increase the number of LGS/RIGS and generally make geological sites more accessible, intellectually and physically, to the general public.

**AONB Aim:** Conserve and enhance sites that are important for the scientific and general understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the geodiversity heritage of the AONB.

#### **Geodiversity Strategic Objectives**

<b>WV-G1</b>	Support the identification and monitoring of significant geodiversity conservation features (SSSIs & LGS/RIGS), in partnership with geoconservation organisations and the local Record Centres. <i>[see also WV-P7 and WV-P8]</i>
<b>WV-G2</b>	Contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the geodiversity resource in line with Geodiversity Action Plans (GAPs) <i>[see also WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-G3</b>	Encourage and support measures that create and/or maintain the accessibility and conservation interest of sites of geological importance <i>[See also WV-M2 and WV-M3]</i>
<b>WV-G4</b>	Promote increased understanding and opportunities to appreciate the significance of the geodiversity of the AONB and the need for its protection and management <i>[see also WV-A1]</i>

## 8.4 HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

8.4.1 The Wye Valley AONB has a rich heritage that has been host to many activities that have been instrumental in laying the foundations to the cultural identity of Britain. This is recognised in the high number of designated archaeological and heritage conservation sites. The lower part of the AONB is in the Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales (Cadw 1998). There are 126 Scheduled Monuments in the AONB and 10 registered Parks and Gardens. There are also 17 Conservation Areas and 953 Listed Buildings in the built environment of the AONB. Additionally there are many more nationally and regionally important monuments in the AONB that are not designated, along with a number of Unregistered Parks and Gardens (parks and gardens of local interest) and designed landscapes.

8.4.2 Heritage features are a unique, non-renewable asset. Like distinctive landscape features there are no breeding pairs of Iron Age Hill Forts. Similar to the landscape and the biodiversity, the features of the historic environment are under pressure from changes in land management and climate. Indeed, some features of the historic environment in the AONB, including some scheduled sites, are not in the best condition. This is often a reflection of present priorities, as well as changing management practices, with some sites suffering from neglect. Nearly 8% of heritage assets on the English side of the AONB are on the Register of Heritage at Risk. There are existing datasets on the vulnerability of designated historic environment and heritage assets and also the potential to broaden these datasets to encompass undesignated nationally important monuments. The appreciation and preservation of the historic environment is therefore a priority wherever possible, accepting the need for sympathetic management that has regard for other interests

such as the SACs and financial viability. The amounts of public, private and charitable finance invested into the management of the historic environment is significant and needs to continue along with properly-considered changes to achieve viable uses that enable the heritage to continue to survive. Therefore management must focus on sustainability rather than a cycle of repair and decay.

8.4.3 The Statement of Significance in Section 2.1.4 contains a brief summary of the historic environment of the Wye Valley. The Wye Valley National Character Area profile sections on ‘Key Characteristics’ and ‘Landscape Through Time’ provide further detail. The heritage of the Wye Valley is also closely linked with the neighbouring Forest of Dean. There are numerous publications and articles elaborating on many aspects of local history, including ‘Overlooking the Wye, A guide to the heritage of the Wye Valley’ a legacy publication of the £3million ‘Overlooking the Wye’ Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership Scheme.

**AONB Aim:** Conserve and sympathetically manage the historic environment and cultural heritage of the AONB and promote engagement with and understanding of it

### Historic Environment Strategic Objectives

<b>WV-H1</b>	Initiate and encourage schemes, policy development, advice and sympathetic management through partnerships and positive action to conserve, enhance and promote the historic environment, in conjunction with landowners, national agencies and other relevant organisations <i>[see also WV-P4, WV-P5 and WV-P7]</i>
<b>WV-H2</b>	Promote establishment of baseline data to monitor change and improve the local databases of historic landscape assessments, conservation areas, locally important buildings, buildings at risk, ancient trees, heritage features and sites in the AONB in conjunction with Local Planning Authorities, local archaeological trusts and individuals <i>[see also WV-L4, WV-P8]</i>
<b>WV-H3</b>	Promote the understanding and enjoyment of the cultural heritage and historic environment <i>[see also WV-A1]</i>

## 8.5 FARMING

8.5.1 Agriculture occupies over 60% of the land in the AONB and continues to be an important part of the rural economy and a provider of rural landscape management. There is a wide variety of farm enterprises in the AONB ranging from soft fruit under polytunnels to High Nature Value Farming on unimproved grassland, from broiler chicken units to pedigree Hereford beef herds and from organic apple juice to turf

production. Supplementing the agricultural businesses are renewable energy production and a complete spectrum of farm diversification businesses and re-developments of farm buildings. The majority (53%) of the AONB is farmed intensively.

8.5.2 Farming practices have crafted the land for millennia. Agricultural businesses have always adapted to remain profitable and the viability of enterprises enables land managers to conserve and enhance their holdings and their interests. However modern agriculture has evolved and many of the traditional habitats and practices that have created some of the distinctive features of the AONB are often commercially redundant. The future viability of farming and forestry is fundamental to the appearance of the Wye Valley landscape and many of the problems can only be solved by national and European policy changes. For example the Wye is a Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) Priority area, providing opportunities and incentives for landowners to reduce agricultural inputs polluting the river. The increasingly globalised nature of agricultural commodities, volatile farm gate prices, consumer confidence, the increasing costs of fuel and fertiliser and of welfare, hygiene, bio-security and traceability initiatives, together with the opportunities for farmers to act co-operatively, all have implications for the viability of farming. These trends have particularly influenced stock farming, which plays a pivotal role in the maintenance of the Wye Valley's agricultural landscapes.

8.5.3 The production of food and fuel are key ecosystem services but must also be viable businesses. Influences on these include the effects of climate change and the ability to adopt new agricultural practices. Both can impact on the visual quality and landscape character of the area through the use of different technologies, crops, crop production and crop protection practices. These could include the use of photovoltaic (PV) arrays, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), new irrigation techniques or plastic crop covers. The latter, either as mulch or polytunnels, can have a dramatic impact on the landscape. Farm-scale polytunnels are not necessarily acceptable in the AONB where protection of the natural beauty and scenic beauty have great weight in planning policy. The potential adverse impacts to landscape, biodiversity, soil and water quality that these changes could bring require more research and close monitoring.

8.5.4 The paradox is that many agricultural practices create and support natural beauty, and farmers and rural businesses need to be economically viable so that they can conserve and enhance the landscape, otherwise the businesses and the active environmental land management they underpin, will cease. Farming needs to be able to realise social and economic needs while delivering a whole range of ecosystem services including healthy food, pollination, biodiversity, high landscape quality, high air and water quality, high animal welfare standards and opportunities for public recreation and spiritual refreshment. Therefore farmers must be supported for taking a positive role in the land management of a nationally protected landscape. Farmers are already engaged in many initiatives including the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, Catchment Sensitive Farming and agri-environment schemes (Countryside Stewardship in England and Glastir in Wales). Nearly half of the AONB in England is covered in agri-environment agreements. The trend should be to

increase the coverage and effectiveness of schemes in the AONB. Thus agricultural practices that conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the area, including biodiversity, and protect environmental resources e.g. soil and water and the River Wye, and take account of the landscape character should continue to be encouraged as a high priority, for example High Nature Value (HNV) farming. Utilising local markets, environmental grants and reducing costs via smart use of water, energy and nutrients are all important, alongside increasing production and environmental enhancements. Conversely, agricultural activity that significantly diminishes or destroys the natural beauty, landscape character and ecosystem services of the AONB should not be supported.

8.5.5 The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy will continue to significantly influence agricultural policy and practice, with the next review in 2020. The process of ‘decoupling’ and ‘modulation’, supporting a general move away from production support mechanisms to those providing enhanced environmental benefits, is likely to continue. Designated landscapes have been incorporated as high value landscape areas within the targeting framework in England and Countryside Stewardship targeting information will identify to applicants the specific actions and benefits that the scheme options can deliver in these designated landscapes. In this way agri-environment schemes will continue to support the AONB.

8.5.6 There are also the ‘small landowners’, ‘small-holders’ or ‘hobby farmers’ who do not depend on land management for their income. However collectively they are the main private custodians of the distinctive small-field landscapes of the Wye Valley and a disproportionately large amount of the key sites for biodiversity and ecology. These people often own and manage High Nature Value farmland with semi-natural species rich grasslands and orchards and practice more traditional forms of farming, such as low intensity grazing and hay-making. They, too, need support and practical help and are often outside the existing agri-environment schemes.

**AONB Aim:** To foster viable farming enterprises that manage the land in ways that conserve and enhance the natural resources and local distinctiveness of the AONB.

### **Farming Strategic Objectives**

<b>WV-F1</b>	Encourage farmers and landowners to develop and adopt sustainable management practices that conserve or enhance the features, Special Qualities and natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB <i>[see also WV-E2 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-F2</b>	Influence policy on, and encourage the maximum uptake of, agri-environment and other appropriate schemes, including support for small-holders, where they progress the conservation or enhancement of the natural beauty, biodiversity, historic environment and Special Qualities of the AONB, particularly through Catchment Sensitive Farming and mixed farming systems <i>[see also WV-P3, WV-P4, WV-P5 and WV-P7]</i>

<b>WV-F3</b>	Seek to mitigate &/or reduce, or as a last resort remove, agricultural activity which significantly diminishes or destroys the Special Qualities, natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB <i>[see also WV-D3]</i>
<b>WV-F4</b>	Support the development of and funding for new skills, farming practices and farm-based activities that are compatible with the aims of AONB designation, and encourage and support traditional skills such as hay making, hedge laying, dry stone walling, woodland and coppice management, riparian tree works etc. that contribute to the maintenance of the Special Qualities of the AONB <i>[see also WV-W3, WV-E1 and WV-E3]</i>
<b>WV-F5</b>	Promote a wider understanding of the value of farming to the landscape and economy of the AONB <i>[see also WV-A1]</i>
<b>WV-F6</b>	Support all appropriate measures to control diseases of agricultural crops, trees and livestock, which threaten the commercial viability of farming systems that conserve the landscape character, ensuring that the measures remain compatible with the conservation and enjoyment of natural beauty <i>[see also WV-B4 and WV-W4]</i>
<b>WV-F7</b>	Encourage and support local producers to supply local food and promote and encourage the use of local produce by public bodies, consumers, accommodation providers and local food outlets. <i>[see also WV-E1]</i>

## **8.6 WOODLAND, TREES AND FORESTRY**

8.6.1 Woodlands in the Wye Valley are one of the dominant landscape features with significant connectivity across the landscape. They provide a multitude of ecosystems services and environmental, social and economic benefits. The majority of woodlands in the Wye Valley AONB are ancient woodland of high nature conservation value, and therefore irreplaceable. However there are also sizeable conifer plantations. Forestry and woodland occupies about 26% of the AONB, i.e. about 8440ha. Over 900ha, about 3% of the AONB, are internationally protected as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The highest proportions of ancient and semi-natural woodland (ASNW) and planted ancient woodland sites (PAWS) are in the Wye Gorge, Dean Edge Limestone Hills (Highmeadow) and Woolhope Dome. The woodland proportion varies enormously between landscape management zones. The productive areas of woodland in the AONB are on the flatter land of the Dean and Trellech plateaux and the Woolhope Dome. The majority of the woodland in productive management is in the Public Forest Estate which covers 4,962ha or 15% of the

AONB, managed by the Forestry Commission in England or Natural Resources Wales (NRW). A further 1,650ha of private woodland (5% of the AONB) are in some level of grant scheme. The administrative complexity of the AONB means that there are a range of relevant woodland strategies and plans, for England and Wales respectively.

8.6.2 Britain's trees are under unprecedented threat. Over the last ten years there has been a significant increase in the number of pests and diseases attacking our trees. There are imported pests diseases creating problems with Ash, Larch, Oak, Pine, Spruce and Horse Chestnut trees. Current threats include Ash Dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*), Alder Phytophthora (*Phytophthora cambivora* x *fragariae*) and Ramorum Blight (*Phytophthora ramorum*) which all have the potential to affect dramatically the landscape character of the AONB. Close monitoring and swift remedial action are required to control the worst impacts of these threats. This increase in pests and diseases has dramatically highlighted how dependant we have become on a limited range of tree species. The ancient woodlands of the Wye Valley have a much richer species diversity than plantation woodland. Species diversification is very much at the core of woodland adaptation and ensuring resilience in the future. In the longer term climate change may also significantly affect the Wye Valley woodlands. However their extensive connectivity across the landscape may afford some opportunities for species and habitat migration and/or adaptation.

8.6.3 The Wye Valley woodlands would have been managed, predominantly coppiced, on an industrial scale over at least the past 500 years. Much of this would have been low-grade hardwood timber turned into charcoal on site and fed into the local blast furnaces and industrial works along the valley. Currently nationally only 30% of woodlands are managed and the woodlands in the AONB are no exception. This is partly due to the low timber prices in recent years, making the relatively low-grade hardwoods on the steep slopes of the Wye Valley woodlands particularly unprofitable. The development of modern woodfuel and biomass markets could significantly increase the management of these woods once more. But in the meantime many of the woodlands receive little management.

8.6.4 With this lack of active management come a range of problems. The neglect of woodlands has resulted in a general loss of biodiversity particularly those species that are dependent on the cyclic light to shade development in woods. Other problems include invasion by species such as cherry laurel, increasing deer, boar and grey squirrel populations and the general loss of woodland management skills. Deer populations can have a significant detrimental impact on the economic and conservation value of the Wye Valley woodlands and continued collaborative management is needed. Increases in grey squirrel populations are also recognised as having a significant impact on the longevity of trees such as beech which not only affect the productivity and biodiversity but also the landscape character of the woodlands. However effective control is not so well advanced. The impact of “wild” boar has yet to be determined. The division of woods and marketing of small individual plots is another trend that needs monitoring.

8.6.5 Employment levels in woodland management in the AONB are uncertain due to the scarcity of comprehensive figures for the AONB. However, there are a wide

range of professions locally connected to the woodlands and the use of timber and woodland products. These range from foresters, arboricultural and silvicultural advisors, coppice workers and charcoal makers through stalkers, butchers and game dealers to carpenters, wood turners, joiners and cabinet makers. The viability of the enterprises and markets for woodland produce are essential to ensure the ongoing management of the woodland.

8.6.6 The other significant use and value of the woodlands is for recreation, health and well-being. In Japan, the health benefits of spending time in forests has its own word, *shinrin-yoku*, which means "forest bathing". The heavily wooded nature of the lower Wye Valley is a key factor in the area's popularity as a tourism and recreation destination. The Public Forest Estate in England and Wales (respectively managed by Forestry Commission & Natural Resources Wales) and Woodland Trust woodlands are open to, and popular with, walkers, with various further promoted and permissive routes for horse riders and cyclists. Similarly most (but not all) Nature Reserves have public access, these are managed by Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust. However high levels of recreational use can at times conflict with practical woodland management, such as felling operations or deer culling. The woodland resource also provides good educational and well-being opportunities, particularly through community woodland activity, Forest Schools and the establishment and development of creative and therapeutic initiatives such as InsideOUT and MindSCAPES.

8.6.7 The woodlands of the Wye Valley therefore require multipurpose management, with sound advice, support and initiatives to secure the benefits for local landscape character and biodiversity and for amenity, health, the local economy and linking or expanding existing sites. Riparian tree corridors and/or wet woodland can help with some flooding issues and be an important resource for watercourse management and biodiversity, but are under threat due to lack of management and tree health related problems. New woodlands would be an important asset in those areas to help with water management. Wherever possible woodlands need to be brought back into management, woodland owners should be encouraged to undertake active and appropriate management of their sites including the use of coppice management. The only way of increasing the area of ancient woodland with semi natural characteristics is through PAWS restoration. To make the most of these remnants, it is good practice to change the woodland canopy structure gradually, rather than removing non-native tree species in one go. Where replanting or new planting is proposed the planting of 'the right tree in the right place' must be encouraged (including using native species and consideration of local provenance). However, appropriate management is required as trees themselves and modern forestry operations can cause significant damage to individual heritage assets.

8.6.8 Single trees and small groups of trees in parkland or in hedgerows also make a contribution to the landscape character of the AONB. Such trees are usually of high conservation value, especially ancient / veteran trees. They are often part of a link between woodlands or other semi-natural habitats. Individual and hedgerow trees, such as ancient pollards, need appropriate management and maintenance to minimise damage and loss. Ancient trees are living relics of incredible age that inspire in us

feelings of awe and mystery, contributing to both biodiversity and cultural history. A planting programme is required to ensure there are mature single and hedgerow trees in the future. We also need to be mindful of not only orchard fragments on the edge of settlements, but also of solitary veteran fruit trees, particularly as they may hold a rare genetic resource.

8.6.9 The Woodlands of the Lower Wye, Origins, History and Management booklet (AONB 2007) provide useful information on the Wye Valley woodlands.

**AONB Aim:** To ensure woodlands and trees throughout the Wye Valley AONB are managed sustainably in a way that protects and enhances the outstanding ancient woodland character of the area, and provides environmental, social and economic benefits.

### Woodland, Trees and Forestry Strategic Objectives

<b>WV-W1</b>	Provide best practice advice to woodland owners and managers on sustainable multipurpose management of the Wye Valley woodlands, including sensitive PAWS restoration, encouraging ‘the right tree in the right place’ and the ecosystems approach <i>[see also WV-P4, WV-P5 and WV-P7]</i>
<b>WV-W2</b>	Develop and support tree, woodland and forestry initiatives and policy that conserve, restore and/or enhance the Special Qualities, biodiversity and natural beauty of the area, ensuring no net loss of semi-natural woodland cover unless there are overriding nature or heritage conservation benefits <i>[see also WV-P3, WV-P4 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-W3</b>	Support the development of employment and skills and markets for local timber and woodland produce <i>[see also WV-F4, WV-E1 and WV-E3]</i>
<b>WV-W4</b>	Support the monitoring, management and where appropriate, control of diseases, pests and other threats, which may cause substantial mortality in tree species and woodland habitats and seek to mitigate the landscape impact of any loss <i>[see also WV-B4, WV-F6 and WV-P8]</i>
<b>WV-W5</b>	Increase understanding, awareness and enjoyment of trees and the special nature of the Wye Valley woodlands and promote them as a resource for appropriate educational, community, recreational and health opportunities <i>[see also WV-A1]</i>

## **THEME 2**

### **9. DEVELOPMENT & TRANSPORT – planning and protection**

This section outlines aims and strategic objectives for planning and development, minerals, utilities, public services, renewable energy and transport infrastructure in the Wye Valley AONB.

#### **9.1 DEVELOPMENT**

9.1.1 The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) does not have direct responsibility for the preparation of land use planning policies nor the determination of planning applications. This is the responsibility of the statutory planning authorities under specific Town and Country Planning legislation.

9.1.2 National policy for AONBs in Wales is contained in Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and in England is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Local development management policies are set out in the Local Plans, Local Development Plans and emerging Neighbourhood Plans and are based on an up-to-date evidence base. The PPW and NPPF provide specific planning guidance for plan makers and decision takers in relation to AONBs and both confirm that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs and that AONBs have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty (equal to National Parks). The ‘great weight test’ (PPW section 5.3.6 and NPPF section 115) is significant and one of the most stringent legal tests that can be applied under planning law. In relation to major development, both PPW (section 5.5.6) and the NPPF (section 116) state that planning permission should be refused for major developments in AONBs except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that they are in the public interest, and set a series of 3 tests that have to be assessed. Whether a proposed development is major development, to which NPPF 116 policy applies, is a matter for the relevant decision taker, taking into account the proposal in question and the local context. A commonly referenced definition of “major development” is included in The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010, but this can only be a starting point in the matters of scale, character and the context of the location as relevant factors to consider. Both the NPPF and PPW recognise that development affecting AONBs includes impact on the setting of the AONB.

9.1.3 The AONB designation does not prohibit development unnecessarily. Some people may feel that planning legislation and development control is restrictive on what they want to see developed. However research in Wales has shown that nationally 84.5% of planning applications are approved in AONBs (broadly similar to National Parks), compared with 85.3% approved in non-AONB areas. Therefore the process should be seen as a positive process that aims to secure and enhance

development that is good enough for the mutual benefit for present and future generations, in an area that is internationally recognised for its landscape importance. Section 14 of the NPPF includes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which aims to make decision-making on developments easier. But the footnote to the section (para 14, footnote 9) makes clear that the AONB policies in the NPPF (sections 115 and 116), may take precedent over this presumption. Consequently proposals must be carefully assessed for their effect on those features and Special Qualities that make the designated area so distinctive. High quality design, including the inclusion of Green Infrastructure, that takes account of landscape character, scale and setting, can help enhance the area.

9.1.4 All four local planning authorities have been preparing their Local Development Frameworks or Plans. Local and Neighbourhood Plans include policy references to the AONB in Core Strategies and in specific Development Plan Documents (DPD) as relevant, and specifically cross-reference this AONB Management Plan. This AONB Management Plan therefore forms part of the evidence base and is a material consideration in these documents and the planning process.

9.1.5 There are about 750 planning applications per annum in the AONB (whereas there are over 13,450 dwellings). These range from porch extensions of a few square meters to over 50 hectares of polytunnels. The AONB unit and JAC only tend to consider planning applications that are likely to have a significant impact on the AONB. This is judged to be if the proposed development will form a dominant new feature in the landscape and/or if it damages or impacts on several Special Qualities simultaneously. However the JAC is not a statutory consultee. On average the AONB Officer makes comments on about 1% of applications, usually objecting or raising concern about likely significant detrimental impacts on the AONB. The JAC's comments are sought on large scale developments when they coincide with the JAC's meeting cycle, or if deadlines are tight then key members may be consulted. A Planning Protocol was developed between the AONB Unit and the local planning authorities. This will be reviewed to reflect new legislation, particularly in Wales.

9.1.6 Many of the planning applications are approved by the local planning authority on the grounds that the development has negligible impact on the AONB. These decisions would take into account current policy and any material considerations, which may include setting a precedent and any cumulative impacts. The range of aspects for which the AONB is important is much more than visual. Natural beauty includes wildlife, geology, heritage, landscape character, scenic beauty, environmental quality and opportunities for enjoyment, and in assessing a planning application the collective impact of these factors needs to be taken into account.

9.1.7 However it is a commonly expressed concern that it is often the incremental effect of developments collectively that encroaches on and erodes the landscape features and Special Qualities of the AONB. In some areas the integrity of the AONB is challenged by incremental and cumulative development, where one poor development is used to justify the next. The Landscape Character Assessments for each county go some way towards addressing these issues along with Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), such as Herefordshire Council's on PolyTunnels.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIA) are becoming an essential tool in the planning process for identifying impacts on landscape character and visual impacts from major developments. The third edition of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3) includes a chapter on cumulative effects assessment. GLVIA3 should be used for Environmental Statements and may also be useful in relation to smaller scale developments.

9.1.8 The impacts on the landscape of ‘Permitted Development Rights’, which include many agricultural buildings and renewable energy installations, is another cause of some public concern. Planning infringements and retrospective applications can also have a detrimental impact locally. Light and noise pollution, and actions such as agricultural improvement of species-rich grassland, removal of hedges or stone walls, hard surfacing of previously unsealed lanes, changes to drainage etc. are also frequently identified as eroding the character of the area. The level and effectiveness of development management and planning enforcement by the local planning authority is a key factor in controlling this. More effective monitoring of the overall efficacy of the local planning authorities in protecting the AONB designation is required.

9.1.9 There are areas outside of the control of the planning system which can also have an erosive effect or a visual impact on the AONB eg the extensive use of plastic or synthetic mulch. Infrastructure associated with public utilities services and highways are often criticised by people for their standardised approach and lack of attention to local distinctiveness. The duty on all public bodies to have regard for the purposes of AONB designation, in Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, can be used to improve the AONB. An example of this is the regulator Ofgem reimbursing the electricity distribution companies for burying underground some of their overhead electricity cables in AONBs.

**AONB Aim:** Ensure all development within the AONB and its setting is compatible with the aims of AONB designation

### Development Strategic Objectives

<b>WV-D1</b>	Ensure a consistent and coherent framework of planning policies relating to the AONB is fully reflected in the statutory land use planning documents and their effectiveness monitored <i>[see also WV-D4 and WV-P4]</i>
<b>WV-D2</b>	Encourage and support high standards of design, materials, energy efficiency, drainage and landscaping in all developments, including Permitted Development, to ensure greater sustainability and that they complement and enhance the local landscape character and distinctiveness including scale and setting and minimise the impact on the natural environment <i>[see also WV-L3, WV-D4, WV-U1, WV-U3, WV-T2, WV-S4 and WV-P5]</i>

<b>WV-D3</b>	Resist inappropriate development which will create a persistent and dominant feature out of keeping with the landscape of the AONB and/or if it damages Special Qualities in the AONB, including through high levels of noise and/or light pollution or any SAC, SPA or Ramsar site or other sites designated as environmentally important <i>[see also WV-L3, WV-F3, WV-U1, WV-U3, WV-T2 and WV-S4]</i>
<b>WV-D4</b>	Encourage the use of Section 106 or Section 38 Agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy to provide opportunities for developments to contribute to enhancing or conserving the natural beauty of the AONB <i>[see also WV-D1, WV-D2 and WV-P4]</i>
<b>WV-D5</b>	Encourage and support public involvement in the future planning of settlements and the countryside throughout the AONB for example through Neighbourhood Plans* <i>[see also WV-C4, WV-P6 and WV-P7]</i>
	* subject to Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) being carried out at appropriate plan or project level as set in the HRA document.

## 9.2 MINERALS

9.2.1 The geology of the Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire parts of the AONB include considerable quantities of carboniferous limestone. Herefordshire contains more Devonian sandstone and Silurian limestone. These resources have been quarried for centuries to provide building stone, lime for local blast furnaces, agricultural lime and aggregate. As well as stone there is a considerable heritage in the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean of mineral extraction, including iron ore, quartz conglomerate for millstones, and coal.

9.2.2 Mineral extraction is now concentrated on limestone aggregate extraction from one large scale quarry in the AONB, at Stowfield Quarry, just west of Coleford, while Clearwell Quarry is adjacent to the AONB boundary. Minerals can only be worked where they occur. However, the environmental impacts of quarries, not only in but adjacent to the AONB, can be considerable. These can be through the long term effect on the landscape and/or through the daily operations which can be noisy and dusty and generate considerable lorry traffic. Conversely, quarries provide employment and can be restored to give valuable exposures of the geology, create special habitats for wildlife, as is happening at Livox Quarry south of Tintern, and potentially new recreational facilities.

9.2.3 There are several large disused quarries that are re-vegetating and naturalising over time, and a myriad of small redundant quarries many of which are completely overgrown. All quarries, working and disused, are of value to geoconservation and several are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or Local Geological Sites (LGS) - formerly known as Regionally Important Geological Sites

(RIGS). Building stone from local quarries is also important for local architectural and heritage reasons. Historic England and Cadw are keen to see local quarries temporarily reopened for close stone matches for specific building conservation or renovation permissions.

9.2.4 Government guidance on mineral applications in AONBs is given in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in England and in Wales in Minerals Planning Policy Wales and Minerals Technical Advice Note (MTAN) 1, all of which emphasise that applications in AONBs should be subject to the most rigorous examination. Major developments should not take place in AONBs except in exceptional circumstances. The Minerals Planning Authorities (MPAs) in the AONB are Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council. Each MPA is responsible for planning for a steady and adequate supply of aggregates in accordance with the NPPF and MPPW. All issues such as the impacts of quarrying on environmental constraints will be balanced through the statutory plan process.

**AONB Aim:** Ensure all minerals development within the AONB is compatible with the aims of AONB designation

### Minerals Strategic Objectives

<b>WV-M1</b>	Encourage a consistent and coherent framework of mineral planning policies that recognise the AONB and SACs as primary constraints to new quarries and extensions to existing quarries* <i>[see also WV-P4]</i>
<b>WV-M2</b>	Encourage quarries to be operated and restored to a standard that is appropriate to the landscape character, geodiversity and biodiversity of the AONB <i>[see also WV-L3, WV-G3, WV-P4 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-M3</b>	Support the working of building stone where there is a clear need for local conservation and heritage purposes where the scale and nature of extraction is not seriously damaging to the Special Qualities, landscape character or natural beauty of the AONB <i>[see also WV-G3, WV-E1 and WV-P5]</i>
	* subject to Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) being carried out at appropriate plan or project level as set in the HRA document.

## 9.3 UTILITIES, PUBLIC SERVICES AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

9.3.1 The topography of the Wye Valley provides some challenges for the delivery of modern services and utilities. Yet the landscape also offers opportunities and alternatives along with lessons that can be learned from previous generations. The

early industries in the Wye Valley were based entirely on the natural resources available and were powered by water and wood. The potential remains to make good use of small-scale hydroelectric schemes on the tributaries of the Wye and of wood fuel. A key government target is to meet 20% of UK energy needs from renewable sources by 2020. Opportunities exist for small domestic wind turbines and for solar power, both for water heating and small-scale photovoltaic electricity generation. Agriculture and horticulture also have the ability to provide renewable energy crops. However landscape impacts may occur from large scale changes to crops or ‘solar farms’.

9.3.2 Most public utility services, notably gas, water, electricity and telephone lines tend to follow the road network. Over-ground wires can cross the valleys and the river where they are very conspicuous. The scattered settlement and heavily wooded nature of some parts of the AONB also mean that over-ground connections, particularly telephones and electricity, are disrupted by storms and flooding. The under-grounding of cables is being pursued by the electricity distribution network companies under the Ofgem Section 85 scheme. This can provide both landscape and service supply enhancements.

9.3.3 The rate of consumption of resources is a fundamental aspect of sustainable development. The conservation of energy and water are crucial factors that affect the AONB. Excessive water use and abstraction can have a significant impact on the river, its biodiversity and the surrounding landscape. On-farm water storage is becoming necessary to facilitate irrigation. The waste of resources has both short term and long term effects. For example excessive lighting causes light pollution but also the resultant CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the electricity generation contributes to climate change. The development of renewable energy does not negate the need for efficient use of resources. Similarly national planning policy on waste is to divert waste from landfill and to ‘reduce & reuse & recycle’. This provides opportunities to promote more sustainable alternatives to exporting all waste from the AONB, such as community composting schemes or small-scale energy-from-waste schemes like anaerobic digestion plants.

9.3.4 Mobile phones and Broadband have revolutionised modern life, but the topography and rurality of the AONB means that coverage is not consistent. In the aspiration to reach comprehensive high speed Broadband and mobile phone coverage, the balance has to be reached so that the valley sides don’t end up bristling with masts to achieve this. Mast sharing is an option but may not always provide the best environmental result in every case, as they tend to need to be taller with each sharing. Masts can use optimum designs or involve innovative solutions, such as incorporation in church towers or farm buildings, which when accompanied by adequate landscaping where appropriate, minimises the landscape impacts in the AONB.

**AONB Aim:** Ensure the most sustainable, effective and efficient use and supply of services and energy within the AONB, compatible with the aims of AONB designation

### **Utilities, Public Services and Energy Strategic Objectives**

<b>WV-U1</b>	Support and promote the development of renewable forms of energy generation that do not impact negatively on the landscape features and Special Qualities of the AONB <i>[see also WV-D2, WV-D3 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-U2</b>	Encourage further under-grounding of existing and proposed power and telephone lines, where these do not conflict with any SAC, and resist new overhead lines where skylines or important views are affected <i>[see also WV-D3 and WV-P4]</i>
<b>WV-U3</b>	Encourage the highest standards of equipment design and siting for high-speed broadband and mobile phone installations and resist new structures that either do not share masts and / or do not utilise appropriate designs at suitable locations* <i>[see also WV-D2 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-U4</b>	Encourage the use and supply of resources, including water abstraction and investment in infrastructure, that is consistent with the Special Qualities, SACs, landscape character and natural beauty of the AONB, and monitor any adverse impacts <i>[see also WV-L3 and WV-P5]</i>
	* subject to Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) being carried out at appropriate plan or project level as set in the HRA document.

## 9.4 TRANSPORTATION

9.4.1 The Wye Valley, like almost every other area in the UK, has a dominance of private car use and lorry freight, with nearly 20,000 cars and vans based in the AONB and over 70% of journeys to work taken in a vehicle. This use predominantly concentrates on the two trunk roads in the AONB, the A40 dual carriageway and the A49. The other key routes in the AONB are the A466, A4136, B4224, B4228, B4229 B4234 and B4293, which link the main towns and villages in and around the AONB. There are then a network of smaller rural roads and country lanes that link the scattered settlements and rural businesses. Barely a couple of miles outside the AONB are both the M48 and M50, allowing for a two way flow of produce, visitors and commuters to and from the conurbations of Birmingham, Bristol and Cardiff, and beyond. Surveys indicate that over 90% of visitors to the AONB come by car. However, while some areas in the AONB reach car and parking capacity at peak periods, other places remain under-used and relatively peaceful with moderately sized car parks retaining spaces virtually all year.

9.4.2 Accessibility to the road network can be an issue, for example due to extreme weather causing landslips, particularly in the lower Wye Valley, flooding or snowdrifts or the closure of the old Severn Bridge. These can have significant

knock-on effects for both the landscape and the local economy. The infrastructure associated with maintaining road traffic, and accommodating any increase, is controlled primarily by the need to meet requirements of road safety for drivers travelling within the legal speed limits. Sensitive improved transport infrastructure in the AONB can enhance economic development in the area. However recurring signage, lighting and standardised material can have a significant detrimental impact on natural beauty and local distinctiveness. Road noise is also a factor, affecting tranquillity in some places and quality of life in others.

9.4.3 There are alternatives to the car. Appropriately designed and located development, which includes live-work units and encourages or allows home working, with good links to public transport or cycle routes, can reduce car dependence. Indeed 13% of journeys to work by residents in the AONB are on foot or by bike and another 12% work from home. However, most day-to-day travel options face problems of one sort or another, particularly in such a rural landscape. The local authorities are cutting back funding of the rural bus services. But the willingness of people to use public transport is also strongly influenced by public perceptions, as much as reality, about variable standards in terms of connections, frequency, reliability, access and comfort. The AONB Unit, along with the local authorities, continue to promote the use of the local bus services and the network throughout the AONB. However, for many rural businesses and attractions there is no regular local bus service. Demand response buses are popular where they operate, but have proved difficult to sustain when relying on volunteer drivers.

9.4.4 Rail links exist at either end of the AONB at Hereford and Chepstow. These can provide useful staging posts for the non-car traveller. Further afield there are also stations at Abergavenny, Gloucester, Ledbury, Lydney and Newport. The railway line that once did go through the valley was closed to passengers before the Beeching cuts. There are also coach stations in Chepstow, Monmouth, Ross and Hereford which likewise provide access to the area. However frequency of both rail and coach services can be limited to some of these destinations.

9.4.5 The other main alternative is cycling, which is a sustainable and practical means of making journeys, and one of the best forms of exercise. The lower Wye Valley is popular with road cyclists, including being on the Land's End to John O'Groats route. However the A466 is at times and in certain places busy, fast and narrow so can be regarded as quite a dangerous road for less experienced cyclists and drivers. Sustrans Regional Route 423 links Ross-on-Wye with Monmouth, including the off-road sections that are very family friendly of the Town & Country Trail in Ross-on-Wye and the Peregrine Path between Monmouth and Symonds Yat East. A further off-road section is proposed linking Ross with Walford and Kerne Bridge. There were also approved sections of off-road cycleways in the Lower Wye Valley, linking Monmouth to Redbrook and Tintern to Tidenham, but they have not been implemented due to planning and/or funding complications. Other off-road recreational routes have been developed in Monmouthshire with the Tread & Trot Trails linking the woodlands and villages between Redbrook, Trellech and Tintern predominantly along bridleways, forest rides and green lanes. More extensive

recreational cycle routes exist in the Forest of Dean based on the historic tramroads and railways.

9.4.6 Walking is a popular recreational activity in the AONB but also remains a valid part of most journeys and can be the main form of transport for local journeys. When in good condition, the roadside pavements and the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network can make a considerable contribution to improving the prospects for walkers, and their health. Likewise horse riding and carriage driving makes good use of the quieter roads and Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network. Historically the river itself was an important transport corridor and the right of navigation on the Wye can still play a role in journeys up and down and across the valley.

9.4.7 The local authorities in England are committed to progressing their respective Local Transport Plans through local and/or regional Transport Partnerships. In Wales the National Transport Plan is supported by the local authorities and delivery partnerships such as the Cardiff Capital Region Board. These are based on the modal hierarchy, which balances the priorities of active travel, walking and cycling, with public transport and private motor vehicles. The challenge, as ever in the AONB, is to secure a consistent and comprehensive approach to achieving sustainable and integrated transport in the AONB. The result should be attractive transport choices for local people and visitors in the Wye Valley that nurtures their health and well-being while providing improved access, social equity and economic opportunities.

9.4.8 Transport corridors are often not managed with wildlife in mind, despite the fact that they are linear features with the potential to act as corridors for wildlife as well as vehicles. Vegetated verges can support a diverse range of rough grassland and scrub species if managed in the right way. Depending on the flowers present, grassland verges may be best cut either once in late summer or twice; in both spring and early autumn. This ensures that tall plants do not cause unnecessary visual obstruction for vehicles, whilst allowing rare and native species to thrive and set seed. It is also desirable to remove the cuttings as this reduces soil nutrients, allowing rare wildflowers that thrive on poor soil to emerge. There are various schemes in each County for registering important roadside verges for biodiversity, usually through the local authority or wildlife trust.

9.4.9 In 2011 the AONB Unit consulted on Highway Design Guidelines for the AONB, in which four Guiding Principles were outlined:

1. Unless there is an overriding safety issue, do as little as possible.
2. Highway improvements should take account of the traffic flow and character of the road to ensure the proposals are not over specified.
3. Unless there is an overriding reason, copy the style and materials that have been used over time
4. Consult with AONB Unit

The informality and apparent 'naturalness' of many of the roads in the AONB is fundamental to the appeal of the area. Any sort of engineering feature, even white lines, detracts from their 'fit' into the landscape.

**AONB Aim:** Ensure transport in the AONB is sustainable and integrated and compatible with the purposes of AONB designation.

### **Transportation Strategic Objectives**

<b>WV-T1</b>	Encourage and promote greater use of more sustainable and smarter forms of transport in the AONB and for accessing the area, including from railway station, so as to afford modal shift from the car for visitors and residents, subject to WV-D2 and WV-D3 <i>[see also WV-R1, WV-P3 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-T2</b>	Ensure the design of transport infrastructure and traffic management and control schemes are consistent with the Special Qualities, landscape character and natural beauty of the AONB, and monitor their effectiveness <i>[see also WV-D2, WV-D3 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-T3</b>	Conserve the character of rural roads in the AONB by conserving existing traditional features, reducing excessive signage and lighting and sympathetically managing verges for biodiversity, unless there are proven public safety grounds <i>[see also WV-B3, WV-D2, WV-D3, WV-P3 and WV-P5]</i>

## **THEME 3**

### **10 VITAL COMMUNITIES - living & working in the AONB**

This section outlines aims and strategic objectives for community development and the economy and rural regeneration in the Wye Valley AONB. Agriculture and forestry, while being a traditional part of the local economy have been covered under the Unique Landscape section due to the dominant influence these industries have on the landscape and land use of the AONB. Tourism also makes a significant contribution to the vitality of the local economy, but is dealt with under the next section: Enjoying the AONB.

#### **10.1 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

10.1.1 There are 33 Parish and Town Councils on the English side and 7 Town or Community Councils on the Welsh side wholly or partially in the Wye Valley AONB. They have a duty, under section 85 of the CRoW Act, to have regard to the purposes of the AONB. There is frequently more than one village within each of the Town, Parish or Community Councils. Each village or settlement has its own identity, residents and facilities. Many also have their own traditions and celebrations. These give distinctiveness and unique cultural aspects to the local communities and reinforce local community life. However it must be recognised that individuals usually belong

to a multitude of ‘communities’, for example by being members of the local church, on the Parish Council, users of the local pub and/or shop, local business people, parents at the local school, part of a neighbourhood watch scheme, sports club etc.

10.1.2 The statistics for the socio-economic makeup of the AONB are outlined in the separate State of the AONB Report. The age profile of the local population in the AONB is slightly older than the national average. From this it can be inferred that the Wye Valley AONB is a popular place for retired people, which is likely to put pressure on local housing and the availability of affordable housing for younger people. Thus the effects of rural disadvantage, social exclusion and lack of affordable housing may affect a significant fraction of households in and around the AONB.

10.1.3 As a predominantly rural area people in the Wye Valley AONB encounter many of the problems familiar throughout rural Britain. The viability of village shops, pubs and local public transport depends on continued support from all sectors of the local community. Additionally however, local wages are lower than the national average yet the area is popular for retirement, second homes and for commuting to Birmingham, Bristol or Cardiff. Nearly 60% of the working population of the AONB are in professional or skilled occupations. Therefore the cost of housing can prevent local people from being able to continue to live in the area. This has been compounded with the scarcity of affordable housing, the increase in second homes and the use of houses as holiday lets. Meanwhile, access to jobs may also be more difficult for some people where public transport provision is not comprehensive.

10.1.4 A Charter for Residents and Visitors is included in this Management Plan with actions that all residents, visitors and businesses can take to help care for this internationally important protected landscape. There are a range of opportunities that can be progressed for a more sustainable quality of life in the AONB. For example some village halls host post offices and local cinema clubs as well as their usual wide range of activities. Many local shops and food outlets sell more local produce which helps re-connect people in local communities with the surrounding farmland. Farmers Markets and organic vegetable box schemes have already enhanced and widened this linkage and appreciation for some. The community links with woodland produce need to be developed further. There are several renewable energy options appropriate to the Wye Valley with various incentives and grants available for schemes in housing, shops, farms, schools and other groups within communities. The need for sustainable integrated transport is also recognised.

10.1.5 Communities need actively to identify what they value in their locality and participate in setting priorities for its sustainable management. This may include supporting local / cultural distinctiveness and the Welsh language or local accents and dialects. Commitment by local people to the protection of, and pride in, the Wye Valley is strong. Parish, Community and Neighbourhood Plans, as well as the AONB Management Plan, provide fresh opportunities to express these priorities and commitments. Involvement of young people, schools, and the elderly and less vociferous members of local communities needs to be included in these processes as well as the participation of the Town, Parish and Community Councils and other local representative and resident organisations. Where appropriate a special effort should

be made to include part-time residents, letting them know that their views are welcomed and respected, and the skills and experience they might bring to the community is valued. The outcomes then need to be developed into a coherent plan with close liaison with the local authorities and other statutory and voluntary organisations.

**AONB Aim:** To engender thriving local communities which have a high quality of life with a healthy economy that supports the natural beauty of the area.

### Community Development Strategic Objectives

<b>WV-C1</b>	Encourage community led initiatives that maintain the diversity, sustainability and quality of rural community life and/or that stimulate investment, local employment and retain or improve facilities and services for local people, subject to WV-D2 and WV-D3 <i>[see also WV-P3, WV-P5 and WV-P7]</i>
<b>WV-C2</b>	Promote awareness, appreciation of, and pride in the lower Wye Valley, the Special Qualities and features of the Wye Valley AONB and the beneficial aspects for local people of living and working in a nationally protected landscape <i>[see also WV-A1 and WV-P7]</i>
<b>WV-C3</b>	Support the development of affordable housing appropriate to local need in the AONB, subject to WV-D2 and WV-D3* <i>[see also WV-L3 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-C4</b>	Encourage and promote local community plans and strategies to contain coherent objectives relating to the protection, conservation and management of the AONB and monitor their effectiveness <i>[see also WV-D5 and WV-P6]</i>
	* subject to Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) being carried out at appropriate plan or project level as set in the HRA document.

## 10.2 ECONOMY AND RURAL REGENERATION

10.2.1 The economy plays an important role in the maintenance of an attractive countryside. The AONB landscape and the designation itself are an economic asset which can yield returns many times higher than the cost of its conservation and enhancement. The vitality of the AONB is dependent on the contribution of a vast range of businesses beyond the obvious land uses of agriculture, horticulture, forestry and mineral extraction. There is also employment in leisure and tourism, retail, energy production, light industrial, offices and storage plus other providers such as nursing homes, schools, art galleries etc. In total over 14,270 of the residents of the AONB are

in employment. There are also locations within and adjacent to the AONB where manufacturing development, for example of clean, high technology industry, are situated. The natural services and materials provided by the environment are essential for many of these businesses. The best businesses understand the value to be gained from managing resource and supply chain impacts on the natural capital. They also know the risks to their brand image, security of resources and their bottom line if they do not. The strength of the rural economy is also a critical factor in combating rural disadvantage and social exclusion, as well as making a major contribution to the national economies of England and Wales. For example the role of the horse in the local economy covers the full spectrum from local grazing, vets, saddlers and livery through local equestrian events to the activities of Chepstow racecourse and the training of national winners.

10.2.2 Given the proximity of towns and cities to the AONB the economy cannot be expected to be at all self-contained. This also applies to people within the AONB spending their money outside it. The city of Hereford and market towns of Chepstow, Coleford and Monmouth surrounding the AONB, and Ross-on-Wye largely in the AONB are the focus for much of the area’s economic and social life. These towns still provide significant local services, although there are considerable competitive pressures from the facilities of Bristol, Birmingham, Cardiff, Cheltenham and Gloucester.

10.2.3 Farming, forestry and quarrying have already been covered in earlier sections and tourism is covered in the next section. However the diversity of businesses makes for a mixed and viable rural economy and all the businesses and enterprises operating in or relying on the resources of the AONB are important for the environmental, social and economic well-being of the area. Similarly people need to recognise that a high quality environment is a key factor in both attracting new rural entrepreneurs and relocating businesses and retaining and attracting inward investment and skilled personnel. The accommodation of sensitive growth in the AONB shows that the designation can be an enabler of high quality development and enterprise.

**AONB Aim:** To foster viable rural enterprises that derive benefit from and enhance the natural resources and local distinctiveness of the AONB

### **Economy and Rural Regeneration Strategic Objectives**

<b>WV-E1</b>	Support initiatives that improve the market for products which conserve or enhance the AONB’s distinctive landscape, Special Qualities and strengthens the sense of place of the AONB <i>[see also WV-F7, WV-W3, WV-M3 and WV-P7]</i>
<b>WV-E2</b>	Raise awareness of good practice and encourage local businesses in the AONB to take opportunities to become more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, particularly in ways that sustain the natural beauty of the area <i>[see also WV-F1, WV-P5 and WV-P7]</i>

<b>WV-E3</b>	Support the delivery of local co-operative schemes, advice and training programmes that support the development and expansion of rural micro-businesses, subject to WV-D2 and WV-D3 <i>[see also WV-F4, WV-W3 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-E4</b>	Raise awareness of the value of the AONB and the importance of retaining a high quality environment in attracting and retaining entrepreneurs, relocating businesses, inward investment and skilled personnel <i>[see also WV-A1 and WV-P7]</i>

## **THEME 4**

### **11. ENJOYING THE AONB - sustainable tourism, recreation and appreciation**

This section outlines strategic objectives for sustainable tourism; recreation and access; and understanding and appreciation in the Wye Valley AONB.

#### **11.1 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

11.1.1 The Wye Valley is one of the few inland rural areas with its own tourism heritage, dating back over 250 years. Indeed the Wye Valley is arguably the birthplace of British tourism, with the introduction of the Wye Tour in the 1700s made popular in 1770 by Reverend William Gilpin. Some of Britain's finest artists and writers of the time, including Turner, Coleridge and Wordsworth, came to make the Wye Tour and the associated Picturesque Movement, highly fashionable. The Tour highlighted the dramatic natural scenery, historic monuments and the intense industrial activity of the time. People went on the Wye Tour in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to experience and appreciate the sublime and picturesque qualities of the Wye Valley. To a large extent the desires are the same today for visitors to the AONB. The Wye Valley continues to offer a great range of opportunities for enjoyment and appreciation of the tranquil and spectacular scenery and the features of the historic environment. These include activities as diverse as day-tripper sightseeing, canoeing, climbing, fishing, walking and cycling. Many are inspired to share their experiences through social media and photography. Thus it remains nationally renowned as a destination for tourism and recreation in an outstandingly beautiful landscape.

11.1.2 Visitor numbers in the Wye Valley AONB are calculated at 1.58million tourists per annum (STEAM 2013), enjoying 2.3 million tourist days per annum, with over 1.3million being day visitors. They arrive in over 300,000 vehicles but also spend nearly £134million in the local economy. The value of tourism to the local economy is therefore significant; both in terms of direct spend (over £100million) and indirect spend (over £33million) and supporting over 2,250 full-time equivalent jobs. However 44% of spend came from visitors staying in non-serviced

accommodation (self-catering, caravan, camping etc.) compared to 29% of spend coming from day visitors.

11.1.3 The importance and vulnerability of tourism was highlighted during the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001 when a wide range of businesses were seriously affected and to a lesser extent during the wet summers of 2007, 2008 & 2012. The recession in 2008-9 also hit consumer confidence, although nationally the economy appears to be recovering, but still fragile. These all put pressure on leisure spending. Those tourists who are spending now expect more for less money, with the food and drink industry often hardest hit. Trends such as late booking and discounting is reducing margins for many businesses, with usage of online booking agents often adding to those pressures. Rising costs generally are also exacerbating competitiveness.

11.1.4 It has to be recognised that the majority of tourism businesses are very small scale. The accommodation sector is made up of a large number of generally small enterprises, with caravan and camping sites contributing very significantly to the bed spaces for the area (but consequently vulnerable to poor weather). Therefore the 'industry' is composed of a multitude of potentially competing small enterprises and somewhat weather dependant.

11.1.5 Visitor surveys consistently identify that the landscape of the Wye Valley is the most important factor in the decision to visit the area. However the rich cultural and industrial heritage and the valley's long history as a visitor destination and place of creative inspiration are also notable factors. Many features of the Wye Tour survive as important elements of the visitor experience in the Wye Valley today. Especially iconic are Goodrich Castle, Tintern Abbey, Chepstow Castle and the range of popular viewpoints. There are a small number of other visitor attractions and two companies offer short river cruises on the Wye from Symonds Yat East and West.

11.1.6 Many of the tourism businesses in the Wye Valley work together through local associations such as Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Tourism Association and Visit Herefordshire. The Wye Valley AONB spans the two countries and their respective agencies are Visit England and Visit Wales. The three main county based tourism campaigns have all used the Wye Valley brand name, namely; 'Visit Herefordshire and the Wye Valley' in Herefordshire, 'Visit Wye Valley and Vale of Usk' in Monmouthshire, and 'Wye Valley and Forest of Dean' in the Forest of Dean. The AONB Partnership has been a key player in maintaining sufficient cross border co-ordination and collaboration to drive the promotion of the Wye Valley as a destination in its own right, particularly for sustainable tourism.

11.1.7 The AONB Partnership adopted a Wye Valley AONB Sustainable Tourism Strategy in 2011 (having previously implemented one from 1996). This Strategy contains an analysis of the tourism industry and an action plan to develop the area as a sustainable tourism destination. The AONB Unit services a Tourism Co-ordination Group to deliver the Strategy. The following six functional objectives provide the framework for the action plan:-

A. Promoting the Wye Valley brand

To raise the profile of the Wye Valley as a special place to visit throughout the year, by strong presentation of the brand in all area marketing

**B. Strengthening information outreach**

To ensure that all visitors are aware of the range of activities and experiences available throughout the Wye Valley through effective information services

**C. Linking conservation and tourism**

To encourage tourism that is based on, respects and helps to conserve the environment and the Special Qualities of the landscapes and habitats of the Wye Valley

**D. Promoting experiences of the river and wider countryside**

To strengthen provision and awareness of a wide range of opportunities to find and follow the River Wye and to access the wider countryside

**E. Celebrating heritage**

To promote enjoyment and understanding of the special heritage of the Wye Valley, building on the legacy of Overlooking the Wye

**F. Raising quality in key centres and enterprises**

To ensure that the towns, key villages and individual businesses provide a quality experience for visitors in line with the Wye Valley brand values, strengthening investment, management and performance where needed

11.1.8 The key strategic tourism partners in and around the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean are now working together as a Destination Management Organisation with an emerging Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Destination Management Plan. This will help communities, businesses and visitors alike make the most of the special qualities of the AONB as well as helping the place ‘work’ for everyone. For Public Bodies this will also contribute to their CRoW Act Section 85 ‘Duty of Regard’.

11.1.9 Key elements that make tourism more sustainable in the Wye Valley AONB include visitors staying in the locality rather than using it as a touring base, using local products and spending time getting to know local heritage, communities, ways of life, etc. The ‘Sustainable Transport within Tourism’ Study for the South East Wales Region (2012) also provides a number of recommendations and actions to make tourism more sustainable.

**AONB Aim:** Sustainable tourism based upon the natural beauty and local distinctiveness of the AONB continues to enrich the lives of visitors, operators and employees while contributing positively to the conservation and enhancement of the area

**Sustainable Tourism Strategic Objectives**

<b>WV-S1</b>	Encourage and promote the AONB as a sustainable tourism destination with forms of tourism activity and development that are based on the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the Special Qualities and features of the AONB <i>[see also WV-P5 and WV-P7]</i>
<b>WV-S2</b>	Promote the improvement of the visitor experience, particularly at the most heavily visited sites, and facilitate the opportunity for visitors to

	explore and discover other appropriate but less used locations throughout the AONB, thus spreading demand and balancing pressures across sites where this does not conflict with the Special Qualities of the AONB and the SACs <i>[see also WV-A1, WV-P3 and WV-P7]</i>
<b>WV-S3</b>	Ensure adequate provision of co-ordinated tourism data and visitor engagement to inform strategic and practical decision making on conserving or enhancing the Special Qualities of the AONB <i>[see also WV-P8]</i>
<b>WV-S4</b>	Encourage the mitigation and/or reduction of the adverse impacts of existing tourism activity and attractions, particularly where they are concentrated around certain locations or sites, and/or those that fall outside the aim of conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the Special Qualities and features of the AONB. Highest priority will be given to addressing the issues in the Symonds Yat and Tintern areas <i>[see also WV-L3, WV-D2 and WV-D3]</i>

## 11.2 RECREATION & ACCESS

11.2.1 Recreation is a major activity in the AONB, both socially and economically. Most fly-fishermen in the country will have fished on the Wye, most canoeists learned to run rapids at Symonds Yat. Many rock climbers will have climbed in the Wye Gorge. Many coach tours have visited Tintern Abbey. Many walkers will have trodden on the Wye Valley Walk and the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail. Many cyclists pedalling from Land's End to John O'Groats will have travelled up the A466. Many artists and photographers will have captured the mist floating in the Valley. All these people will have enjoyed the fresh air, the picturesque and sublime natural beauty and the historic features of the AONB, either consciously or subconsciously. This is a primary element of the visitor experience. Significant health benefits and social opportunities are also gained through these recreational activities. There is a need to ensure that all people in society have access to the benefits offered by the area along with sufficient resources to manage and maintain that access. Thus the Wye Valley AONB should continue to be a place where residents and visitors alike enjoy activities that result in the enjoyment of the countryside and the Special Qualities of the AONB.

11.2.2 The health and economic benefits of access and recreation are important. But there are conflicts, real and perceived, between some types of activities, for example between canoeists and fishermen on the river, and variously between walkers, horse riders, various types of cyclists and trail motorbike riders and 4x4 drivers on Public Rights of Way. Specific issues emerge with the popularity of some paths and trails and sections of riverbank where users can cause severe erosion from over use. Overuse is also a problem to the nature conservation value of the area, particularly

where European designated species and habitats are. Conflict sometimes emerges when there is confusion over signage and rights of access. Where public access is provided, private landowners often incur costs in maintaining the public service of that provision. When dialogue can be entered into between the various interests and users, invariably a consensus can be reached and positive solutions progressed. It is often the case that recreational users have a high appreciation of the Wye Valley (although not necessarily that it is an AONB) but not such a high appreciation of the needs of landowners and other users, nor of the impacts of their activity on other users and the area. In cases of severe conflict an appropriate authority may consider regulation of an activity through the use of banning, licensing or zoning. However, lawful users should not be penalised because of clearly illegal activities by others. For example providing for small scale low impact wild camping should not be confused with unauthorised, noisy or messy rogue camping. The provision of facilities for minority groups needs careful consideration by appropriate authorities and providers. But this should be on a wider basis than just within the AONB. Similarly public access needs to adapt and modernise to meet the needs of the 21st century user.

11.2.3 There are a range of statutory and voluntary organisations and private individuals with interests in the recreational activities occurring in the AONB. Various bodies and strategies bring these organisations and interests together. On the river the navigation authority for the tidal stretch, demarcated as downstream of Bigsweir Bridge, is the Gloucester Harbour Trustees. Upstream of Bigsweir Bridge the navigation authority is the Environment Agency and the Wye Navigation Advisory Committee which, through the Wye Waterways Plan, takes a leading role in resolving conflicts and defining what activities are acceptable on the river. Some recreational providers have formed associations to help advance their common interest, for example The River Wye Canoe Hire Association. On land each county, under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, has a Local Access Forum (LAF), and a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). However these are based on administrative boundaries and do not cover the AONB as a whole.

11.2.4 The purposes of AONB designation emphasise that the conservation of natural beauty takes primacy over the needs of and demand for recreation, which itself should be consistent with the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses of the area. However, there is potential to integrate recreational access and public educational facilities through agri-environmental schemes and ROWIP delivery. Woodlands and forests can play an important role in absorbing tourism and recreation pressure. There are also opportunities to make links to health, equality and well-being strategies. These can all help to both enhance opportunities for everyone and deflect unsustainable visitor pressures away from the AONB honeypots or very sensitive habitats. There are huge benefits that we all get through contact with nature. Recreation in the AONB also helps people to reconnect with nature, recreating a relationship with the natural environment and ensuring fairer access to its goods and services. Recreation also helps our well-being through its positive impact on mental and physical health, and it improves education, encourages social activity and reduces crime.

**AONB Aim:** People continue to enjoy active recreation in the Wye Valley that does not detract from the natural beauty of the area

### Recreation & Access Strategic Objectives & Targets

<b>WV-R1</b>	Encourage and promote recreational pursuits and responsible access compatible with the AONB purposes, particularly linking sustainable transport and town and village facilities. Associated development and new access to land should be subject to WV-D2 and WV-D3 <i>[see also WV-T1, WV-A1 and WV-P3]</i>
<b>WV-R2</b>	Assist the resolving of conflicts, real and perceived, between recreation, conservation and local interests, including other economic activities, and between different recreation interest groups in relation to the purposes of the AONB designation <i>[see also WV-P1 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-R3</b>	Support appropriate levels of sustainable design, repair, signage and maintenance on public rights of way, recreational trails and sites, using materials in keeping, in order to conserve or enhance the character and natural beauty of the AONB <i>[see also WV-P4 and WV-P5]</i>
<b>WV-R4</b>	Assist in identifying gaps in access and recreational provision, including for under-represented and minority groups, and work with appropriate bodies and stakeholders to support and promote access enhancements and improved access for all, where this does not conflict with the Special Qualities of the AONB and the SACs <i>[see also WV-P5, WV-P7 and WV-P8]</i>

## 11.3 UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION

11.3.1 Both residents and visitors in the Wye Valley AONB value the scenic beauty. Most of the historic environment and the strong cultural and artistic heritage is founded on the outstanding geology and topography that contributes so significantly to the natural beauty of the area. Many of the local business are either directly or indirectly dependent on the landscape. But some people have little idea what or where the AONB is. Some have nearly lost connection with the natural environment. There is much that can be done to reconnect people and nature and the landscape. Amongst those that do know what or where the AONB is there is still considerable misunderstanding as to the roles and responsibilities in the AONB. This applies to some organisations as well as to individuals. Moreover many people are uncertain about how they could positively contribute to the conservation or enhancement of the natural beauty of the area. Likewise it is unclear to some people how the AONB positively contributes to people's lives or businesses. Some may see this purely in

terms of a market value. However, while some services of and in the AONB do have a market value, although this may be difficult to agree, others will have a ‘non-use’ value. Non-use value refers to the value that people attach to the environment even if they never have and never will use the environment for recreation or economic gain.

11.3.2 There is a rich legacy of cultural and landscape associations from artists, writers and musicians that can be explored and enjoyed by local people and visitors to gain a strong sense of the landscape and their role in it. The Special Qualities of the AONB continue to inspire artists, crafts people, writers, musicians, performers and other creative practitioners. Their work in turn develops strong connections between people and the landscape, increasing understanding, appreciation and wellbeing. This can help widen the base of people who care about the landscape and become involved in safeguarding its future. Activities such as the Wye Valley River Festival enable land managers and local communities to work with artists on creative solutions to communicating messages about the area’s natural beauty. A vibrant cultural industry can bring strength to the social fabric and local economy of the AONB.

11.3.3 More effective information is required to increase the overall appreciation of the landscape and the designation, and to engage people more in understanding, contributing to and benefiting from the AONB.

**AONB Aim:** Increase people’s appreciation and understanding of why the area is designated

### **Appreciation and Understanding Strategic Objectives**

<b>WV-A1</b>	<p>Increase the profile of the Wye Valley AONB, promoting awareness and understanding of the designation and the Special Qualities of the AONB, through communication with, and interpretation for, residents, visitors, organisations and businesses, including embedding cultural and artistic activities into the conservation and enhancement of the AONB and measure effectiveness</p> <p><i>[See also WV-L5, WV-B6, WV-G4, WV-H3, WV-F5, WV-W5, WV-C2, WV-E4, WV-S2, WV-R1, WV-P5, WV-P6, WV-P7 and WV-P8]</i></p>
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## **THEME 5**

### **12 ACHIEVING TOGETHER – effective management of the AONB**

#### **12.1 PARTNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

12.1.1 The current AONB Partnership of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and the AONB Unit, supported by the Technical Officers Working Party (TOWP) and various Topic Groups have proved remarkably effective and resilient. This governance structure offers the benefits of local accountability through elected

members and access to specialists with both local and national knowledge, supported by dedicated professional staff. Over the decades since designation these structures have seen significant alterations in AONB status nationally and locally, with Local Government Re-organisations; the development of the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB); regionalisation and de-regionalisation; fresh legislation and the impacts of austerity on public sector funding and agencies. The Wye Valley AONB Unit and JAC have at times been a leading agent in the NAAONB and some of the national and regional developments around these changes. Meanwhile the AONB Partnership has co-ordinated a broad range of practical and strategic achievements in the Wye Valley AONB, variously involving the public, private and voluntary sectors. With the administrative complexity of the AONB, the AONB Partnership is recognised as one of the very few organisations locally with a true cross-border remit. Consequently the AONB Unit and its partnerships have a considerable amount of experience and expertise in cross-border working and project development and delivery at both local and landscape scales.

12.1.2 The AONB Unit is an established team, currently with five full-time core members of staff, but due to reduce to four during this Plan period. The local authorities have commissioned the AONB Partnership to operate as a cross-border co-ordinating body, engaging with local communities and other partners effectively to develop and deliver both localised projects and AONB wide initiatives. The AONB Unit staff report to the JAC and are employed through the local authorities and work on behalf of the AONB Partnership to carry out the preparation and review of the Management Plan, to advocate its policies and work in partnership to deliver a range of actions described in the Action Plan. To achieve this the AONB Unit:

- Builds knowledge in order to inform and realise the ambitions of the Management Plan.
- Provides value to partners, providing helpful advocacy, advice and support and leading activity where appropriate.
- Carries out timely, inclusive and authoritative reviews of the AONB Management Plan on behalf of local authorities.
- Leads on the delivery of the AONB Management Plan and generates partnerships and collaboration in support.
- Builds capacity, motivation and professionalism and retains expertise and high quality staff.
- Actively seeks finance and other resources to support the delivery of the Management Plan.

The JAC ensures that the AONB Unit is effective, efficient and authoritative, recognised and valued by partners and policy makers as a professional body delivering significant added value and enabling action on the ground. For example the AONB staff both actively lead project steering groups and contribute to county Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) and other fora. The activity of the AONB Unit has complemented economic regeneration initiatives in the area such as LEADER programmes and drawn in project funding from a wide range of sources.

12.1.3 An independent assessment by Land Use Consultants (LUC) entitled “The Value of AONB partnerships” published in July 2013 concludes that:-

- AONB partnerships are embedded within, and trusted by, local communities.

- AONB partnerships excel at using small sums of public money to draw extra money and resources into rural communities
- AONB partnerships are flexible, adaptable and respond to change
- AONB partnerships are helping facilitate new ways of working in the public sector
- AONB partnerships work together and recognise the benefits of acting together as a Family

The pressures on local and central government budgets mean that the AONB Partnership will need to continue to evolve and adapt. This will entail broadening partnerships, particularly with the private and voluntary sectors, levering in more resources from non-governmental sources and aligning projects and the capacity to deliver them accordingly. In Wales particularly, but not exclusively, proposals will also need to deliver benefits under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (WFG) goals of:

- A healthier nation
- A nation of cohesive communities
- A prosperous nation
- A nation of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- A globally responsible nation
- A resilient nation
- A more equal nation

Full engagement with the AONB Partnership will enable public bodies to demonstrate that they are delivering part of their ‘duty of regard for the AONB’ and are in line with the WFG legislation, as they will be working with the long term perspective; with approaches that take an integrated approach; planning to take action now in order to prevent problems occurring or getting worse in future; involving all parts of the community; and collaborating with other organisations in order to achieve these wider benefits.

**AONB Aim:** Continue proactive and imaginative achievements in the Wye Valley AONB through successful and productive partnerships

### **Partnership, Management and Governance Strategic Objectives & Targets**

<b>WV-P1</b>	Maintain and develop effective partnerships and administrative arrangements to lead and co-ordinate the management of the AONB and develop the AONB Partnership as an effective forum for initiating and promoting discussion on important issues affecting the AONB <i>[see also WV-R2, WV-P5, WV-P6, WV-P7 and WV-P9]</i>
<b>WV-P2</b>	Sustain and enhance local and national government funding and support for the AONB Unit to add value to delivery of the AONB purposes <i>[see also WV-P3 and WV-P4]</i>
<b>WV-P3</b>	Encourage and assist partners with initiatives that deliver the Management Plan, or other initiatives where the objectives are consistent with the purposes of the AONB designation, and utilise existing resources and seek new resources to implement the AONB Management Plan

	<i>[see also WV-L1, WV-L2, WV-B1, WV-B2, WV-B3, WV-B4, WV-G1, WV-G2, WV-G3, WV-F2, WV-W2, WV-T1, WV-T3, WV-C1, WV-S2, WV-R1 and WV-P2]</i>
<b>WV-P4</b>	Encourage Section 85 organisations, under the CRoW Act, to have co-ordinated policies to progress the purposes of the AONB designation and to make commitments in their annual business plans to specific delivery contributions that enable the AONB 3-year work programme <i>[see also WV-L1, WV-L2, WV-B1, WV-B2, WV-B3, WV-B4, WV-H1, WV-F2, WV-W1, WV-W2, WV-D1, WV-D4, WV-M1, WV-M2, WV-U2, WV-R3 and WV-P2]</i>
<b>WV-P5</b>	Develop and promote the AONB as a model of sustainable development, landscape management, transportation, access and rural regeneration through exemplary initiatives setting standards for other areas <i>[see also WV-L1, WV-L2, WV-B2, WV-B3, WV-G2, WV-H1, WV-F1, WV-F2, WV-W1, WV-W2, WV-D2, WV-M2, WV-M3, WV-U1, WV-U3, WV-U4, WV-T1, WV-T2, WV-T3, WV-C1, WV-C3, WV-E2, WV-E3, WV-S1, WV-R2, WV-R3, WV-R4, WV-A1 and WV-P9]</i>
<b>WV-P6</b>	Inform and engage all relevant interests, especially local communities, in issues and decisions affecting the AONB <i>[see also WV-D5, WV-C4, WV-P1 and WV-P9]</i>
<b>WV-P7</b>	Encourage partners to be champions and ambassadors for the AONB in their contact with other interests, and ensure those interests recognise and consider the Management Plan and AONB work programme when relating to the area <i>[see also WV-L2, WV-B1, WV-G1, WV-H1, WV-F2, WV-W1, WV-D5, WV-C1, WV-C2, WV-E1, WV-E2, WV-S1, WV-S2, WV-R4, WV-A1 and WV-P1]</i>
<b>WV-P8</b>	Develop and co-ordinate the acquisition and analysis of data across the AONB, to inform priority setting, planning, implementation and monitoring of change affecting the natural beauty, including developing a better understanding of the likely impacts of climate change on the landscape of the Wye Valley AONB and supporting mitigation and adaption actions <i>[see also WV-L4, WV-B5, WV-G1, WV-H2, WV-W4, WV-S3 and WV-R4]</i>
<b>WV-P9</b>	Share knowledge and skills in protected area management locally, regionally, nationally and globally as appropriate <i>[see also WV-P5 and WV-P6]</i>

## 12.2 A CHARTER FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

The following baker's dozen of actions are ways that all residents, visitors and businesses can help to deliver this Management Plan and help to care for this internationally important protected landscape.

- 12.2.1           **Take pride in the Wye Valley – promote its Special Qualities, Features and places to family, friends and visitors**  
*Promoting what you find special about the Wye Valley is the best way of encouraging commitment and action by others to the area.*
- 12.2.2           **Buy local products and services from farmers and woodland managers who actively manage their land to benefit the environment**  
*The landscape and wildlife value of the area's woodlands, grasslands, heathlands, hedges and field margins are dependent on traditional management. Money invested in products and services that help support this management is money invested in conserving the AONB and its local economy.*
- 12.2.3           **Get out there and enjoy it**  
*Being out and about in such outstandingly natural and beautiful landscapes is good for your health and general well-being, so take full advantage of this asset on your doorstep.*
- 12.2.4           **Respect other users – follow the Countryside Code**  
*Through responsible behaviour we can all use and enjoy the countryside without damaging the enjoyment or livelihoods of others.*
- 12.2.5           **Slow down for people, horses and wildlife**  
*Traffic spoils enjoyment of the Wye Valley for a great many of its residents. Speeding cars kill people, horses and wildlife, and ancient greenways and their rare plants are damaged by inconsiderate driving and parking.*
- 12.2.6           **Manage your land for wildlife**  
*Fields, woodland, paddocks and gardens support valuable and threatened wildlife. A few simple measures and sensitive management can enhance their wildlife value for everyone's benefit.*
- 12.2.7           **Maintain the rural nature of your property**  
*The use of traditional materials and skills, such as drystone walling, helps retain the AONB's valued rural feel, which is in danger of being gradually eroded through the use of inappropriate and urban materials and features.*
- 12.2.8           **Help prevent the spread of invasive and harmful plant and animal species**  
*Introduced plant, animal and fish species spread rapidly in the Wye Valley countryside, competing with our native wildlife and leading to its loss.*
- 12.2.9           **Avoid using the car where possible and consider using renewable energy in your home**

*Emissions from non-renewable fossil fuels contribute to climate change and lead to degradation of valuable habitats such as bogs and heathland and the possible gradual loss of wildlife such as primroses and bluebells.*

**12.2.10 Reduce, reuse and recycle, and dispose of all litter responsibly**

*Litter spoils enjoyment of the countryside for the majority of residents and can pose a lethal risk for wildlife. Less rubbish also means less pressure for landfill sites and fewer collection vehicles in the AONB.*

**12.2.11 Use less water**

*Demands for water lead to high levels of water extraction from the Wye. This damages the wildlife in the AONB's rivers, streams and wetlands, as well as recreational enjoyment of the Wye.*

**12.2.12 Get involved – support local conservation organisations**

*With your financial and practical support, local conservation organisations can take action to care for the area such as monitoring threatened wildlife, undertaking practical conservation tasks and lobbying government.*

**12.2.13 Have a say**

*Your views can influence care of the area – use consultation processes operating at Community/Parish/Town, district, county and AONB level to steer policy and action that affects the area. Meanwhile, help report damage to geological, ecological, archaeological and historic features.*

## **APPENDIX I**

### **JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) comprises of representatives from the following organisations:

Local Authorities:

- Forest of Dean District Council (2 councillors)
- Gloucestershire County Council (2 councillors)
- Herefordshire Council (4 councillors)
- Monmouthshire County Council (4 councillors)

Co-opted members - umbrella organisations:

- Herefordshire Association of Local Councils (HALC)
- Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC)
- One Voice Wales
- Country Land & Business Association (CLA)
- National Farmers Union (NFU)
- A voluntary conservation sector representative for Gloucestershire
- A voluntary conservation sector representative for Herefordshire
- A voluntary conservation sector representative for Monmouthshire

Non-voting co-opted members:

- A representative of the local Wildlife Trusts,
- Wye Valley Society,
- River Wye Preservation Trust,
- A Recreation interests' representative
- A Tourism interests' representative

The JAC is supported by a Technical Officers Working Party (TOWP), which comprises lead officers from the four local authorities and a range of Government agencies, including:-

- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- Historic England
- Natural England
- Natural Resources Wales

## Map 2. AONB Landscape Management Zones

