

## Record of Officer decision

<b>Decision title:</b>	Wye Valley AONB - Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks Project with National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) Nature Networks Fund (#NNF).
<b>Date of decision:</b>	<b>1 November 2021</b>
<b>Decision maker:</b>	Interim Service Director – Highways, Environment & Waste
<b>Authority for delegated decision:</b>	<p>On 30<sup>th</sup> June the Assistant Director for Economy &amp; Place endorsed the Wye Valley AONB Grant application of £278,400 for the Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks Project to the Nature Networks Fund, a Welsh Government fund developed in partnership with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and administered by the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) who administer funding through The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).</p> <p>On 5<sup>th</sup> July 2021 the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) formally endorsed the Lower Wye Nature Networks application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the Nature Networks Fund in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust. <a href="https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=154&amp;Mid=4804&amp;Ver=4">https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=154&amp;Mid=4804&amp;Ver=4</a></p> <p>On 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021 the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) notified that the Lower Wye Valley Nature Networks Project application had been assessed and NHMF have offered a Grant of up to £258,400 [93% of the total approved Project cost of £278,400] up to March 2023.</p> <p>The Grant Contract offer with the Trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund requires a second signature from Herefordshire Council.</p>
<b>Ward:</b>	<p>Out of county:</p> <p>The NHMF Nature Network Fund is only eligible in Wales so applies to in the Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB.</p>
<b>Consultation:</b>	This decision has been taken in consultation with the council's Head of Environment, Climate Emergency & Waste and the Built & Natural Environment Service, the Wye Valley AONB Technical Officers' Working Party (TOWP) and AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and project partners and stakeholders; Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust, Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales.
<b>Decision made:</b>	To accept the Grant Contract on behalf of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership and authorise signing by the Wye Valley AONB Manager and the Service Director.
<b>Reasons for decision:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Wye Valley AONB Unit develops collaborative landscape-scale projects to help deliver the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan.</li> <li>• The Nature Networks Fund (NNF) aims to strengthen the resilience of Wales' network of protected sites, supporting a green recovery for nature and communities. Improving the condition of protected sites will enable them to function better at the heart of nature networks – vital areas of ecological resilience in which habitats and species can thrive and expand. Restoring connectivity in these networks will prevent</li> </ul>

	<p>further declines in species and habitat condition, and enhance capacity to adapt to climate change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AONB Unit has led on the Lower Wye Nature Network project bid to the NNF in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust, and in collaboration with Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales. The NNF project will run from November 2021 until March 2023.</li> <li>• The Lower Wye Nature Networks project will deliver: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ conservation and enhancement of 7 SSSIs / 2 SACs; ancient woodland, species-rich grassland and riverine sites, improving condition and resilience, and enabling safer public access.</li> <li>○ Targeted nature conservation and habitat connectivity advice for landowners, and working at landscape scale to improve connectivity to and from designated sites: including hedgerow restoration, Natural Flood Management activity, tree planting and species rich grassland creation.</li> <li>○ Breaking unwanted connections in and around designated sites through management of a range of Invasive Non Native Species (INNS). Working with volunteers and contractors reducing the current extent of INNS and building capacity to prevent further infestation.</li> <li>○ Volunteer activity within every aspect of project delivery.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Herefordshire Council are the accountable body for the Wye Valley AONB under the Wye Valley AONB Memorandum of Understanding with Forest of Dean District Council and Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire County Councils and the DEFRA Wye Valley AONB Funding Agreement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Lower Wye Nature Network Partnership Agreement has been prepared between the 3 lead partner organisations; Wye Valley AONB/Herefordshire Council, Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.</li> <li>• There are no additional financial requirements from HC.</li> <li>• All costs outlined in this report will be covered by the £278,400 NNF grant allocated for this project and core AONB budgets, with the following contributions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ £258,400 - NLHF Nature Networks Fund</li> <li>○ £15,000 - Landowner contributions to habitat work</li> <li>○ £5,000 - Woodland Trust Hedgerow Trees</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Funding for 6 months of project officer time is also included in the budget to enable extension of the AONB Nature Recovery Officer post (employed through Monmouthshire County Council).</li> <li>• The Landowner contributions to grant aided habitat work are dependent on farmer/landowner willingness to engage. Grant payments for work will be paid in arrears which limits risk. But it is difficult to predict whether full spend will be achieved and the spend profile.</li> <li>• The partners have the ability to negotiate and/or reallocate the funds should there be insufficient landowner engagement. This may require subsequent modification to the Offer Agreement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:</b></p>	<p>Not to accept the grant offer – This would result in the potential loss of £278,400 investment in nature, climate, people and place in the Wye Valley AONB.</p>

<b>Details of any declarations of interest made:</b>	None
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I am an officer delegated to make the decision

**Signed:**

**Print Name:** Phil Crossland

**Job Title:** Interim Service Director – Highways, Environment & Waste