



Title of report: Wye Valley National Landscapes - acceptance of grant funding

Decision maker: Cabinet Member – Environment

Decision date:

Report by: Wye Valley National Landscape Manager

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function concerned. A threshold of £500,000 is regarded as significant.

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

Backbury; Birch; Dinedor Hill; Kerne Bridge; Llangarron; Old Gore; Ross East; Ross North; Ross West;

Purpose

This report seeks approval to accept a number of confirmed and indicative funding awards, allocations and bids from National Grid, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales for the future management and duties of the Wye Valley National Landscape, formerly known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) The council accepts the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) project grants for 2025-2031 as detailed below, and to deliver the projects as set out in this report across Llangarron; Ross East; Ross West & Kerne Bridge Wards in the Wye Valley National Landscape:-
 - a. the 'Magnificent Meadows, Tremendous Trees and Wonderful Wetlands' award of £296,426
 - b. the 'Marstow and Pencraig Landscape Connections' award for £248,722
 - c. The 'Whitchurch to Howle Hill Landscape Enhancements' award for £246,769
- b) The council accepts the anticipated funding offer(s) from DEFRA for 2025-26 and 2026-27 for a total of up to £1,663,710 as detailed below, to deliver the work programme agreed by the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) as outlined in this report across the Herefordshire part and other counties in the Wye Valley National Landscape, ;
 - a. Wye Valley National Landscape Core funding of up to £303,710 (£151,855pa)
 - b. Access for All funding allocation of up to £240,000 (£120,000pa)
 - c. Additional Core Capital funding of up to £320,000 (£160,000pa).
 - d. Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) allocation of up to £800,000 (£400,000pa)
- c) The council accepts the funding offer(s) from Welsh Government for the 2025-27 for a total of up to £988,000, as detailed below, to deliver the work programme agreed by the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) as outlined in this report across the Monmouthshire part of Wye Valley National Landscape;
 - a. Core Revenue funding of £103,000 (£51,500pa)
 - b. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) allocation of £190,000 (£95,000pa)
 - c. Sustainable Landscape Sustainable Places (SLSP) allocation of up to £234,000 (£117,000pa)
 - d. General Capital Funding of £156,000 (£78,000pa)
 - e. Ffermio Bro funding of up to £305,000 (£120,000 in 2025/6 & £185,000 in 2026/7).
- d) The council accepts the funding offer from Natural Resources Wales for 2025-2027 for a total of £98,000 (£49,000pa) Strategic Allocated Funding (SAF) to deliver the projects as set out in this report across the Monmouthshire part of Wye Valley National Landscape.
- e) The council accepts the funding bid to the Environment Agency for a total of £45,000 in 2025-2026 from the Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF) to complement delivery of the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) project as set out in this report.
- f) The council continues to support the Wye Valley National Landscape through a Memorandum of Understanding with the other constituent local authorities, namely Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council and Monmouthshire County Council.

- g) The council delegates the review and preparation of the next Wye Valley National Landscape Management Plan to the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.**
- h) The council accepts any additional funding, or variations in the above funding, in seeking to further the purpose of the National Landscape designation in 2025-6 and 2026-7.**
- i) The Chief Operating Officer (Resident Services) is authorised to take all operational decisions necessary to implement the schemes.**

Alternative options

- 1. Not to accept the grant funding- this is not recommended as the council is the accountable body for the Wye Valley National Landscape, has statutory responsibility to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the area of outstanding natural beauty, and will otherwise need to allocate revenue and capital funding to meet these duties.
- 2. Part accept the grant funding-
 - a. Core funding - This is not recommended at this time as the core funding allocations are required to maintain the existing services and contribute to deliver the council's duties to further the conservation and enhancement of the area of outstanding natural beauty.
 - b. Project funding – this is not recommended as this would result in a significant loss of investment in the National Landscape and is not in line with either the Council's strong Climate and Ecological emergency commitments or the delivery of the joint statutory National Landscape Management Plan.

Key considerations

Background - Wye Valley National Landscape

- 3. The Wye Valley National Landscape was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1971 and is managed as a cross-border multi-authority partnership under a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) with the National Landscape Team acting as the main delivery agent. The current council representatives on the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for the Wye Valley National Landscape are:
 - a. Cllr Graham Biggs,
 - b. Cllr Simeon Cole,
 - c. Cllr Barry Durkin,
 - d. Cllr Ed O'Driscoll.
- 4. The council, under Sections 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, as amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 Part 12 s245 (5-10) has the following powers and duties:

“In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority...must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.”

5. The National Landscape 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 National Landscape, and as a cross-border National Landscape the relevant local authorities must act jointly.
6. To help deliver the above duties and obligations, the council enters into a Memorandum of Understanding with the other constituent local authorities, namely Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council and Monmouthshire County Council including outlining the contributions of each towards supporting the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership.
7. Under the 25 Year Environment Plan, DEFRA have been providing enhanced resources for the management of National Landscapes across England, including through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme and Capital uplift allocations. Welsh Government have also consolidated funding through the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), and Sustainable Landscape Sustainable Places (SLSP) which is now focused as a 'Nature & Carbon Fund' to address the nature and climate emergencies. Welsh Government are also establishing a General Capital Fund and Ffermio Bro, a Designated Landscapes Farming programme.
8. National Grid High Voltage lines and pylons cross the Wye Valley National Landscape south of Ross-on-Wye. The Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) is a grant scheme that is part of National Grid's Visual Impact Provision (VIP) targeted at reducing the impact of National Grid's existing electricity transmission lines in English and Welsh National Landscapes and National Parks. The LEI offers each National Landscape or National Park a maximum of £900,000 worth of live grants at any one time for projects that enhance the quality of the impacted Designated Landscapes.
9. Operational decisions are delegated through the Directorate of Economy and Environment.

Funding allocations

10. On behalf of the council, the Wye Valley National Landscape Team have submitted bids to the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) for three projects, as outlined in the table below. All three bids have been successful.
11. DEFRA are making new allocations to the National Landscapes for continuation of core funding and the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme along with Capital uplift and Access for All funding. The indicative allocations, based on 2024/25 are outlined in the table below subject to outcome of the Spending Review.
12. Similarly, Welsh Government are also making new revenue and capital allocations, including the new Designated Landscapes Farming grants programme, Ffermio Bro, and the continuation of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Sustainable Landscape Sustainable Places (SLSP). The indicative figures outlined in the table below are subject to final sign off of the Welsh Government budgets,
13. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have also renewed their offer of Strategic Allocated Funding for the Wye Valley National Landscape
14. The Wye Valley National Landscape Team have submitted a bid to the Environment Agency for a total of £45,000 in 2025-2026 from the Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF) to match and complement delivery of the Magnificent Meadows, Tremendous Trees and Wonderful Wetlands' National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) project.

15. From time to time the Wye Valley National Landscape Team may bid for other grants and funding to deliver the Work Programme for the Wye Valley National Landscape/AONB Management Plan as agreed by the Joint Advisory Committee.
16. The table below outlines the awarded and indicative funding that the Council will receive on behalf of the Wye Valley National Landscape, should currently anticipated or indicative allocations be confirmed. The differentiation between Revenue and Capital is identified where confirmed at this stage:

Grant scheme	Funder	Summary {status}	2025/26	26/27	Future years	TOTAL
Revenue						
LEI	National Grid	'Magnificent Meadows, Tremendous Trees and Wonderful Wetlands' project {Award}	£185,409	£91,650	£19,367	£296,426
LEI	National Grid	'Marstow and Pencraig Landscape Connections' project {Award}	£91,333	£108,448	£48,941	£248,722
LEI	National Grid	'Whitchurch to Howle Hill Landscape Enhancements' project {Award}	£136,306	£31,461	£79,002	£246,769
National Landscape core funding	DEFRA	Core contribution to the National Landscape Team budgets and delivery of the National Landscape Management Plan through agreed annual Work Programme. {Indicative}	£151,855	£151,855	TBC	£303,710
Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)	DEFRA	Delegated grant programme administered through the Local Assessment Panel and FiPL Officer to deliver outcomes on nature, climate, people and place {Indicative}	£400,000	£400,000	TBC	£800,000
National Landscape core funding	Welsh Government	Core contribution to the National Landscape Team budgets and delivery of the National Landscape Management Plan through agreed annual Work Programme. {Indicative}	£51,500	£51,500	TBC	£103,000
Strategic Allocated Funding (SAF)	Natural Resources Wales (NRW)	Strategic Allocated Funding contributing to delivery of the National Landscape Management Plan through an agreed annual Work Programme. {Award}	£49,000	£49,000	TBC	£98,000
WEIF	Environment Agency	Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF) to match and complement LEI	£44,622	0	0	£44,622
Ffermio Bro	Welsh Government	Designated Landscapes Farming grants programme – advice & guidance {Indicative}	£30,000	£30,000	TBC	£60,000
Revenue Totals			£1,140,025	£913,914	£147,310	£2,201,249
Capital						
Additional Core Capital funding	DEFRA	Additional capital core funding to deliver on innovation and 30by30 nature recovery	£160,000	£160,000	TBC	£320,000

Grant scheme	Funder	Summary {status}	2025/26	26/27	Future years	TOTAL
Capital and Access for All funding	DEFRA	To deliver priorities in the National Landscape Management Plan through agreed annual Work Programme {Indicative}	£120,000	£120,000	TBC	£240,000
General Capital	Welsh Govern-ment	Contribution to delivery of the National Landscape Management Plan through agreed annual Work Programme {Indicative}	£78,000	£78,000	TBC	£156,000
SDF	Welsh Govern-ment	Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) delegated grant {Indicative}	£95,000	£95,000	TBC	£190,000
SLSP	Welsh Govern-ment	Sustainable Landscape Sustainable Places (SLSP) Nature & Carbon Fund {Indicative}	£117,000	£117,000	TBC	£234,000
Ffermio Bro	Welsh Govern-ment	Designated Landscapes Farming grants programme – Ffermio Bro delegated grants {Indicative}	£100,000	£220,000	TBC	£320,000
		Capital Totals	£670,000	£790,000	TBC	£1,460,000
		TOTALS	£1,810,025	£1,703,914	£147,310	£3,661,249

Community impact

17. In accordance with the adopted code of corporate governance, the council is committed to promoting a positive working culture that accepts and encourages constructive challenge and recognises that a culture and structure for scrutiny are key elements for accountable decision making, policy development and review.
18. The Wye Valley National Landscape Team Work Programme and the projects to be delivered through the acceptance of this grant funding will contribute towards the delivery of the following key commitments within the Council Plan:
 - a. Work towards reducing county and council carbon emissions, aiming for net zero by 2030/31 and work with partners and communities to make the county more resilient to the effects of climate change.
 - b. Develop Herefordshire as a place for growth, prosperity and communities to thrive
 - c. Value nature and uphold environmental standards to minimise pollution and maximise biodiversity.

Environmental Impact

19. The Wye Valley is a nationally designated and protected landscape cared for by the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership which promotes and supports effective long term management to keep the area special. The funding allocations will enable the continued delivery of the statutory

National Landscape Management Plan and the ongoing management of the National Landscape Team.

20. The Wye Valley National Landscape Team Work Programme is developed to deliver the National Landscape Management Plan and the Review of the National Landscape Management Plan will also undergo both a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA).
 - a. The SEA screening concluded that the Wye Valley National Landscape Management Plan 2021-2026 is unlikely to display significant environmental effects.
 - b. The HRA screening assessment identified that the National Landscape Management Plan 2021-2026 will not have a likely significant effect on the European Sites either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
21. The funding allocations will significantly enhance the local environment by:
 - a. Supporting farmers and land managers to deliver outcomes on nature and climate
 - b. Delivering the National Landscape Management Plan, which supports innovative and sustainable projects that further the enhancement and conservation of natural beauty, wildlife, culture, landscape, land use and community
 - c. Promoting biodiversity and nature recovery, supporting resilient and green communities, accelerating decarbonisation and delivering sustainable tourism

Equality duty

22. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

 - a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
23. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Our providers, including volunteer walks leaders and site owners &/or land managers, will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.
24. The Wye Valley National Landscape is an area of outstanding natural beauty with unique and irreplaceable assets, distinctive character and special qualities. It is recognised and designated nationally and managed in the interest of everyone – local residents, businesses, visitors, and the wider public both now and for future generations. The Access for All and capital funding will contribute to investment in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives in the area, for example

enhancing and promoting access for wheelchairs and all-terrain buggies along the Willow Walk in Ross and training providers.

Resource implications

25. The table above (para 14) details the profile for each of the indicative and confirmed funding allocations. These will continue to be managed through the existing Wye Valley National Landscape budgets and do not require any additional funding as match from the council. Once final capital grant awards are confirmed the S151 officer can use the delegated authority to amend the capital programme in respect to the grant notification.
26. This programme will be managed by the cross-border Wye Valley National Landscape Team and where appropriate with project support and oversights by the Council's Corporate Project Management Office reporting to the Environment & Sustainability Board. Any required procurement led by the Council will be in line with the Council's procedure rules and current

Legal implications

27. Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 (as amended through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023) require local authorities to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.
28. Sections 89-90 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 require local authorities to review adopted and published National Landscapes Management Plans at intervals of not more than five years. The CRoW Act also requires local authorities to 'act jointly' in the preparation and review of National Landscapes Management Plans. Under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision requiring the local authorities to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of such plans.
29. The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is set up under a legal agreement between the four local authorities and oversees the National Landscape Team.
30. The Memorandum of Understanding provides a formal collaborative commitment to act jointly in maintaining contributions and minimising risk towards the management of the National Landscape Team.
31. Each grant received will include a series of conditions and terms and outcomes to be achieved. The Council as the accountable body will need to ensure that such have been complied with during the implementation.

Risk management

32. The Council is required to discharge its statutory duties in relation to seeking to further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the Wye Valley National Landscape (under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 & CRoW Act 2000 – as amended). This is currently fulfilled through collaborating in the established partnership of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and the National Landscape Team. Not to accept the funding allocations would present a significant financial risk and potential failure to delivery on these statutory duties. The Council will be required to resource the Review of the National Landscape Management Plan and will not be able to proactively support climate mitigation and adaptation and nature recovery in the National Landscape.
33. The National Landscape Team operates under a Memorandum of Understanding between the four local authorities which delegates the review and delivery of the statutory National Landscapes

Management Plan to the National Landscape Team and outlines contributions and mitigates shared risks including other commitments from any external funding agreements and resolving proportionate redundancy of staff members of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.

34. A new Memorandum of Understanding is being prepared for adoption by the four constituent local authorities.

Consultees

35. A PGC did not take place for this key decision. Group Leaders were contacted seeking their view to dispense with the need for a PGC on the basis there was limited scope for the council to influence the final outcomes of the decision and no objections were received from Group Leaders.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published

Governance	John Coleman	Date 12/02/2025
Finance	Karen Morris	Date 10/02/2025
Legal	Sean O'Connor	Date 03/02/2025
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 03/02/2025
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 03/02/2025
Procurement	Claire Powell	Date 03/02/2025
Risk	Jessica Karla	Date 04/02/2025

Approved by Ross Cook Date 26/06/2025