

Photo: Nanette Hendy

Part 2 Strategy

The following pages develop the strategy for the AONB Management Plan coming out of the themes from Section 4. Each theme is divided into topics. For each topic there is a brief outline. This may elaborate or highlight any significant issues identified in Tables 1 - 7. The aim for that topic is then given, based on the Vision in section 4. The strategic objectives for that topic are then listed, these are in effect the policy proposals for the Management Plan. Targets for the duration of the Management Plan are given for each strategic objective against which the actions are set to achieve in the Action Plan for the Wye Valley AONB, in section 10.

Therefore the structure of the Strategy, with the five themes and related topics, is:-

- Theme 1: Our Unique Landscape – conserved and enhanced**
 Landscape
 Biodiversity
 Geodiversity
 Heritage
 Farming
 Woodlands, Trees & Forestry
- Theme 2: Development & Transport – planning and protection**
 Development
 Minerals
 Utilities, Services and energy
 Transportation
- Theme 3: Vital Communities – living and working in the AONB**
 Community Development
 Economy and Rural Regeneration
- Theme 4: Enjoying the AONB – sustainable tourism, recreation and appreciation**
 Sustainable Tourism
 Recreation & Access
 Appreciation & Understanding
- Theme 5: Achieving Together – effective management of the AONB**
 Partnership, Management & Governance

Each factor is developed in the following way:-
 Outline & issues from Tables 1 - 7
 Aim, from Section 4
 Strategic Objectives
 Targets

Theme 1

5. Our Unique Landscape – conserved & enhanced

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

5.2 Landscape

5.2.1 The LandMap and Landscape Character Assessments covering the lower Wye Valley identify the characteristics that make the landscape of the Wye Valley AONB so distinctive. These are identified in the State of the AONB Report in Table 1, outlining the Features and

Distinctive Attributes of each of the seven AONB Landscape Zones.

5.2.2 There are many pressures on the natural beauty and landscape characteristics of the AONB. These are summarised in Table 7. Standardisation, urbanisation, and the sheer speed and scale of change in modern technology can all have an erosive effect on the distinctive character of an area. The State of the AONB Report in Table 4 highlights ways to monitor the impacts these changes may have on the landscape. Then mitigation and positive action can be targeted at conserving or, where appropriate, enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.

AONB Aim: Conserve and, where necessary, enhance the natural beauty of the landscape in the Wye Valley AONB.

Landscape Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|--|---|
| L1 | Promote positive action to protect those landscape features and distinctive attributes, identified in Table 1, and the special qualities, identified in Table 4, which contribute to the unique character and natural beauty of the area | <p>a. Establish consistent levels of protection for each landscape feature, distinctive attribute and the special quality</p> <p>b. Through the AONB Landscape Topic Group, work with all agencies that affect landscape change within the AONB to drive landscape conservation in the AONB</p> |
| L2 | Support, carry out and promote measures to conserve or enhance the landscape features and distinctive attributes, identified in Table 1, and the special qualities, identified in Table 4 | <p>a. Develop consistent landscape and biodiversity conservation and enhancement initiatives in all DEFRA and WAG funded land management</p> <p>b. Establish partnership initiatives for each of the dominant landscape features of woodland, farmland / grassland and river</p> <p>c. Annually promote local grant schemes to encourage landowners to maintain and restore key landscape features such as hedgerows, stone walls and hedgerow trees, etc.</p> |
| L3 | Promote and encourage the use of the Landscape Character Assessments to guide the maintenance of local distinctiveness in development plans and landscaping schemes | <p>a. Ensure that all the local planning authorities have up to date Landscape Character Assessments and landscape design guidance for the AONB adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance</p> |

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|-----------|--|---|
| L4 | Promote the establishment of sufficiently comprehensive knowledge and baseline data to monitor landscape changes and pressures for change | <p>a. Ensure that there is no net decline in quality or quantity of features, attributes and special qualities</p> <p>b. Develop processes for monitoring landscape change</p> |
| L5 | Encourage, develop and promote policies and initiatives that integrate rural development and the sustainable management of natural beauty across the AONB | <p>a. Ensure that AONB Unit has opportunity to input and comment on all policies and initiatives relating to AONB</p> <p>b. Ensure policies in the upper Wye and wider Wye catchment do not have an adverse impact on the special qualities of the AONB</p> |
| L6 | Support, carry out and promote measures to restore and enhance features, distinctive attributes and special qualities that are degraded, and to mitigate, reduce or remove eyesores as appropriate to the underlying landscape character | <p>a. Through the AONB Landscape Topic Group, develop landscape enhancement plans for significant areas of degradation or eyesores</p> <p>b. Retain and extend landscape enhancement grants for landowners and land manager for small scale works, consistent with the Landscape Character Assessments, in the AONB</p> |
| L7 | Support measures which increase public awareness and appreciation of the natural beauty and importance of the Wye Valley AONB | <p>a. Ensure all printed material about the AONB promotes landscape conservation and emphasises the special qualities</p> |
| L8 | Safeguard the viewpoints and view-sheds both within and out of the AONB | <p>a. Ensure all viewpoints identified in Viewpoints Assessment 2000 are opened up and accessible wherever possible</p> <p>b. Encourage establishment of roadside and riverside tree management programmes to open up strategic vistas along appropriate routes</p> |



Photo: AONB Unit

5.3 Biodiversity

5.3.1 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 candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) under the European Union's Habitats Directive. The 3 cSACs 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. Of national importance are 45 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) including 3 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 English Nature (EN) and the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW). Of local importance in the AONB are 3 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), managed by the respective local authority, and 130 local wildlife sites, some managed as nature reserves by Gwent Wildlife Trust, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust or Herefordshire Nature Trust in their respective counties, Plantlife and the Woodland Trust.

5.3.2 EN and CCW have a duty to report on the condition of SSSIs and whether they are in favourable condition. About a third of these designated sites are not in their optimal ('favourable') condition from a biodiversity perspective. This is due to many factors ranging between local, regional, national and global impacts. Therefore it is particularly important to consider the options where their condition is significantly affected by management of the wider landscape in which they occur. The need for landscape scale action is emphasised in the England Biodiversity Strategy.

5.3.3 The English and Welsh Biodiversity Strategies are part of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) process that identifies the 'priority' habitats and species that are important, particularly in relation to their rate of decline over the past 50 years. The nationally important habitats and species are outlined in the UKBAP. Locally each county is developing a Local BAP (LBAP). These are currently complete for Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. Some of the priority habitats and species in the UKBAP and LBAP have a significant presence in the Wye Valley AONB, while others are no more significant than in other parts of the country. Table 5 lists the birds and Table 6 the vascular plants that are of national significance, identified through the IUCN Red List

of threatened species and the UKBAP. The potential for the AONB to contribute positively to species BAPs is evident from the Tables. A large number of plant species of conservation significance have occurred in the AONB in the past, suggesting re-introductions with suitable source material could be considered. The Wye Valley is well known for being an important area for species of *Sorbus*.

5.3.4 The AONB Nature Conservation Strategy, published in July 1999, identified the key habitats and species in the AONB and provided proposals that are being drawn into an AONB Nature Conservation Action Programme. This will progress many of the LBAPs actions and help achieve many of the LBAPs targets as well as advancing aspects of nature conservation that are locally important in the AONB. The Strategy identified the following Objectives for Nature Conservation in the Wye Valley AONB:-

1. Maintaining all locally native animal, plant and fungal species
2. Maintaining natural features, including patterns and processes
3. Maintaining the wild, or natural, aspect of the landscape
4. Maintaining the long-term relationship between people and nature
5. Making nature accessible to people

AONB Aim: Conserve, and where appropriate restore or enhance the characteristic biodiversity of the AONB (comprising the semi-natural habitats, farmland wildlife, and the range and populations of native species).



Photo: AONB Unit

Biodiversity Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|---|---|
| B1 | Identify and contribute to the delivery of national, regional and local Biodiversity Action Plan targets and priorities for key habitats and species relevant to the AONB, in partnership with relevant organisations | <p>a. Accomplish AONB elements of LBAP targets</p> <p>b. Achieve LBAP targets identified with AONB lead</p> |
| B2 | Encourage and support measures that contribute to the management in favourable condition of all statutory designated and locally listed sites | a. All sites moving towards favourable condition |
| B3 | Promote the adoption of management schemes and initiatives that sustain, enhance and/or restore the characteristic biodiversity of the AONB, (including semi-natural sites, farmed habitats, and populations of native species) | <p>a. Establish partnership initiatives for each of the dominant landscape features of woodland, farmland / grassland and river</p> <p>b. Develop consistent landscape and biodiversity conservation and enhancement initiatives in all DEFRA and WAG funded land management schemes</p> <p>c. Increase area of farmland under agri-environment schemes and organic farming</p> |
| B4 | Encourage and support the management, and where appropriate the control, of species considered to be detrimental to the biodiversity value of the AONB | <p>a. Develop landscape-scale management strategies for key damaging and/or invasive species</p> <p>b. Ensure sustainable management of wild deer through Deer Management Groups</p> <p>c. Monitor the efficacy of the various control measures used on various species</p> <p>d. Increase residents' and visitors' understanding of the damage to AONB character caused by certain species</p> |
| B5 | Support the identification and monitoring of significant nature conservation features, in partnership with environmental organisations and the Local Biological Record Centres | a. Share standardised digital base information on land cover, designated sites, BAP species & habitats |
| B6 | Promote increased awareness, advice and involvement in biodiversity conservation by landowners, land managers, local communities and the wider public | a. Increase recognition of links between biodiversity as a resource for people to enjoy and appreciate as well as a resource for economic activity |
| B7 | Encourage measures that enable biodiversity, ecological systems and natural processes to accommodate climate change | a. Clarify potential effects of climate change on biodiversity and designated sites in the AONB |

5.4 Geodiversity

5.4.1 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. There are several geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites

(RIGS), although it is recognised that there are opportunities to increase the number of 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 geological heritage of the AONB.

Geodiversity Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|--|--|
| G1 | Support the identification and monitoring of significant geological conservation features, in partnership with geoconservation organisations and the local Geological Record Centres | a. Contribute to the production and delivery of Local Geodiversity Action Plans |
| G2 | Encourage measures that maintain the accessibility and conservation interest of sites of geological importance | a. Ensure access to full range of representative geological sites b. Identify new sites suitable for access and conservation work |
| G3 | Promote increased understanding and opportunities to appreciate the significance of the geology of the AONB | a. Increase respect for geological processes and soils |

5.5 Heritage

5.5.1 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 85 Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the AONB and 10 registered Parks and Gardens. There are also 17 Conservation Areas and numerous Listed Buildings in the built environment of the AONB.

5.5.2 Similar to the landscape and the biodiversity, the features of the historic environment are under pressure from changes in land management. 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, as well as changing, management practices, while some

sites, especially sites of early industrial importance, suffer from neglect. However, like distinctive landscape features there are no breeding pairs of Iron Age Hill Forts. So heritage features are a unique, non-renewable asset. The appreciation and preservation of the historic environment is therefore a priority wherever possible.

AONB Aim: Safeguard and, where possible, seek to enhance and promote, the historic environment of the AONB.



Photo: Courtesy of Monmouth Museum

Heritage Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|---|---|
| H1 | Initiate and encourage schemes and positive action to consolidate and upgrade the heritage interests in the AONB in conjunction with national (EH & Cadw) and other responsible agencies | a. Heritage significance of Wye Valley widely recognised by residents and visitors |
| H2 | Improve the local databases of historic landscape assessments, conservation areas, ancient trees, heritage features and sites in the AONB in conjunction with Local Planning Authorities, local archaeological trusts and individuals | a. Comprehensive and up to date database for AONB b. Buildings at risk register completed for AONB c. Develop a programme of research and co-ordinated archaeological fieldwork |
| H3 | Safeguard the historic environment of the AONB through offering advice and encouraging sympathetic management | a. All bodies working in the AONB check with Cadw/EH and council planning departments, before commencing so that no feature is destroyed or damaged by their work |
| H4 | Maintain the integrity and promote the restoration (without precluding necessary change) of the Historic Parks and Gardens in the AONB | a. No decline in condition of historic parks and gardens |
| H5 | Promote the understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment of the AONB by the public | a. Provide interpretation of main heritage features, cultural factors and settlement patterns b. Appropriate promotion of, and public access to, key heritage sites |

5.6 Farming

5.6.1 From the figures in Table 2, Agriculture occupies 57.8% of the land in the AONB. The great majority (54%) of the AONB is farmed intensively. The figures from Table 3.17 suggest that only 42% of the AONB is registered as farmland with DEFRA. Tables 3.12 to 3.22 show the agricultural statistics for the AONB and the trends over the past 11 years. Table 3.12 shows that farm employment has declined by 10% in the last 11 years. The number of dairy and mixed farms has decreased over the last ten years along with a decline in the amount of permanent pasture, which now accounts for 15% of the AONB. A small proportion is farmed non-intensively and about 3% of the AONB is covered in agri-environment agreements. The three Herefordshire landscape zones are the most intensively agricultural.

5.6.2 Farming practices have crafted the land for millennia. Rapid changes in modern agriculture have overwhelmed and threatened many of the traditional habitats and practices that have created some of the distinctive attributes of the AONB. 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. The increasingly globalised nature of agricultural commodities, falling farm gate prices, the increasing costs of heightened welfare, hygiene, bio-security and traceability initiatives, together with the failure of farmers to act co-operatively, all have grave implications for the viability of farming. Consumer confidence in British food has also been undermined by the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) crisis and recent outbreaks of Classical Swine

Fever and Foot-and-Mouth Disease and the continuing spread of Bovine TB. These trends have particularly influenced stock farming, which plays a pivotal role in the maintenance of the Wye Valley's agricultural landscapes.

5.6.3 The production of food must return to being a viable business. Influences on this 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 crops, crop production and crop protection practices. These could include the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), new irrigation techniques or plastic crop covers. The latter, either as mulch or polytunnels, can have a dramatic, although not permanent, impact on the landscape. The potential impacts to landscape, biodiversity, soil and water quality that these changes could bring require more research and close monitoring.

5.6.4 The paradox is that agricultural practices create and support natural beauty, but current agriculture is not sustainable and therefore potentially undermines the AONB objectives. Farming needs to be able to realise social and economic needs while delivering a whole range of 'environmental' non-market goods including healthy food, 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.

Thus agricultural practices that retain or restore 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 be encouraged as a high priority.

5.6.5 The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the proposals for the expansion of EU membership will significantly influence agricultural policy over the next few years. 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. The mid term review of the Common Agricultural Policy makes some moves towards these changes with some funding being switched to a Higher Tier Scheme and an Entry Level Scheme for farmers applying various levels of good environmental agricultural practices. In 1998, the Countryside Agency recommended to Government that Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) status should be extended to all AONBs. The Wye Valley had a strong case for ESA status and the AONB remains a target area for Countryside Stewardship Schemes. Every effort should be made to ensure that any new Higher Tier Scheme is applicable to the Wye Valley AONB.

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

Farming Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|---|---|
| F1 | Encourage farmers and landowners to identify and develop sustainable management practices that conserve or enhance the characteristics and natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB, e.g. integrated crop management, extensive grazing and organic production | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Local grazing network functioning b. Return of river floodplain to pasture and grazing c. Increase in farmland under integrated crop management, organic and GMO-free production |
| F2 | Encourage the maximum uptake of agri-environment schemes that progress the conservation or enhancement of the natural beauty, biodiversity and special qualities of the AONB | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 10% of AONB in higher tier agri-environment schemes |

| | | |
|------------|---|--|
| F3 | Promote methods by which the protection of soils against erosion, damage and pollution can be integrated into decision-making frameworks | a. Demonstration sites promoted |
| F4 | Encourage farmers and landowners to consider the landscape character of the AONB and the long term viability of their enterprise when developing redundant agricultural buildings and siting, designing and constructing new farm buildings | a. Appropriate guidelines produced and promoted b. New farm buildings accord with landscape character |
| F5 | Resist, and seek to mitigate, reduce or remove, any agricultural activity which significantly diminishes or destroys the natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB, including impacts on the wider rural economy | a. No loss of habitats or features due to inappropriate agricultural practices b. All codes of good practice adhered to c. Opportunities identified to recreate degraded landscape features |
| F6 | Encourage and support traditional skills such as hay making, hedge laying, dry stone walling, black smithy, thatching etc. that contribute to the maintenance of the special qualities of the AONB | a. Network of local skilled labour b. Programme of skills training |
| F7 | Promote a wider understanding of the value of farming to the landscape and economy of the AONB | a. Strategy developed and implemented |
| F8 | Support the development of new farm-based activities that are compatible with the aims of AONB designation | a. Advice and guidance in place |
| F9 | Oppose moves to disengage and trade the ownership of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) entitlements from land ownership within the AONB | a. CAP entitlements retained with land ownership in AONB |
| F10 | Support all appropriate measures to control diseases of agricultural livestock, which threaten the commercial viability of grazing systems, ensuring that the instruments remain compatible with the conservation and enjoyment of natural beauty | a. No significant outbreaks of disease |
| F11 | Promote, and encourage the use of, local produce by public bodies, consumers, accommodation providers and local food outlets | a. Increase in regular outlets of local agricultural produce b. Increase in uptake of ERDP processing funding local to AONB |

5.7 Woodland, Trees and Forestry

5.7.1 Woodlands in the Wye Valley are one of the dominant landscape features. They provide a multitude of uses 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. Forestry and woodland occupies 27% of the AONB, i.e. about 8855ha. Over 900ha, about 3% of the AONB, are internationally protected as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC). The highest proportions of ancient and semi-natural woodland (ASNW) and planted ancient woodland sites (PAWS) are in the Wye Gorge, Dean (Highmeadow) and Woolhope Dome. The woodland proportion varies enormously between landscape zones.

5.7.2 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 catastrophic collapse in timber prices in recent years, making the relatively low-grade hardwoods on the steep slopes of the Wye Valley woodlands particularly unprofitable. Consequently many of the woodlands are becoming neglected. With this lack of active management come problems of invasion by species such as cherry laurel and sycamore, increasing deer and squirrel populations and the general loss of woodland management skills. It has become particularly recognised recently that increases in grey squirrel and Fallow deer populations are having a significant detrimental impact on the economic and conservation value of the Wye Valley woodlands. 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 owned by the Forestry Commission.

5.7.3 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 and coppice workers, arboricultural and silvicultural advisors, through stalkers, butchers and game dealers to carpenters, wood turners, joiners and cabinet makers.

5.7.4 The other significant use and value of the woodlands is for recreation and quiet enjoyment. The heavily wooded nature of the lower Wye Valley is certainly a key factor in the area's popularity as a tourism and recreation destination. The Forestry Commission and Woodland Trust woodlands are open to the public and are popular with walkers, horse riders and cyclists, with various promoted routes or favourite sites for each.

5.7.5 The Wye Valley AONB Woodland Management Guidelines (2nd edition, 1996) outline the management options and priorities for each Landscape Zone. The emerging Regional Forestry Frameworks, being prepared by the Forestry Commission for each region, will be an important influence on future woodland policy and strategy.

5.7.6 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, often as part of a link between woodlands or other semi-natural habitats. Individual and hedgerow trees need appropriate management and maintenance to minimise damage and loss. A planting programme is required to ensure there are mature single and hedgerow trees in the future. Current imported diseases of trees such as Alder Phytophthora (*Phytophthora cambivora x fragariae*) and Ramorum Blight or 'Sudden Oak Death' (*Phytophthora ramorum*) also have the potential to dramatically affect the landscape character of the AONB.

AONB Aim: To ensure woodland throughout the Wye Valley AONB is 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 Policies Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|--|---|
| W1 | Provide best practice advice to woodland owners and managers on sustainable multipurpose management of the Wye Valley woodland | a. Revised AONB Woodland Management Guidelines promoted throughout AONB |
| W2 | Support the ongoing management of woodlands and trees in the AONB that conserve and/or enhance the natural beauty and biodiversity of the area, including restoration of conifer planted ancient woodland to native broadleaves, and also have due regard to local socio-economic needs. | a. All SSSI woodlands in favourable condition b. No decrease in ancient woodland area c. Relevant Habitat Action Plan commitment fulfilled by partners d. PAWS restoration programme developed |
| W3 | Support initiatives for the planting of new broadleaf trees and woodlands which respect the local landscape character and biodiversity and provide benefits for amenity, health, the local economy and defragment ancient woodland by linking or expanding existing sites | a. Increase in area of broadleaf woodland, without degrading other valuable habitats b. Increase in farmland and hedgerows trees planted and protected |
| W4 | Work in partnership to develop tree, woodland and forestry initiatives | a. A successful new partnership initiative |
| W5 | Support and promote initiatives that encourage employment and skills development for multipurpose woodland management and conservation | a. Network of local skilled labour b. Programme of skills training |
| W6 | Support the development of existing and new markets for local timber and woodland produce through improved marketing, entry into national certification schemes and product development | a. Increase in value and volume of timber and woodland products marketed locally and nationally b. Increase in woodlands in certification schemes |
| W7 | Support appropriate measures designed to monitor, control and where possible, eradicate diseases, which may cause substantial mortality in tree species and mitigate the landscape impact of any loss | a. No net loss of tree cover |
| W8 | Increase understanding and awareness of trees and the woodland environment generally and of the special nature of the Wye Valley woodlands | a. Heightened awareness and understanding of tree and woodland issues in AONB |

Theme 2

6 Development & Transport – planning and protection

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

6.2 Development

6.2.1 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. The most relevant legislation for the AONB is the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, Planning Policy Guidance note 7 (PPG 7) paragraph 4.5 and the Minerals Planning Policy Guidance notes (MPGs). Government policy is that in general, policies and development control decisions affecting AONBs should favour conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape. In all cases the environmental effects of new proposals will be a major consideration, though it will also be appropriate to have regard to the economic and social well-being of the areas. In relation to major projects, it is the Government's view that the assessment required in paragraph 4.5 of PPG7 in National Parks should also apply to proposals for major development in AONBs. This emphasises that such proposals should be demonstrated to be in the public interest before being allowed to proceed. Consideration of applications should therefore normally include an assessment of:-

- o The need for the development, in terms of national considerations
- o The impact of permitting it or refusing it on the local economy
- o The cost of and scope for developing elsewhere outside the area or meeting the need for it in some other way
- o Any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and the extent to which that should be moderated.

All three counties have reasonably robust development control policies for the AONB, in the Herefordshire and Monmouthshire Unitary Development Plans (UDPs) and the Forest of Dean Local Plan and the Gloucestershire Structure Plan.

6.2.2 There are about 750 planning applications per annum in the AONB. These range from porch extensions of a few square meters to major new industrial estates of tens of hectares. 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 permanent dominant new feature in the landscape and/or if it damages or impacts on several special qualities simultaneously. The mechanisms for considering planning applications are:-

- o the AONB Officer receives the weekly planning lists and considers whether the full plans of any application need viewing. Between 2000 and 2003 this tended to be about 10% of all applications.

- o a local planning authority may send applications it considers significant to the AONB office for comment.

- o members of the public contact the AONB office to raise concern about specific planning applications

The AONB Officer makes comment 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, recent examples include a quarry extension, a new business park and the Wye Valley Cycleway.

6.2.3 Many of the planning applications are approved 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. However it is a commonly expressed concern that it is often the incremental effect of such developments collectively that encroaches on and erodes the distinctive attributes and special qualities of the AONB. The new Landscape Character Assessments for each county go some way towards addressing these issues with Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). Planning infringements and retrospective applications can also have a detrimental impact

locally. Light and noise pollution are also frequently identified as eroding the character of the area. The level and effectiveness of development control and planning enforcement by the local planning authority is a key factor in controlling this. The overall efficacy of the local planning authorities in protecting the AONB designation should be monitored.

6.2.4 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. Infrastructure associated with public utilities services and highways are often criticised by people for their standardised approach and lack of attention to local distinctiveness. It is anticipated that 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 this oversight in the AONB.

6.2.5 The impacts on the landscape of 'Permitted development rights', which include many agricultural buildings, causes frequent

public concern. Similarly the use of plastic crop protection is also an emotive issue that is partially unregulated by the planning system. However the need for sustainable farming and rural diversification enterprises in the AONB needs to be fully recognised.

6.2.6 The Government has published proposals to radically alter the land use planning system in England. The new system is likely to include new Regional Guidance, with Local Development Frameworks and Area Action Plans replacing Unitary Development Plans and Local and Structure Plans. Changes are also proposed in Wales but these are unlikely to be as extensive. The implications for the AONB of these changes are not yet clear. There is also the opportunity for the local Planning Authorities to adopt relevant parts of this Management Plan as Supplementary Planning Guidance, where this accords with their other planning policies.

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

Development Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|---|--|
| D1 | Ensure that a consistent and coherent framework of planning policies relating to the protection, conservation and management of the AONB is fully reflected in the statutory land use planning policies | a. Robust AONB policies within the new Regional Guidance, Local Development Frameworks, Area Action Plans and supplementary planning guidance and UDPs |
| D2 | Adopt the highest standard of design, materials, energy efficiency, drainage and landscaping in new development and redevelopment to ensure that they complement the landscape and local character of the AONB | a. Ensure availability of adequate guidance on design standards, including environmental design and construction techniques, local materials and distinctiveness, landscaping, sustainable drainage and energy efficiency |
| D3 | Promote the recognition and reinforcement of local character and distinctiveness in design, scale, setting and materials used in all development in the AONB, using local landscape character assessments | a. Consistency in decision making on proposed developments throughout the AONB b. Housing densities within new residential housing developments reflect the settlement patterns associated with the immediate landscape character of the AONB |
| D4 | Resist inappropriate development which will create a permanent and dominant new feature out of keeping with the landscape of the AONB and/or if it damages several special qualities of the AONB, including through high levels of noise and/or light pollution | a. Effective control of significant developments |

- | | | |
|-----------|--|---|
| D5 | Provide opportunities through Section 106 Agreements for developers to contribute to schemes that enhance or conserve the natural beauty of the AONB | a. New Section 106 Agreements contributing to the purposes of AONB designation |
| D6 | Encourage and support public involvement and commitment to the future planning of communities and the countryside throughout the AONB | a. Ensure independent countryside & community organisations assist in monitoring County Council planning application lists to strengthen scrutiny of possible threats to AONB countryside |

6.3. Minerals

6.3.1 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. There is a considerable heritage in the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean of mineral extraction, including coal, iron ore and quartz conglomerate for millstones.

6.3.2 Mineral extraction is now concentrated on limestone aggregate extraction from two large scale quarries in the AONB, Livox just south of Tintern, and Stowfield just west of Coleford, and one adjacent to the boundary, at Clearwell. To ensure continued supplies of suitably high quality stone, and in recognition of the basic principle that minerals can only be worked where they occur, existing quarries within the AONB must continue to operate effectively. However, the environmental impacts of quarries can be considerable both through the long term effect on the landscape and through the daily operations which can be noisy, dusty, loud and generate considerable lorry traffic. On the other hand quarries provide employment and can be restored to give valuable exposures of the geology, create special habitats for wildlife and new recreational facilities.

6.3.3 There are several large disused quarries that are revegetating 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 Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS). Building stone from local quarries is also important for local architectural and heritage

reasons. English Heritage and Cadw are keen to see local quarries temporarily reopened for close stone matches for specific building conservation or renovation permissions.

6.3.4 Government guidance on mineral applications in AONBs is given in Minerals Planning Guidance note 1 (MPG 1), which emphasises that applications in AONBs should be subject to the most rigorous examination. MPG 6 states that major developments should not take place in AONBs except in exceptional circumstances. The criteria in PPG 7 would also apply here. The Minerals Planning Authorities (MPAs) in the AONB are Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council. Each has an AONB policy in their respective Minerals Local Plan or Unitary Development Plans that should be in accordance with these MPGs.

6.3.5 A national provision that should be made for primary aggregates is given in MPG 6. The Regional Guidelines annexed to MPG 6 set out the forecast demand broken down for each region in England, and separate provisions are made for Wales. These are then apportioned by a regional aggregates working group between each MPA. Each MPA is required to meet its share of the regional apportionment, which consequently forms part of the national need. While respecting the AONB designation, it must be remembered that each MPA in the Wye Valley AONB is operating in different regions and therefore working to a different regional apportionment, rather than considering the AONB as a whole.

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

Minerals Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|---|---|
| M1 | Encourage a consistent and coherent framework of mineral planning policies relating to the protection, conservation and management of the AONB | a. Robust AONB policies within the Regional Guidance, Local Development Frameworks, Area Action Plans and supplementary planning guidance |
| M2 | Encourage existing quarries to be operated and restored to a standard that is appropriate to the landscape character, geodiversity and biodiversity of the AONB and encourage the restoration of worked quarries where circumstances allow | a. All quarries, working and disused, mapped with all notable quarries having a management plan |
| M3 | Support new mineral workings, or further extensions in existing or redundant quarries, that provide masonry stone where there is a clear demand for local conservation and local heritage purposes that are of appropriate scale in the landscape for use within the AONB or immediately adjacent areas | a. Recognised supply of locally produced stone meeting demand for local conservation and heritage schemes, within the parameters of the landscape |
| M4 | Regard the AONB as a primary constraint to new quarries or extensions to existing quarries for limestone aggregates within the AONB. Proposals for all minerals developments in the AONB will be subject to the most rigorous examination | a. No new aggregate quarries in the AONB |

6.4 Utilities, Public Services and Energy

6.4.1 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 AONB unit commissioned a feasibility study on renewable energy in 2002. This identified the potential for small-scale hydroelectric schemes on the tributaries of the Wye, the use of wood fuel, small domestic wind turbines and the opportunities for solar power, both for water heating and photovoltaic electricity generation. A key government target is to meet 10% of UK electricity generation from renewable sources by 2010, and there are grants and incentives to encourage this.

6.4.2 Most public utility services, notably gas, water, electricity and telephone lines, tends to follow the road network. Where over ground wires cross the valleys and the river they can be very conspicuous, but under-grounding of cables remains hideously expensive. However, 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.

6.4.3 Mobile phones have revolutionised modern life. But the topography of the AONB means that coverage is not consistent. The balance has to be reached between comprehensive mobile phone coverage for all operators against the valley sides and every other hill 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 & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|---|---|
| U1 | Support and promote the development of renewable forms of energy generation that are of a scale in the landscape that do not impact negatively on the distinctive attributes and special qualities of the AONB | a. 1% of average domestic energy requirement in the AONB generated from renewable sources within the AONB (i.e. the equivalent of 100 households having their cooking, heating and lighting from locally produced renewable energy) |
| U2 | Encourage under-grounding of existing and proposed power and telephone lines and resist new overhead lines where skylines or important views are affected | a. No new over ground lines affecting skylines or important views |
| U3 | Encourage the highest standards of equipment design for telecommunication masts to reduce the visual impact of such facilities and resist new structures that either do not share masts and/or do not utilise optimum designs at suitable locations | a. All new mast developments incorporating highest standards of design and landscape conservation |

6.5 Transportation

6.5.1 The Wye Valley, like almost every other area in the UK, suffers from a general presumption towards private car use and lorry freight, with over 30,000 cars and vans based in the area. 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. Barely a couple of miles outside the AONB are both the M48 and M50, allowing for a two way flow of visitors and commuters to and from the conurbations of Birmingham, Bristol and Cardiff. Recent surveys would indicate that of the 2.5 million visitor days spent in the AONB over 90% would have come by car. National forecasts predict that road traffic will continue to increase over coming decades. However, while some areas in the AONB reach car and parking capacity at peak periods, other places remain quiet and relatively peaceful with moderately sized car parks virtually empty all year.

6.5.2 The infrastructure associated with increased road traffic is controlled primarily by the need to meet requirements of road safety for drivers travelling within the legal speed limits. 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.

6.5.3 There are alternatives to the car. However, most options face problems of one sort or another. The local authorities fund and promote extensive rural bus services. But the willingness of people to use public transport is strongly influenced by public perceptions, as much as reality, about variable standards in terms of connections, frequency, reliability, access and comfort. The AONB, along with the local authorities, continue to promote the use of the local bus services and the network throughout the AONB, and to promote and subsidise The Wye Valley Wanderer, a summer Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday bus service going the length of the AONB. In the lower part of the AONB this is now complemented by a commercial service.

6.5.4 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 and Newport. The railway line that once did go through the valley was closed to passengers before the Beeching's cuts.

6.5.5 The other main alternative is cycling. The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) received a feasibility study on a Wye Valley Cycleway in 2003. Localised and focused opposition suggested that sections of the route were not feasible. However the JAC welcome initiatives by local people to develop local routes on existing ex-railway tracks, but only when there is no compulsory purchase orders or pressure on landowners. The JAC wish to be presented with proposals to develop local routes, even if only one constituent authority is involved.

The JAC would only support proposals that meet the objectives and do not affect the AONB adversely.

6.5.6 Walking is a popular recreational activity in the AONB but also remains a valid form of transport for some local journeys. The good condition of roadside pavements and the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network can make a considerable contribution to improving the prospects for walkers.

6.5.7 The local authorities are committed to progressing their respective Local Transport Plans. These work on the model hierarchy, which

gives priority to walking first, followed by cycling, public transport and private motor vehicles, in that order. 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 with improved access, social equity and economic opportunities in the Wye Valley.

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

Transportation Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|--|---|
| T1 | Encourage and promote greater use of more sustainable forms of transport as part of an integrated transport strategy for the AONB and adjoining areas. This will accord with the model hierarchy – giving first priority to walking, followed by cycling, public transport and private motor vehicles, in that order | a. Integrated transport strategy for the AONB produced in partnership and promoted widely |
| T2 | Support traffic management and control schemes, including control or provision of parking, that help to reduce adverse impacts of motor traffic in the AONB | a. No significant adverse impacts on special quality by motor traffic |
| T3 | Encourage and promote the design and landscaping of new and improved transport infrastructure to standards in keeping with the AONB designation and the surrounding landscape pattern. In particular, encourage protection of the character and special features of existing country roads, and the sympathetic management of identified herb-rich roadside verges | a. Highways development and design guidelines covering AONB produced in partnership and promoted widely |
| T4 | Encourage full consideration of the impact upon natural beauty of proposals for transport management schemes and in particular the intensification of air, road and rail traffic systems in and adjacent to the AONB | a. No significant adverse impacts on special qualities by air, road and rail traffic |
| T5 | Conserve the local character of rural roads in the AONB by conserving wherever feasible vernacular highway features and reducing excessive signage | a. No net loss of identified vernacular highway features |
| T6 | Resist the further extension of street lighting, junction lighting and traffic sign illumination in the rural areas of the AONB unless there are proven public safety grounds | a. No increase in light pollution from within the AONB |

Theme 3

7 Vital Communities - living & working in the AONB

7.1 This section outlines aims, strategic objectives, and targets 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.

7.2 Community Development

7.2.1 There are 33 Parish Councils on the English side and 7 Community Councils on the Welsh side wholly or partially in the Wye Valley AONB. There is frequently more than one village within each of the Parish and Community Councils. Each village or settlement has its own identity, residents and facilities. These define 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, etc.

7.2.2 The statistics for the socio-economic make up of the AONB are outlined in Tables 3.1 to 3.11. The age profile of the AONB, Table 3.1 shows a slightly older local population than the national average. Meanwhile Table 3.2 suggests that a quarter of local households in and around the AONB are below the 60% Median for local incomes. Table 3.5 indicates that about 20% of households are also some distance from local services. Table 3.10 identifies that male unemployment is below the national average but female unemployment is higher locally. Finally Table 3.11 indicates that the AONB has a higher than national average amount of retired people from professional and managerial backgrounds, as well as of course a high proportion of retired agricultural people. From this it can be inferred that the Wye Valley AONB is a popular place for retired people from professional and managerial backgrounds, which is likely to put pressure on local housing and the availability of affordable housing for local people, including the high number of retired agricultural workers. Thus the effects of rural disadvantage, social exclusion

and lack of affordable housing affects a significant fraction of households in and around the AONB.

7.2.2 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. 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 sale of council houses, 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.

7.2.3 Communities need to actively identify what they value in their locality and participate in setting priorities for its sustainable management. Commitment by local people to the protection of the Wye Valley is strong. Parish Plans and statutory Community Plans, as well as the AONB Management Plan, provide fresh opportunities to express these priorities and commitments. Involvement of young people and schools, and the elderly and less vociferous members of local communities need to be included in these processes as well as the participation of the Parish and Community Councils and other local representative and resident organisations. The outcomes then need to be developed into a coherent plan with close liaison with the local authorities and regional agencies.

7.2.4 There are a range of opportunities that can be progressed for a more sustainable quality of life in the AONB. For example village halls can host post offices and local cinema clubs beyond their usual wide range of activities. Local shops and food outlets can sell more local produce which will help 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 and government grants are available for schemes in housing, shops, farms, schools and other groups within communities. The need for sustainable integrated transport is also recognised. This is dealt with in the Transportation section above.

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

Community Development Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|--|--|
| C1 | Encourage community led initiatives that maintain the diversity, sustainability and quality of rural community life | a. Each Parish and Community Council engaged in a Parish Plan or community appraisal project |
| C2 | Promote awareness and appreciation of the special qualities of the Wye Valley AONB and the beneficial aspects for local people of living and working in a nationally protected landscape | a. AONB recognised in each Parish Plan or community appraisal project |
| C3 | Encourage initiatives in the local community that stimulate investment, enhance local employment opportunities and retain and improve facilities and services for local people, subject to WV-D2, WV-D3 and WV-D4 above | a. Increased household disposable income b. No decline in distance to key services |
| C4 | Support the development of affordable housing in the AONB, maximising the opportunities within rural housing developments and where it is related to local employment opportunities, subject to WV-D2, WV-D3 and WV-D4 above | a. Increase in affordable housing in AONB |

7.3 Economy and Rural Regeneration

7.3.1 The rural economy plays an important role in the maintenance of an attractive countryside. 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 village gymkhanas to the activities of Chepstow racecourse and the recycling of newspapers in Ross-on-Wye for bedding.

7.3.2 Much of the current employment in the AONB is based on the service industries of tourism, public administration, finance and transport. The highest industry sector in the

AONB is 'Distribution, hotels and restaurants' employing over 3300 people (see Table 3.6), whereas total farm labour accounts for 810 people (see Table 3.12). The large majority of businesses in the Wye Valley are small, with only 1-49 employees (see Table 3.7 and 3.8), although there are 5 businesses which have 100-199 employees, and 2 of 200 plus. Nationally up to 70% of new businesses in the countryside are created by incomers who are often attracted to rural areas by the quality of life. Consequently, it must be recognised that an ever-increasing proportion of the workforce in the AONB are people working from home or from small units. These may be adding value to existing services or contributing to sectors predominantly outside the AONB. These trends are likely to continue with advances in technology and an economy moving further away from primary production.

7.3.3 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.

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.

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

7.3.4 Farming, forestry and quarrying have already been covered in earlier sections and tourism is covered in the next section. However

Economy and Rural Regeneration Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|--|---|
| E1 | Support initiatives that improve the market for products which conserve or enhance the AONB's distinctive landscape, wildlife and historic features and strengthen the sense of place of the AONB | a. Increased markets for local organic and woodland produce |
| E2 | Raise awareness and encourage local businesses in the AONB to take opportunities to become more environmentally and economically sustainable, particularly in ways that sustain the natural beauty of the area | a. Increase of environmental auditing by companies in the AONB b. Increase in use of renewable energy, such as woodfuel, and recycling |
| E3 | Support initiatives that further, and increase the understanding and awareness of, the contribution of key business sectors, beyond farming and tourism, to the economic vitality of the AONB and adjacent areas | a. Key links in wider business sector secured |
| E4 | Support the delivery of local co-operative schemes, advice and training programmes that support the development and expansion of rural micro-businesses | a. Business training programme established |
| E5 | Encourage recognition of the importance of a high quality environment in attracting and retaining entrepreneurs, relocating businesses, inward investment and skilled personnel | a. Establishment of consensus among local businesses |

Theme 4

8 Enjoying the AONB - sustainable tourism, recreation and appreciation

8.1 This section outlines objectives, policies and action for sustainable tourism; recreation and access; understanding and appreciation in the Wye Valley AONB.

8.2 Sustainable Tourism

8.2.1 The Wye Valley is one of the few inland rural areas with its own tourism heritage, dating back over 250 years. People went on the Wye Tour in the 18th and early 19th 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 the 2.5million visitor days per annum to the Wye Valley AONB. The Wye Valley continues to offer a great range of opportunities for quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the tranquil and spectacular scenery. These include activities as diverse as day-tripper sight seeing, canoeing, climbing, fishing, walking and hiking. Thus it remains nationally renowned as a destination for tourism and recreation.

8.2.2 The value of tourism to the local economy is significant; both in terms of local employment and visitor spend into the local economy. National estimates calculate that average per capita / per day visitor spend is about £35 and can be as much as £55 for certain activity groups such as touring cyclists. This would suggest that the value of tourism in the AONB may be £87.5 million per annum. The importance and vulnerability of tourism were highlighted during the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001 when a wide range of businesses were seriously affected. It also has to be recognised that the majority of tourism businesses are very small scale. Therefore the 'industry' is composed of a multitude of potentially competing small enterprises.

8.2.3 Many of the tourism businesses in the Wye Valley work together through local associations such as Wye Valley Tourism and South Herefordshire Tourism. The Wye Valley AONB spans three regional tourist board areas; Visit Heart of England, covering Herefordshire and the West Midlands, Capital Region Tourism, in Monmouthshire and south Wales, and South West Tourism, in Gloucestershire. The three

main local authority tourism brochures all use the Wye Valley brand name, namely; Wye Valley and Golden Valley, in Herefordshire, Wye Valley and Vale of Usk, in Monmouthshire, and Wye Valley and Forest of Dean in the Forest of Dean. Much of Gloucestershire County Council's tourism promotion focuses on the Cotswolds, one of our neighbouring AONBs. There is sufficient cross border co-ordination and promotion driven largely by the tourism providers and the reality of the Wye Valley as a destination in its own right. However, where co-ordination breaks down is over the gathering of statistics and data, which is usually collected on district, county or regional administrative areas.

8.2.4 In 1995 A Strategy for Sustainable Tourism was developed for the Wye Valley AONB and each local authority has recently prepared a Tourism Strategy. Three recent tourism surveys in the surrounding counties have been carried out but the data has not been disaggregated for the Wye Valley AONB. The surveys are the Herefordshire 2002 Regional Visitor Survey, research for the Forest of Dean Tourism Strategy 2003-2008 and the South East Wales Visitor Survey 2003. These have all highlighted the recent trends of increases in day and short break visitors against a decrease in long term holidaying in the area. The former group are more likely to be families and the latter group to be older age groups with no children. The shorter stay visitors tend to input less per capita / per day into the local economy than long stay visitors. The environmental impact of short stay visitors tends to be higher if there is dependence on the motorcar for transport. The Herefordshire survey identified 91% car use and 5% using public transport, whereas the South East Wales survey identified 81% car use.

8.2.5 Therefore the complexities and variables of local tourism are considerable. But there are ample opportunities to progress more co-ordinated and more sustainable tourism initiatives, including green and eco-tourism ventures, undertaking environmental audits such as Green Audits and Integrated Quality Management, the provision of sustainable transport facilities and services for tourists, and further enhancing the local economy through supporting local farmers and producers.

8.2.6 The Objectives of the AONB Sustainable Tourism Strategy were:-

Objective 1: To improve amenity, traffic management and visitor experience at the most heavily visited sites and at other locations throughout the AONB

Objective 2: To encourage the improvement of existing tourism enterprises and ensure that any new development is compatible with maintaining the varied conservation interests of the AONB

Objective 3: To provide opportunities for holidays based on countryside access and outdoor activities, which do not damage the environment

Objective 4: To increase visitors' awareness and appreciation of the AONB, through improved information and interpretation

Objective 5: To co-ordinate marketing where appropriate, projecting a high quality, sensitive green image of the Wye Valley

Objective 6: To encourage visitors and tourism operators to be more sensitive to conservation issues and to improve the monitoring of impact on the environment

Many positive actions have been achieved as a result of the AONB Sustainable Tourism Strategy. The Objectives above remain relevant.

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 & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|---|--|
| S1 | Encourage and promote only those forms of tourism activity and development that are based on the intrinsic resources and character of the AONB, and that support the conservation, enhancement and quiet enjoyment of the area | a. Defined positive trend in sustainable tourism |
| S2 | 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 | a. Data for AONB collected, collated and analysed |
| S3 | Encourage the amelioration of the adverse impacts of existing tourism activity and attractions, particularly where they are concentrated around certain locations or sites, through the preparation or updating of visitor management plans. Highest priority will be given to addressing the problems in the Symonds Yat and Tintern areas | a. Revised plans for Symonds Yat and Tintern prepared and under implementation |

8.3 Recreation & Access

8.3.1 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 learnt 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. 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. The Wye Valley AONB should continue to be a place where residents and visitors alike enjoy activities that result in the quiet enjoyment of the countryside.

8.3.2 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 bike and 4x4 drivers on Public Rights of Way. Specific issues emerge such as the popularity of sections of the Offa's Dyke Path where severe erosion is occurring by walkers to the Offa's Dyke Scheduled Ancient Monument. Where 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 other users or 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.

8.3.3 There are a range of statutory and voluntary organisations with interests in the recreational activities occurring in the AONB. Various bodies and strategies bring these organisations together. On the river the navigation authority was established in 2002. Issues will now be dealt with by the Environment Agency and the Wye Navigation Advisory Committee which, along with the Wye Management Advisory Group, will take a leading role in resolving conflicts and defining what activities are acceptable on the river. On land each county, under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, has a Local Access Forum, and is preparing a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. However these are based on administrative boundaries and do not cover the AONB as a whole. The 'right to roam' legislation in CRoW Act will not significantly affect the AONB.

The purposes of AONB designation endorse the 'Sandford Principle' in 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.

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

Recreation & Access Policies Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|---|--|
| R1 | Encourage sustainable recreation and access compatible with the AONB purposes - particularly promoting public transport, town and village facilities, canoeing, walking, riding and cycling ahead of the use of private motor vehicles. Associated development and new access to land should be subject to WV-D2, WV-D3 and WV-D4 above | a. Increased use of public transport, town and village facilities by recreation users b. Increased numbers of walkers and cyclists at key promoted locations (within acceptable limits) |
| R2 | Facilitate the resolving of conflicts 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 | a. Reduction in real and perceived conflicts in 3 key areas |
| R3 | Promote high standards of design, repair and maintenance on all public rights of way, recreational trails and sites in order to conserve or enhance the character and natural beauty of the AONB | a. Recreation 2000 / Milestones objectives maintained |

8.4 Appreciation and Understanding

8.4.1 Both residents and visitors in the Wye Valley AONB value the scenic beauty. 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. 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 how the AONB positively contributes to people's lives or businesses. More effective information is required to increase the overall appreciation of the designation, and to engage people more in understanding, contributing to and benefiting from the AONB.

AONB Aim: People's appreciation of the AONB is increased through heightened awareness and understanding of why the area is designated, and engagement with the designation.

Appreciation and Understanding Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|--|---|
| A1 | Increase the profile of the Wye Valley AONB through effective communication and interpretation for both residents and visitors, organisations and businesses, promoting awareness and understanding of the designation and the special qualities of the AONB | a. Feedback, research and anecdotal evidence shows raised awareness of AONB |
| A2 | Regularly check public perceptions about the AONB | a. At least one study undertaken |

See also WV-L7, WV-B6, WV-G3, WV-H5, WV-F7, WV-W8, WV-D6, WV-C2 and WV-P6 for policies on raising awareness, appreciation and understanding about elements of the Wye Valley AONB.



Photo: AONB Unit

Theme 5

9 Achieving together – effective management of the AONB

Partnership, Management and Governance

9.1 The current AONB structures of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and the AONB Unit, supported by the Technical Officers Working Party (TOWP) and various Topic Groups has proved remarkably effective and resilient. These structures have seen significant alterations in AONB status nationally and locally, with Local Government Re-organisation; the formation of the AONB Staff Forum and National Association of AONBs; regionalisation and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Indeed the Wye Valley AONB has been a lead agent in some of these changes. Meanwhile the AONB Unit and partners of the JAC have consistently produced a broad range of practical and strategic achievements in the Wye Valley AONB.

9.2 The AONB Unit is now established as a five-person team. This goes some way to rectifying the steady withdrawal of activity and involvement by Countryside Rangers and Wardens from the area by the local authorities. It also allows the AONB unit to more effectively engage with local communities and other partners to develop both localised projects and AONB wide strategic initiatives.

9.3 The JAC is refining its membership criteria as part of the Countryside Agency’s Management and Governance Review. However significant alterations to the constitution of the AONB are not considered appropriate at this stage. Options for the future include Conservation Board Status, although there is currently no intention or desire to go in that direction in the Wye Valley.

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

Partnership, Management and Governance Strategic Objectives & Targets

| WV- | Strategic Objective | Target for 2009 |
|-----|---|---|
| P1 | Maintain and develop effective partnerships and administrative arrangements to lead and co-ordinate the management of the AONB | a. Strong AONB partnership maintained |
| P2 | Sustain local and national government funding and support for the AONB Unit | a. Funding levels maintained and indexed from 2003/2004 |
| P3 | Utilise existing resources and seek new resources to implement the AONB Management Plan through an agreed annual and rolling 3 year work programme | a. Increase in external funding |
| P4 | Encourage Section 85 organisations, under the CRoW Act, to have co-ordinated policies and actions to progress the purposes of the AONB designation | a. All Section 85 organisations have policies on AONB |
| P5 | Develop the AONB as a model of sustainable development, transportation, access and rural regeneration through exemplary initiatives setting standards for other areas | a. Exemplary initiatives of national and/or regional importance |
| P6 | Inform and engage all relevant interests, especially local communities, in issues and decisions affecting the AONB | a. All parish and community councils and local interest groups regularly involved in AONB matters and receiving ‘Picturesque’ |

- | | | |
|------------|--|--|
| P7 | Encourage partners to promote the AONB in their contact with other interests | a. Feedback and anecdotal evidence shows wide scale promotion of AONB |
| P8 | Encourage and assist partners with initiatives where the objectives are consistent with the purposes of the AONB designation | a. Four high profile partnership projects |
| P9 | 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 | a. Comprehensive database for AONB |
| P10 | Share knowledge and skills in protected area management | a. High profile involvement in National Association for AONBs and Europarc |

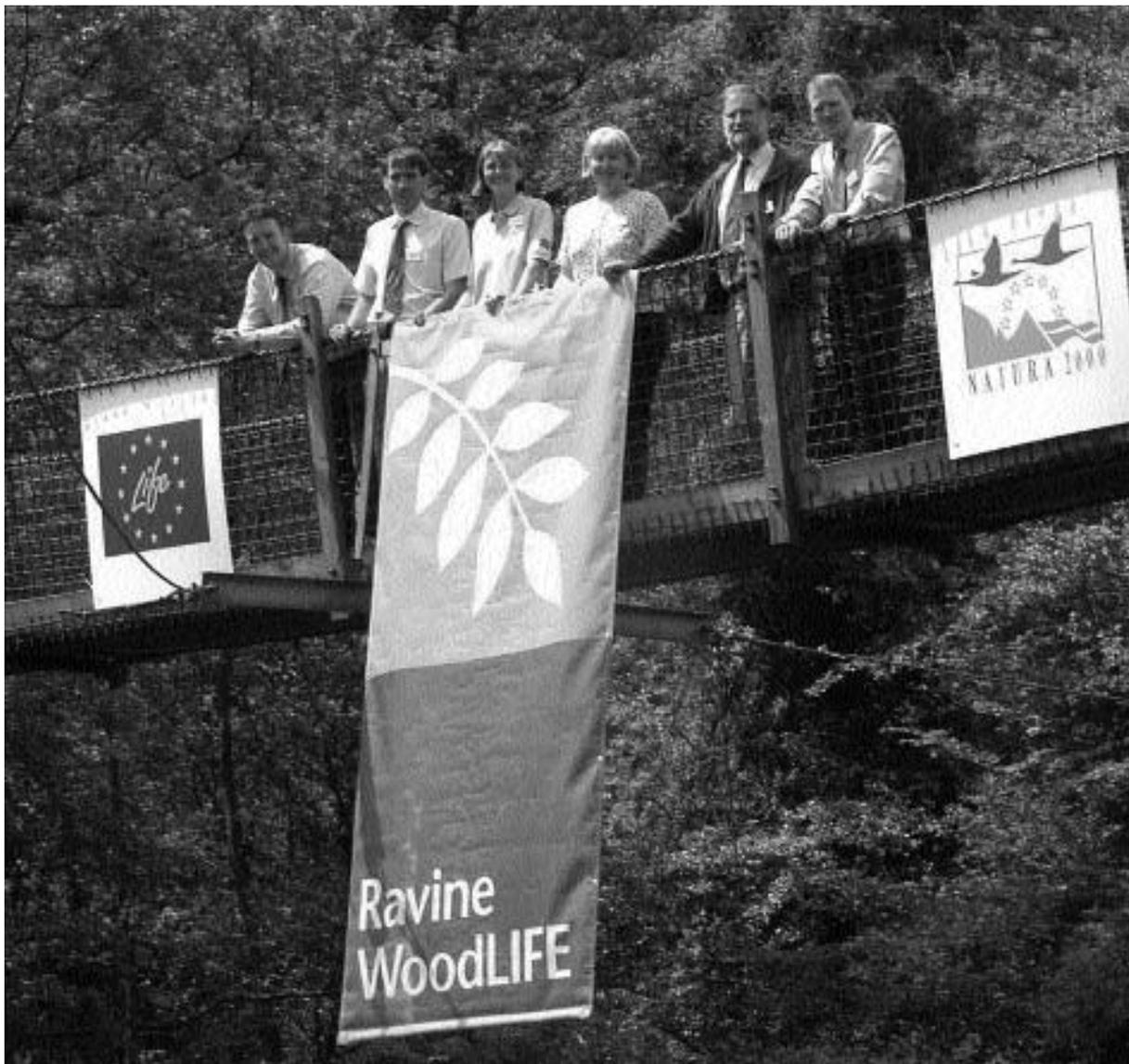


Photo: Ravine WoodLIFE Project