

CLWYDIAN RANGE AND DEE VALLEY AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY JOINT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Committee held in Virtual on Friday, 12 April 2024 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors David Healy (FCC) Dave Hughes (FCC) Nigel Williams (WCBC) and Emrys Wynne (DCC)

ALSO PRESENT

Steve Gadd (Finance and Assurance Manager), Mike Bather (Wrexham County Borough Council), Ceri Lloyd (AONB SDF Officer), Paula O'Hanlon (Senior Finance Officer, DCC) Howard Sutcliffe (AONB Officer), David Shiel (AONB Area Manager), Karen Weaver (AONB Co-ordinator), Clare Lord (Solicitor/ Places Team Leader, DCC), Ash Pearce (Designated Landscapes Programme Team Leader, NRW), Nicola Hughes (Committee Administrator, DCC), Sharon Walker (Committee Administrator/Zoom Host, DCC)

Observers: Councillor Bobby Feeley (AONB Partnership), John Roberts (AONB Partnership), Mike Skuse (AONB Partnership).

1 INTRODUCTIONS, APOLOGIES AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The meeting was opened by the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Officer and Ranger Service Manager, Howard Sutcliffe. The Places Team Leader and Solicitor, Clare Lord suggested everyone attending the meeting introduced themselves for the minute taker to note the attendance at the meeting in the minutes.

Apologies were received from Councillor Win Mullen-James (DCC), Councillor Hugh Jones (WCBC) and Andy Worthington (AONB Partnership Chair).

2 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR (CL)

Nominations were sought for the election of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Committee.

Councillor Emrys Wynne nominated David Hughes for the role of Chair, and this was seconded by David Healy.

David Hughes nominated Nigel Williams for the role of Vice-Chair and this was seconded by David Healy.

There being no further nominations it was:

RESOLVED: that David Hughes be appointed as Chair and Nigel Williams be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Committee.

3 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE AONB JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THE 17 NOVEMBER 2023

The minutes of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Committee held on 17 November 2023 were submitted.

Accuracy –

Page 5 (minutes) – Huw Jones to be amended to Hugh Jones.

Page 8 (minutes) – Moel Famau to be amended to Moel Famau.

Matters arising –

No matters arising were raised.

RESOLVED: that, subject to the above, the minutes of the meeting held on the 17 November 2023 be received and approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

4 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE AONB PARTNERSHIP MEETING HELD ON 26 JANUARY 2024

The draft minutes of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership meeting held on 26 January 2024 were received for information.

The AONB Officer highlighted the following points from the minutes-

A presentation was received at the meeting addressing Inclusion, Diversity and Governance to work towards diversifying the AONB Partnership Membership.

Work to improve the toilet block and car park had now been completed at Horseshoe Falls to improve traffic and visitor flow.

Clwyd West – Levelling Up Fund - Loggerheads had plans being commissioned to alleviate flooding on the site.

Architects were currently working on designs to create a visitor Hub at Moel Famau to help manage visitors.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the AONB Partnership meeting held on the 26 January 2024 be noted.

5 MINUTES FROM THE PICTURESQUE LANDSCAPES STEERING GROUP MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2024

The draft minutes of Our Picturesque Landscape Partnership meeting held on 23 January 2024 were received for information.

The AONB Area manager highlighted the following from the minutes-

Wenffrwd's key link path to the canal was a challenging piece of engineering and this work had now been completed.

Llangollen Museum was to hold its final exhibition displaying OPL work from the end of January and the Ebenezer Chapel in Cefn Mawr had expressed an interest in the exhibition for Spring/Summer 2024.

RESOLVED: that the meetings of the Picturesque Landscapes Steering Group meeting held on the 23 January 2024 be noted.

6 PRESENTATION AND REPORT ON THE DRAFT SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY 2023-2028

The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Sustainable Development Officer guided Members through a presentation on the Draft Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2023-2028.

The Strategy outlined a long-term vision for Sustainable Tourism within the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB.

The vision recognised –

- the increasing number of people participating in outdoor recreation which was placing increasing pressure on fragile and precious ecosystems
- the global and regional challenges arising from climate and nature emergencies
- the challenges facing the industry arising from the cost of living crisis and tourism trends post Covid 19
- the proposed National Park status for an area including the CRDV AONB

The 2023-2028 Sustainable Tourism Strategy was the third plan developed since 2015. In 2015 the impact on the AONB's natural environment had been noted to be relatively limited however, there had been some degree of erosion and pressure on habitats from overuse in a few locations at certain times. In 2019 an impact appraisal was conducted to gather the thoughts of personnel who worked in AONB areas on the impact of tourism within AONB areas. Consolidating responses together, it was felt that without sustainability at its core, the growth of tourism in a region could have serious impacts on people's lifestyles, natural habitats and wildlife, historic sites and essential resources such as water and energy; without careful planning, negative impacts could quickly prevail as tourism grows. This could eventually degrade the destination and lead to the destruction of its assets.

The Draft Sustainable Tourism Strategy had a process to implement the Sustainable Tourism Vision and Action Plan which included the approach, the incorporation of the 9 goals of the vision and commitment.

The 9 goals within the Sustainable Tourism Strategy were –

- Biodiversity
- Communities and Culture
- Visitor Management
- Business Support
- Carbon Footprint
- Waste
- Mitigation and Adaptation
- Communicating with visitors
- Monitoring and Evaluation

In January 2024 a meeting was held to prioritise the goals within the Action Plan. The AONB Sustainable Development Officer further explained each goal within the strategy to the Committee and the responses received back from personnel concerning each goal.

The AONB Sustainable Development Officer stated the Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB Sustainable Tourism Vision for 2050 recognised that the communities/culture, landscape and environment of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB were central to the tourism offer of the region and defined how the management and delivery of tourism can promote and provide experiences of the uniqueness and beauty of the area whilst also protecting and enhancing its special qualities.

The Chair thanked the AONB Sustainable Development Officer for their detailed presentation and question were welcomed from members.

Members commented on the photograph of litter in AONB areas in the presentation and stated that this was an issue for the Local Authority. Members suggested encouraging the public to take their litter home with them and referenced the waste collection methods within different countries involving underground bins with increased capacity.

Members highlighted the challenge of reducing the Carbon Footprint of visitors and referred to sustainable transport, in particular buses and questioned what plans were in place if there were too many visitors to an area at one time. The AONB Sustainable Development Officer stated that the Carbon Footprint of visitors was monitored, and she would gather the information and report back to the Committee at a future meeting.

RESOLVED: *that the Committee adopt the Sustainable Tourism Vision and Action Plan for the AONB covering the year 2023-208.*

7 UPDATE ON NORTHEAST WALES NATIONAL PARK DESIGNATION PROJECT

The Designated Landscapes Programme Team Leader (DLPTL) provided a presentation which included information on the following points: -

- Progress Overview
- Assessments
- Public Engagement
- Next Steps
- Advisory Group changes

Members were given a brief overview of the key elements of the Special Qualities Report, Forces for Change Report and the Management Options Report which were relevant to the Northeast Wales National Park Designation Project.

Details were given on the engagement strategy that had been conducted within the surrounding areas of the proposed new National Park and 949 responses had been received, generally portraying a positive and optimistic feeling towards the National Park. The majority of responses received were from local residents. A table of common concerns was presented to the Committee with tranquillity and sustainability of the area and the impacts on public services being the areas of most concern.

Going forward, the next steps for the Northeast Wales National Park Designation Project included a report to be produced on the engagement period and Impact Assessment and Benefits Analysis being conducted, with public consultation taking place in Autumn 2024.

The Chair thanked the DLPTL for their detailed presentation and questions were welcomed from Members.

Members sought clarity on the Management Advisory Group and questioned if this was to include Members. The DLPTL explained that currently this Group was an Operational Level Group and did not include Members at this stage.

Members discussed the confusion within communities and for many Members regarding the difference between the AONB and a National Park and expressed the need to further educate the public and members on the difference. The DLPTL explained that workshops on the National Park for all Members were planned in the future and further frequent updates would be provided as the project continued.

The Chair thanked the DLPTL for their presentation and for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED: *that the update on the Northeast Wales National Park Designation Project be noted.*

8 NATIONAL LANDSCAPE REBRAND PRESENTATION AND REPORT

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Officer and Ranger Service Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the National Landscape Rebrand report.

Over several years two national reports, the Marston Review (Wales) and the Glover Review (England) had looked at how all aspects of AONBs could be

improved including their future direction. One of the major opportunities was a refresh in the name, direction and branding.

Both reports suggested a change in the name for AONBs to National Landscapes. On 22nd November 2023, AONBs, primarily in England became National Landscapes. For many years the acronym AONB had been mispronounced, misunderstood and had remained in the background of designations.

AONB/National Landscape Teams had been at the forefront of delivering natural solutions to the main challenges facing the nation for many years. The new brand underscores their commitment to redoubling their efforts and engaging with a wider audience. The rebrand marked the next step in fully realising the National Landscapes vision, to be the leading exemplars of how thriving, diverse communities can work with and for nature in the UK: restoring ecosystems, providing food, storing carbon to mitigate the effects of climate change, safeguarding against drought and flooding, whilst also nurturing people's health and well-being.

The AONB Area Manager and Team Leader guided members through a presentation providing further information including –

- Introduction and objectives of the rebrand
- How the brand was developed
- Introduction to the brand identity

Each National Landscape had worked with Nice and Serious to develop a new logo that reflected their landscape or one of its iconic species. There was now a suite of 39 logos (including the National Landscapes Association logo) which made a patchwork representing the whole family. The Committee were shown images of the 39 logos and the reason for their different colours were explained.

The Chair thanked the AONB Area Manager for their presentation and the The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Officer and Ranger Service Manager for his report and comments were welcomed from the Committee.

Members raised concerns regarding the costings of the rebrand and also referred to the plans for a new National Park which would mean a further rebrand in the near future. The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Officer and Ranger Service Manager reassured members that this the costings would be well managed.

RESOLVED: that the Joint Committee adopts the rebranding of AONB areas to the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscapes and becomes The National Landscape Joint Committee.

9 JOINT COMMITTEE ANNUAL RETURN UPDATE REPORT (STANDING ITEM)

The Head of Finance and Property, Steve Gadd (SG) gave a brief update on the Joint Committee Annual Return report to the Committee.

The report gave details of the AONB's projected revenue budget outturn position for 2023/2024. The projected overall position was a contribution from the revenue reserve of c.£20K, slightly less than anticipated when the budget was set.

The report had been audited and signed off and a letter from the Auditors Team would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: *that the AONB Joint Committee Outturn Accounts 2023/2024 be noted.*

10 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (STANDING ITEM)

HS presented the forward work programme and gave a verbal update on progress on the items listed highlighting:

- A new one-year offer had been received from Natural Resources Wales for funding, unfortunately this had reduced from a three year offer.
- Consultation had been held regarding the AONB Management Plan, NRW had commissioned Land Use Consultants to re-write the guidance for National Landscapes Management Plans.
- The Local Authority Legal Agreement had been reviewed in January 2024. It was agreed that there would be no need for reviews of the Joint Committee Legal Agreement however, it would need to be sent to Wrexham and Flintshire Councils.
- AONB Champions had requesting involvement in all aspects of the Committees work and an increase in open and broad meetings had been held to facilitate this.
- Dark Skies initiatives including the changing of lights had had a major impact in Llangollen and aided the reduction in electricity costs.

Members discussed the impact of sewage spillages into rivers and seas and asked if it was relevant for it to be included on the Forward Work Programme. Following a discussion, it was agreed that representatives for Dwr Cymru and the Dee Life Project would be contacted to advise if they would attend a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: *that the Forward Work Programme be noted.*

11 FUTURE MEETING DATES

The next meeting on the AONB Joint Committee is scheduled for 21 June 2024.

RESOLVED: *that the future meeting date be noted.*

Meeting concluded at 11.55am