

Report to: Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 14th May 2015

Lead Member/Officer: Lead Member for Leisure, Youth, Tourism and Rural Development /AONB Officer

Report Author: AONB Officer

Title: The Joint Committee for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) 2014-15 Progress Report

1. What is the report about?

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) stretches from Prestatyn in the North, to Chirk Castle in the South; it includes the attractive towns of Llangollen and Corwen and encompasses 390 square kilometres of the three Counties of Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire. Map (Appendix 1). It is the largest of 5 AONBs in Wales and is nationally protected and locally managed.

From 1996 until November 2014 the AONB was managed by a Joint Advisory Committee and an Interim Joint Advisory Committee (IJAC), this was superseded by The Joint Committee of the three constituent Local Authorities. It met for the first time on the 14th November 2014 and has subsequently appointed the AONB Partnership (Similar to the former IJAC) which meets for the first time tomorrow the 15th May 2015.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

It was agreed at a previous Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meeting that the Lead Member and AONB Officer would update Denbighshire's Partnerships Scrutiny Committee on progress over the first 12 months.

3. What are the Recommendations?

The Committee scrutinises, comments and supports the progress that has been undertaken on AONB Governance and the Projects delivered in the first 12 months

4. Report details.

Governance

The Joint Committee has met twice in the previous 12 months in November 2014 and February 2015, firstly in Ruthin and secondly in Wrexham. A third meeting is due on June the 26th in Mold. The first meeting appointed a chair for the Joint Committee, Councillor Hugh Jones from Wrexham County Borough Council

(WCBC) and a Vice Chair Councillor Huw Jones Denbighshire County Council (DCC).

The Joint Committee agreed to establish an AONB Partnership at its first meeting as per the legal agreement. Members appointed to the Partnership have a primary responsibility to ensure that the Partnership furthers the statutory purposes set out in the CROW Act 2000. They should regard themselves first and foremost as members of the Partnership, with a duty to act in the best interests of the Partnership and of the AONB, rather than representatives of any organisation or interest. The 16 Partnership Members (Which excludes the 9 LA Partnership Members) were agreed at a Sub Group of the JC on the 19th March 2015.

The Joint Committee agreed the following at its two meetings:-

- its Constitution and Legal Agreement
- to advertise and appoint an AONB Partnership
- its Budget
- to consult on Draft Management Plan
- to receive the Forward Work Programme (Appendix 2)

It has also received reports on the following:-

- interim JAC Minutes
- Climate Change Project
- Sustainable Tourism Strategy

As a consequence and possibly in recognition of this closer working relationship and the importance of the AONB around the World Heritage Site (WHS), the AONB Partnership Chair and AONB Officer have been appointed to the World Heritage Site Board.

A very positive funding message has been sign posted by WCBC. It increased their agreed £5,000 contribution for 2014-15 to £12,000 and their 2015-16 contribution to £19,000.

Project in and adjacent to the AONB

It is vitally important that the AONB connects to the surrounding areas, so that those who live there can enjoy the benefits and contribute to the landscape of the AONB, with this in mind the AONB are particularly focused on two areas of work for the future: - Volunteers Strategy and Outreach Strategy these will mutually benefit the AONB and the population who live around it.

Two major projects in the North of the AONB and its surrounding area have been the Green Lynx Project (Appendix 3) and the Cycling Centre of Excellence (Appendix 4), which is both closely linked to the AONB, and the Countryside Officers based in Rhyl.

Welsh Government contributed over £70,000 to the AONB Sustainable Tourism Fund. Here is a taste of the 19 projects the Fund supported:-

- Countryside Grant Schemes to Farmers, 9 projects were undertaken on separate farms, improving hedgerows; 1,760 metres of hedgerow were improved.

- Llanarmon-yn-Iâl - Walls working with local groups and businesses 130 metres of drystone walls were repaired.
- Pentredŵr Village Hall Improvements.
- Gwernymynydd School grounds for wildlife.
- Prestatyn Walking Festival.
- Plas Madoc Families Project.
- Lamb Branding, Clwydian range lamb is now available in the Food Hall at the Tweedmill.
- Pantymwyn Village Hall.
- Young Rangers.
- Llangollen Walking Festival.
- AONB Food Trail.
- Plas Madoc Youth Project.
- Corwen Welcome the Train.
- Shepherds Hut Moel Famau, this facility now provides traditional refreshments and local employment at Moel Famau.
- Community Transport, transport can be a barrier to groups getting out this fund was designed to help groups access the AONB.

The AONB Team has led and supported on a number of other major projects including:-

- Corwen Welcomes the Train - the AONB team have undertaken work in conjunction with the railway, local businesses and train users to deliver a number of initiatives. These included an official launch of the railway extension. An AONB presence at a railway gala event. Corwen business advertising on the temporary platform. The development of promotional material and souvenirs, such as postcards, mugs and plaques. The installation of new benches on the path between the railway and town, and in Coed Pen y Pigyn woodland, to provide better opportunities to enjoy a short stay in Corwen. (see leaflet)
- Llantysilio toilet refurbishment and improvements to car park, interpretation and access to the Horseshoe Falls.
- Contribution to the Chain Bridge restoration.
- Work on improving access to the Jubilee Tower and improvements to interpretation (see leaflet)
- Drafting of an SEA, State of the AONB Report, Management Plan and Action Plan.
- Adoption of Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2015-20 and as part of the action plan award of AONB Badge to 5 Activity Operators in the AONB.
- The Alyn and Wheeler landscape-scale project obtained grant funding from WREN and staff have continued to support implementation of the project via the NWWT project officer.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- **Economy-** there is no doubt that rural tourism economy plays a key role to the success of rural Authorities; the AONB supports this aim through the delivery of projects and partnerships.

- **Health and Wellbeing-** Both visitors and residents are encouraged to participate in outdoor events from walking, cycling, education to specific health events. In the future one aspect of work will focus on an inclusion project on education for other areas in North Wales and the North West.
- **Community-** Welsh Government has in recent years, played a pivotal role in supporting the AONBs through their Sustainable Development Fund.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

Denbighshire is the Lead Authority for the AONB as it has been since local government reorganisation in 1996. It will continue to be the lead Authority for the Joint Committee; as such it will provide the following officers for the Joint Committee: the Secretary and Treasurer. The Joint Committee meetings will be hosted by each Authority in turn; the host Authority will provide the Secretariat for that meeting. These costs will be mainly to Legal and Democratic Services. Denbighshire will provide a separate budget line and report to the Committee. As with all Joint Committee Budgets the budget will have to be independently audited. These are costs to Finance and Countryside.

In terms of the budget, the current budget can be seen in the legal agreement. Over the next five years the budget will become, by negotiation equitable between the three Authorities.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

See Appendix 5

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The AONB Officer consulted Partnerships Scrutiny Committee in 2014 on the new governance arrangements. The Joint Committee is by its nature a partnership and will lead on consulting and working with the AONB Partnership and other organisations.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The financial position of the Joint Committee (JC) has been reported to each of the JC meetings held so far. The meetings have provided a forum to scrutinise both the income and expenditure of the JC and also to formally approve the budget for 2014/15 and 2015/16. Work is currently ongoing to produce the final accounts for the JC which involves producing separate financial statements to the Local Authority. The financial statements for 2014/15 will be taken to the next meeting in June for formal approval and a note regarding the statements will be included in DCC's Statement of Accounts. The increase in annual contributions from Wrexham County Borough Council has been noted and welcomed.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- **Financial-** The risk is low; it is monitored and reported on by DCC Finance Officers.
- **Reputation-** The formation of the Joint Committee and AONB Partnership formalises the AONB Governance, and shows that the Local Authorities can work in a structured and collaborative way.

11. Power to make the Decision

11.1 The legal basis to establishing a Joint Committee lies in Section 101(5) of the Local Government Act of 1972 and the Local Government Act 2000, where Local authorities can enter arrangements to 'Discharge functions jointly with one or more other local authorities by means of a Joint Committee.'

11.2 Scrutiny's powers with respect to the partnerships such as the AONB are detailed in Article 6.1 and 6.3.4(d).

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