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Appendix 2

The Review of Designated
Landscapes in Wales
Third Floor, South Core, CO4,
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Cathays Park,
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Dear Professor Terry Marsden,

The Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales Response to Stage Two, Denbighshire County Council

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) forms an imposing upland frontier in North East Wales, one of Britain's scenic highlights. This AONB covers 390 square kilometres of windswept hilltops, heather moorland, limestone crags and wooded valleys, almost touching the coast at Prestatyn in the north and stretches to dramatic Moel Fferna, the highest point in the AONB at 630 metres, in the south. The area embraces some of Wales's most glorious landscape, the iconic Moel Famau, the World Heritage Site of Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Llangollen Canal and Castell Dinas Bran.

The Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), designated in 1985 celebrates its 30th Anniversary this year. In 2011 the Vale of Llangollen and the Dee Valley were also designated as an AONB. The two areas were joined, creating the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB. It is the most recent landscape designation in Wales and the largest AONB in Wales.

The extent of the AONB crosses the Local Authorities of Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham. The area contained within Denbighshire is the largest of the three Authorities at around 80%.

Denbighshire County Council (DCC) has been the lead authority since initial designation and has a dedicated AONB team within its Countryside Service. The Authority, with its other local authority partners, supports the principles and purposes of AONBs and proactively contributes to the delivery of the AONB Management Plan.

It recognises the AONB landscape supports a rich biological and cultural resource that delivers benefits for communities, local economies and ecosystems, often beyond its boundaries.

Denbighshire County Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute their comments to the Second Stage of the Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales.

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Question 1. What are the most effective governance arrangements for designated landscapes that allow them to lead on and meet ambitious outcomes within and for Wales?

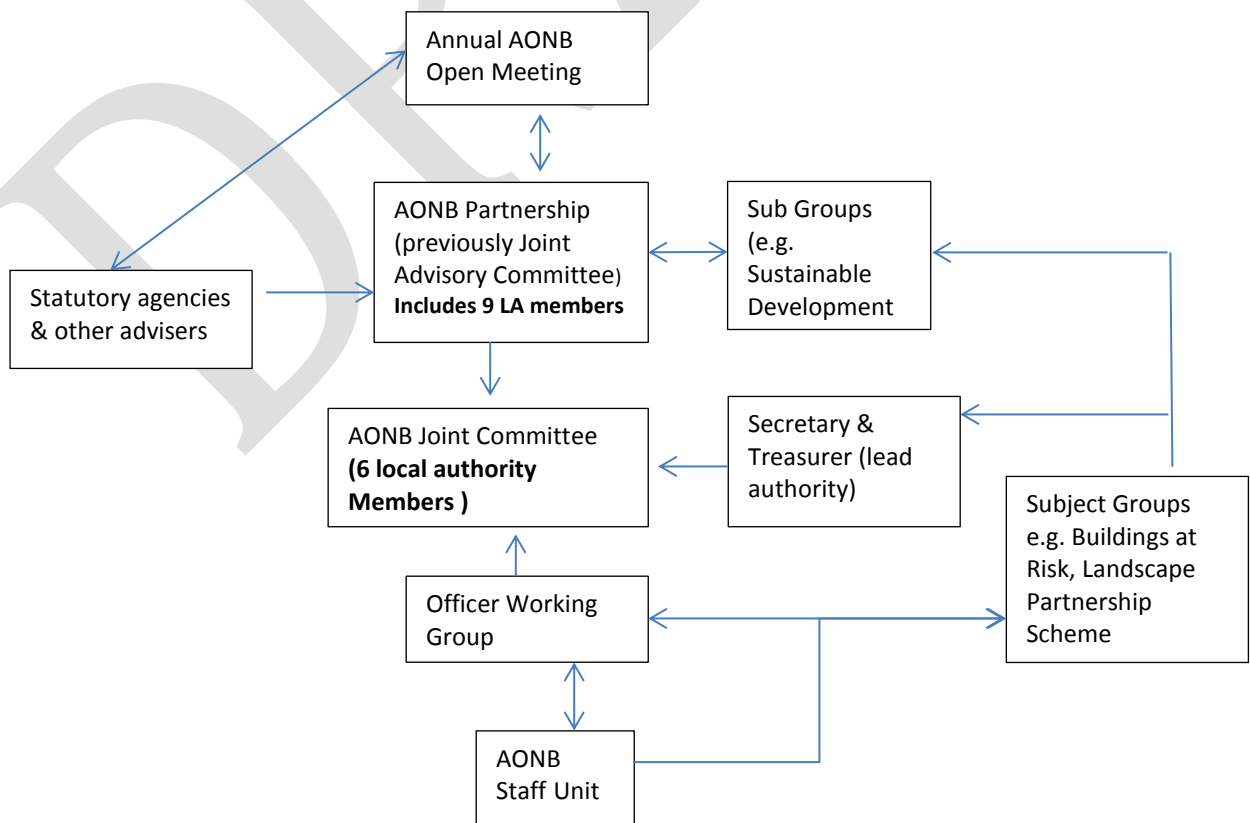
DCC believe that effective governance arrangements for AONBs need to enable:

- the delivery of its statutory purpose to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area
- All public bodies and statutory undertakers as defined in Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 – to have a duty to have regard for the purposes of ANOBs
- Support of the AONB vision and enable the delivery of the AONB management plan
- The coordination of a State of the Environment Report for the AONB.
- AONB policies and projects contribute to the delivery of other National, Regional and local policies and plans.
- an open and accountable structure, a balanced representation of local interest and engagement with local communities

The extended Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB is in its infancy. Following its designation, an Interim Joint Advisory Committee was established to guide the work of officers during a transitional phase. During this period a revised governance procedure was established and agreed by Denbighshire and Flintshire County Councils and Wrexham County Borough Council.

Under Section 102 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 2000 and regulations made under it, the local authorities created a Joint Committee to discharge the executive functions of the AONB, supported by an AONB Partnership and other subgroups.

The structure of the current governance arrangements for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB can be summarised in the following chart:



Two Council Executive members from each local authority have been appointed to the Joint Committee. The Committee has only met twice to date.

AONB Partnership members have also now been appointed by the Joint Committee following an open recruitment and application process. A total of 38 high quality applications were received for a total of 16 seats, with the remaining seats reserved for three county council member representatives nominated by each of the respective local authorities. Places on the Partnership Committee are linked to interest areas (Land management, Rural, Urban, Landscape, Recreation, Historic Environment, Natural Environment, and Business) to ensure that a balance of membership is sustained. Three places are reserved for individual interest. The first meeting of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Partnership Committee will be held on the 15th of May 2015 and it is therefore not possible to provide actual evidence of its operational success.

Nevertheless it is felt that the current governance structure positions the AONB well to serve its statutory purpose and deliver against the management plan. Denbighshire County Council is represented at the highest level and 5 (possibly 6) elected members are involved.

The current structure has the benefit of senior political commitment from each local authority area, coupled with community engagement achieved through the Partnership. The governance arrangement is further strengthened by an Officer Working Group which also has representation from each local authority and includes other agencies, such as Natural Resources Wales. National bodies and groups are able to feed into the governance arrangement as advisors or within subject or sub-groups.

Within the governance structure the annual AONB open meeting provides the opportunity for people with an interest in Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB to share their views and provide information to shape future work plans, which would include local communities from within and outside of the area, politicians, landowners, user groups and many more.

Within a national context, the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB staff and committee members regularly meet with other AONBs across England and Wales to share good practice and discuss solutions to shared issues. Natural Resources Wales co-ordinates meetings for protected landscapes and provide valuable advice and guidance on both a national and local level. The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) also hosts meetings and a national conference for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In addition, the Association hosts a useful online Basecamp discussion forum, where AONBs can pose questions and generate debates. The forum is an excellent mechanism to avoid the duplication of work and also to share experience. Training events have been provided by the NAAONB, with one of the most recent held at Plas Tan y Bwlch in Snowdonia, targeted towards Welsh AONB Committee Members. As employees of the lead authority, staff engage with all of the above opportunities.

Denbighshire County Council also acknowledges that through the AONB activities, the County makes an contribution on the international landscape stage as a member of Europarc. It has secured the Europarc Sustainable Tourism Charter in the past and in partnership with others, has received a Bronze Medal Europa Nostra Cultural Award for the contribution of the Heather and Hill forts Landscape Partnership Scheme.

Denbighshire County Council feels that the current governance structure of the AONB provides an excellent framework to meet its statutory duty and deliver its management plan within a local, national and international context.

Other matters worthy to note during the governance review are:

- Some governance models available to AONBs, for example Conservation Boards and Limited Liability Companies have the disadvantage of not being VAT exempt, which would effectively result in a 20% decrease in funding.
- Any changes in governance arrangement proposed must be fit for purpose. Committees, authorities or Conservations Boards are appropriate for some areas where the scale is larger. In a Welsh setting, DCC do not feel the scale is right for what would be cumbersome and unwieldy governance structures with too many members. A maximum size of 12 members for the main committee is suggested.
- Additional resources would need to be made available for designated landscapes to support changes in governance resulting from the review.

Question 2. In light of the Review's Stage One report and recommendations and the Minister for Natural Resources' written statement (dated the 4th of March) what is your vision and ambition for the direction of Wales' designated landscapes in the medium to long term?

Denbighshire County Council support the vision for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB as set out in the management plan. This vision is

A dynamic landscape with flourishing communities and a thriving local economy; A landscape that supports a rich biological and cultural resource, delivering benefits for the communities, economies and ecosystems far beyond its boundary.

A landscape that is cherished as a peaceful haven by those living in and visiting the AONB and is treasured for its open spaces and commanding views. Its special features and the benefits they provide are understood and appreciated by all.

An AONB that is managed through sound and effective partnerships which ensure that communities and visitors are fully engaged in decision making and are empowered to have a stake in their local landscape and invest in its future.

For the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB to be a flagship for sustainable development and forward planning with its international protection as a category V protected landscapes making it influential on an international, national and local stage.

In attaining the AONB vision, Denbighshire County Council supports Recommendation 5 of the First Stage of the Designated Landscape for one statutory purpose and duty for both AONBs and National Parks and supports the three interlocking statutory purposes.

Question 3. From a governance perspective, what factors are preventing and/or likely to prevent designated landscapes from achieving the vision you set out in response to question 2?

Denbighshire County Council believes the achievement of the vision for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB is linked to resources. How much of the vision is achieved is dependent on Welsh Government funding as delivered through Natural Resources Wales and the local authorities. The Sustainable Development Fund has been very beneficial to lever additional resources towards the delivery of the AONB vision, especially through the work of partners at a local level. AONB Officers have been very successful in the past in securing additional resources from European and Lottery Funds. However these sources of funding are very resource heavy to attain, by nature ad hoc and becoming increasingly competitive due to the current economic climate.

Further, Denbighshire County Council believes there is a direct link between committing resources and the commitment to joint working by the partners. As resources become scarcer, there is a danger partners will reduce their commitments to the partnership or even disengage completely. The strength of the partnerships and the collaborative working within them will be tested at these times and strong governance is vital to secure continued support. DCC are committed to the partnership of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB and believe the current structure is as resilient as it can be to this kind of pressure.

Question 4. From a governance perspective, what factors will allow designated landscapes to achieve the vision and ambition you set out in response to question 2?

The vision for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB can only be delivered in partnership with others. It depends on effective partnerships between a number of departments within the local authority, between local authorities and also external organisations and the local community. It is the enthusiasm of the people, often driven by a passion for the special qualities of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley landscape and its communities that underpins the delivery of the management plan and vision for the area. DCC believes the governance structure reflects this commitment to partnerships and delivers the passion at a community level.

Question 5. Are there other designated landscape/protected area governance models/approaches you wish to bring to the attention of the Review?

Denbighshire County Council considers local authority support to be fundamental to the local AONB partnerships and the delivery of the AONB management plan. It should be regarded as one of the real strengths underpinning AONB management. However, occasionally, AONB partnerships are required to consider national perspectives in their decision making. To this end, national representation on the AONB Partnership might be beneficial and an idea worthy of further investigation.

A copy of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Draft Management Plan, State of the Environment Report and latest Annual Report is available in support of this response on request.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with Huw Rees, Countryside and Heritage Services Manager, Denbighshire County Council should you require any further information with regards to this response-, huw.rees@denbighshire.gov.uk .

Yours faithfully

Councillor Huw Jones

Lead member, Leisure, Youth, Tourism and Rural Development
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