

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership

Minutes of the Meeting held on
Friday 21st October 2016

At
Theatre Clwyd, Mold
at 10:30 am

AONB Partnership Members

Representing Land Management

Gareth Wyn Jones

Representing Access and Recreation

Andrew Worthington OBE (Chair)

Sandy Archdale

Individual Interest

John I Roberts

Representing Rural Interest

Christine Evans

Roger Cragg

Representing Business Interest

Dewi Davies

Urban Interest

(Dee Valley and World Heritage Site)

Del Roberts-Jones

Individual Interest

David Davies

Representing Landscape Interest

Michael Skuse

Representing Historical Interest

Tony King

Representing Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB

Howard Sutcliffe (AONB Officer)

David Shiel (Assistant AONB Officer)

Tony Hughes (AONB Planning Officer)

Karen Holthofer (AONB Communications Officer)

Ceri Lloyd (AONB Sustainable Development Officer)

Helen Mrowiec (AONB Senior Recreation Officer)

Representing Wrexham County Borough Council

Councillor RJ Dutton OBE

Anna Irwin (Senior Conservation and Environment Officer)

Representing Denbighshire County Council

Councillor Merfyn Parry

Councillor Martyn Holland

Representing Flintshire County Council

Councillor Paul Cunningham (Vice Chair)

Councillor Colin Legg

together with

Tom Woodall

(Head of FCC Countryside Service & ROW)

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Observer

Paul Mitchell

Apologies for Absence were submitted from: -

Cllr Hugh Jones (WCBC), Cllr Huw L Jones (DCC), Cllr Stuart Davies,

Cllr Lloyd Kenyon, Huw Rees, Ian Papworth, Helen Walker, Sharron Jones

Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed members to the autumn meeting of the Partnership.

Councillor Huw L Jones (Denbighshire County Council)

The AONB Officer said that he was pleased to report that following Councillor Huw Jones' serious illness, he was now making good progress and was currently convalescing at home.

Action

Best wishes to be sent to Councillor Huw Jones on behalf of the Partnership.

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on May 13th 2016

The minutes were agreed as a correct.

Matters arising

3.2 New Partnership Member

Urban Representative (Dee Valley and World Heritage Site)

The AONB Officer informed the meeting that a new member had now been appointed, Del Roberts-Jones. The Chair welcomed Del to the Partnership and said that he was looked forward to her contribution.

9.1 Parking within the AONB

The Assistant AONB Officer explained that the Land Management & Natural Environment / Recreation and Tourism Working Group was currently examining congestion and parking throughout the AONB. A short review had been proposed to analyse available data, and establish a wider picture of the parking situation. 'Hotspots' included the Horseshoe Falls and the World Heritage Site, Loggerheads and Moel Famau.

Upper Car Park at Loggerheads

The new car park was now open at Loggerheads, which would provide around 70 extra car parking spaces.

9.2 Future Landscapes Wales Working Group

The Review of Protected Landscapes in Wales

Welsh Government had undertaken a review of protected landscapes in Wales. The AONB Officer and Assistant AONB Officer attended the Working Group meetings, and the AONB Officer and that a draft report would be circulated by Welsh Government by November.

2. Update from the AONB Officer

The AONB Officer provided a brief summary of the projects that the AONB had recently been involved in: Wrexham Walking Festival, Flintshire County Council Business Week, and Prestatyn Walking Festival.

The AONB Officer had completed a presentation to Flintshire County Council Scrutiny Committee which had been well received, and he underlined the importance of keeping the three Local Authorities updated on all of the work/projects that the AONB completed.

- 2.1 National Association of AONB's (NAAONB) Annual Conference
This year's conference was held at Lilleshall in the Midlands, and some members of the AONB Team had led a field trip for conference members. Delegates cycled from Trevor Basin to Llangollen with information provided on the World Heritage Site and Our Picturesque Landscape Partnership Scheme.
- 2.2 National Association of AONB's (NAAONB) 'Outstanding Week'
Outstanding Week (17th - 25th September) was coordinated by the NAAONB, and the campaign was for all the AONB's throughout England and Wales promoting AONBs for one week on all social media about their ecological importance and economic value. The majority of AONB's also convened events for that week. The AONB Officer had led three walks on behalf of the AONB, and the Friends of the Clwydian Range & Dee Valley also contributed an event. The campaign was a success and would be held annually.
- 2.3 National Grid Visual Improvement Initiative (VIP) included the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)
The AONB Officer explained that the LEI was a large scale national programme by National Grid to mitigate the impact of overhead lines in protected landscapes. He represented all AONBs on the VIP Steering Group. He explained that the majority of the funding would be invested in undergrounding major transmission lines in a number of National Parks/AONBs. Unfortunately our AONB was not a priority for undergrounding in this round, but would be eligible for significant grants through the LEI (up to £200k per project) to help mitigate local impact.
- The AONB would be submitting an expression of interest for projects associated with the Corwen – Treuddyn and Tremeirchion overhead lines. The projects were still being developed in partnership with farmers and landowners, and would include, for example, grants for hedgerow and tree planting works and roadside verge management. The LEI project locally was being developed and led by the Land Management and Natural Environment Working Group.
- 2.4 Scottish Power Overhead Line Undergrounding Programme
This initiative was for low voltage schemes, the sites that had been proposed were: Moel y Parc, Horseshoe Pass (up to the Ponderosa), Ty Mawr Country Park, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, Horseshoe Falls and Toll booth Café area on the A5
- 2.5 Sewage Works near Poncysyllte Aqueduct
The AONB Officer updated members on various actions that were being taken to press for removal or remediation of this eyesore within the World Heritage Site. The Landscape Character and Built Environment Working Group were leading on this item.
3. Presentation: 'Our Picturesque Landscape Project'
Project Officer, Sarah Jeffery with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation provided a clear and concise presentation on the project explaining that 'key views' of the project area were currently being analysed, with proposals currently being developed to reinstate the views.
Current deliberations included; Parking and congestion, Surveying and engaging with different groups within the community, Interpretation of the sites - to create a sense of arrival at the area.

Phase one of the project consisted of Consultations being held, and securing Match Funding. Current Work included a Community Engagement Plan. Plans for the restoration of the Dell at Plas Newydd and a plan for Wernffrwd Site - at Llangollen. Five Community Consultation events had been held, and on the whole were well attended.

Discussion ensued. It was proposed that engagement with schools/school children should be key area of the project. Del Roberts Jones said that the project had been welcomed in the Dee Valley, with good engagement from the community.

One member said that the term 'picturesque' must be emphasised throughout the project, because it might not be properly understood in this context:

"The word **picturesque** referred to an ideal type of landscape that has an artistic appeal, in that it was beautiful, but also with some elements of wildness or irregularity" - Tate Art Gallery Website

Another member shared that he was a member of the Thomas Pennant Historical Group, and the Picturesque Project had been discussed at a recent meeting.

All agreed that it was a fantastic project that would generate a lot of benefits for both the AONB and World Heritage Site. Members looked forward to hearing about the progress of the project. The Chair thanked Sarah Jeffery for a most interesting presentation.

4. Partnership Working Groups

The Chairpersons of the Working Groups provided a brief verbal update on the progress of the groups.

Report from Chairpersons of the Working Groups

4.1 Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Working Group

Mike Skuse reported that there were 27 approved projects this year with a total of £58,000 awarded. The smallest application approved was for £300 for a community map of Carrog, which would be erected in the village. The largest approved project was for £5,000 which, together with further contributions from Cadwyn Clwyd, would be expended to restore the iconic red phone boxes into tourist information points or defibrillator units etc. Another worthwhile project which was awarded £1,000, was aimed to provide transport to groups who wanted to visit the AONB but lacked the funds to hire a mini bus to do so. This project supported underprivileged groups and was now in its third year. £5,000 of the funding was provided to the Countryside Grant Scheme, in partnership with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG). This fund was available to farmers for restoration schemes, providing 50% of the cost (maximum of £1,000). Five applications were currently being investigated. Mike on behalf of the Working Group thanked the Sustainable Development Officer, Ceri Lloyd and the Assistant AONB Officer, David Shiel for their continuing excellent work.

Discussion ensued. Councillor Owen Thomas said that he represented Cilcain and Nannerch Community Council, and he had attended today's meeting to raise concerns/awareness regarding the increasing number of visitors to the village accessing the countryside around. This put pressure on facilities including the public conveniences that are run and funded by the community. Councillor Thomas also raised concerns regarding parking in Cilcain, explaining that the car park was a community car park, paid for and managed by the community of Cilcain, therefore for the use of the community. The increasing number of visitors in the villages was causing problems. Councillor Thomas asked that the AONB was mindful of the impact to local communities of visitors to the AONB and asked if

there would be support to help tackle some of these issues. The Assistant AONB Officer responded that congestion was a real concern and the AONB were considering options on how to cope with the capacity of visitors in hotspot areas of the AONB. He added that the AONB were consulting the community of Cilcain regarding the local conveniences and how they could be sustained.

In summing up the Chair said that this item would be considered further by the Partnership and thanked Councillor Thomas for his contribution.

RESOLVED

That the Partnership take the raised issues forward

SDF Funding to be investigated

4.2 Landscape Character and Built Environment of the AONB Working Group

Councillor Martyn Holland reported that the group had met on October 14th at which the Dark Sky initiative was discussed. It was recognised that some areas of the AONB may not be dark enough to meet a Dark Sky Reserve criteria, but there were alternative designations. Cadwyn Clwyd had confirmed funding of £10k, and the project could now be taken forward.

Undergrounding of overhead electricity lines was also discussed and it was encouraging that some of the utility companies were working in collaboration with the AONB in key areas.

The Chair also advised that the roll out of improved broad band connectivity by BT Open Reach had raised a number of issues over the siting of some of the new poles. However, BT had been contacted and discussions were underway.

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) was discussed, the SPG was a long standing action in the AONB Management Plan. An SPG was required to improve the quality of development in the AONB and to add value to the planning process, thus reducing the number of applications that the AONB commented on. A key issue that was considered was the change of use to Holiday Park. Land at Maes Mynan Quarry, Afonwen, In particular, concerns were raised about the impact on tranquillity and views from the higher ground of the AONB.

Ash Die Back

Ash Die Back had been identified at Loggerheads. Ash was a prominent tree in the area and the possible long term effects on the landscape was of great concern.

4.3 Heritage, Culture and Communities

Christine Evans, reported that a second meeting was held at Trelawnyd Memorial Hall on September 29th 2016. Fiona Gale had circulated copies of the recently published Management Plan and discussed a report which has recently been submitted to NRW, of work which has taken place within the AONB.

This included:

- Management work at Gop cairn
- Excavations at Penycloddiau and Moel y Gaer, Bodfari
- Interpretive work at the Clive Engine House

Ian Grant from CPAT reported on the community archaeology work which had been taking place at Tomen y Rhodwydd, which had resulted with the motte and bailey castle being virtually free of gorse and scrub.

Caves Project

Will Davies from Cadw provided a verbal update of the Cadw funded Caves Project which was taking place in the limestone areas, partly in the AONB. There had been some excavations within the AONB at Llanarmon and Loggerheads.

The recent incident of damage at Dinas Bran (and more recently at Gop) was discussed, and focussed on the role of the Heritage Crime officers within the Police. The opportunities potentially provided by the National Grid, Landscape Enhancement Initiative were mentioned. Fiona would provide a draft Forward Work programme at the next meeting which was convened for December 15th 2016. The Chair thanked Christine for her update.

4.4 Land Management and the Natural Environment

Gareth Wyn Jones reported that two meetings had been held to date, and at the last meeting the Management Plan was discussed.

Alyn and Chilwer Living Landscape Project

A verbal update on the Alyn and Chilwer project was provided by Project Officer, Amy Green. Amy explained that the Balsam Bashing Project had been successful, and traps had been now been set for minks (re: the Mink Project).

BIRDS Project

This was a potential project looking at Moorland Management across five moorland Estates, Rhug, Nantyr, Vivod, Llanarmon and Ruabon. Moorland Management, was discussed.

National Grid Landscape Enhancement Scheme (LEI)

The LEI was considered, and maps and information had been circulated for Tremeirchion and the Morwynion Valley, as the two areas that this project related to within the AONB. Bracken spraying and road side verges in Tremeirchion had been considered, and an Expression of Interest had been submitted.

North East Wales Grazing Scheme (NEWGS)

This was a Sustainable Management Scheme, and an Expression of Interest (EOI) had been submitted. The EOI bid was unsuccessful but the application did score highly. The AONB had been invited to resubmit the application into the next round which closed at the end of November.

In summing up Gareth said that he was enjoying his time on the AONB Partnership, and that he would do his utmost to assist the AONB wherever he could.

4.5 Recreation, Tourism and Business Engagement

Dewi Davies reported that Helen Mrowiec was investigating the possibility of receiving information from the CAMS (Countryside Access Management Software) on behalf of the group to request information regarding the status of footpaths/rights of way.

Community Miles

Hannah Arndt had circulated the list of 15 Community Miles routes including five routes that were not within the AONB. All leaflets were available as downloadable pdf's on either the AONB or Denbighshire Countryside Service websites. Dewi said that the Community Miles were an excellent project and resource.

The Limestone Legacy Project

The Limestone Legacy Project was discussed, and a new leaflet would be produced by the end of the year.

Visitor Access Data

The current statistics on visitor numbers and trends were circulated to the group, congestion, was considered and it was agreed that a review should be commissioned to address congestion across the AONB as this work would be beyond the current capacity of the AONB team it should be addressed from a Destination Management Perspective. An initial two page summary would be prepared in the interim.

Sustainable Tourism Plan

Dewi explained that, the group had been asked to develop a list of suggested dormant projects, that if or when funding became available the projects would be ready go.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) Review

ROIWPs were required to be reviewed every 5 years. Flintshire County Council were submitting a Plan of Intention by end of October, Wrexham CBC and Denbighshire CC are also required to do so at a later date. The group would be consulted as part of the ROWIP review process.

Discussion ensued. The Chair said that merging all the collected data together and analysing this would be a key objective for the group.

Several members noted that more than one Working Group was considering parking within the AONB. The Assistant AONB Officer explained that several Working Groups may need to consider parking/congestion. However, e.g. a Lead Group and a Delivery Group and joint meetings might held. All findings would be brought back to the Partnership for discussion.

In summing up the Chair said that it was clear that a great amount of work had been being completed within the Working Groups which would then be fed through to the full Partnership Meetings and this was commendable.

The Chair thanked the Chairpersons of the Working Groups for their updates.

5. AONB Annual Forum

This year's theme was the 'Natural Environment'

The Forum would be held on Wednesday 30th November 2016 at

Twm y Nant Theatre, Denbigh 6 pm – 8:30 pm

The speakers for the Forum were:

Martin Clift – RSPB

Amy Green – Alyn & Chilwer Landscape Project

Sarah Bird - Chester Zoo

All members were invited to attend

5.1 Local Members & Community Councils within the AONB Annual Forum

This year's Forum would be held on Monday 5th December at

Loggerheads Meeting Room 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm

The purpose of the Forum was to update all the Local Members & Community Councils of the work that the AONB had accomplished within the last year.

6. Review of AONB Familiarisation Days

The AONB Officer said that two Familiarisation days had been held since the last meeting, Prestatyn Hillside and the steam train through the Dee Valley from Llangollen to the Berwyn Station, and Horseshoe Falls. The next event was on Friday November 4th to visit Caer Drewyn Hillfort, Corwen. The AONB Officer said that the days had been a great success and had enabled members to network together as well as visiting key sites in the AONB.

It was proposed that the summer meeting of the Partnership should include a site visit. Discussion ensued. Cllr Paul Cunningham said that the Familiarisation Days had been excellent, and he along with other members had learnt a great deal about the AONB. Members asked that it be noted that in future site visits there should be some consideration for members that had limited walking. Visits to specific work projects would also be useful and this idea was strongly supported.

RESOLVED

- Site visit to be undertaken in conjunction with the Summer Partnership Meeting
- Consideration to be given to members that cannot walk very far
- Specific site/project visits to compliment Familiarisation Days

7. Application for Dark Sky Reserve

The Assistant AONB Officer summarised the advantages of this project in relation to conserving tranquillity and biodiversity in the AONB together with tourism development opportunities and reported progress since the last meeting. Some progress had also been made in meetings with a number of the highway authorities covering the AONB in respect of street lighting. An application to Cadwyn Clwyd for funding an initial feasibility study to take the Dark Skies project forward had been successful and a £10k grant secured. The study would encompass surveys of the quality and extent of dark skies in the AONB and an assessment of the data in relation to the criteria for formal recognition/ designation of all or parts of the AONB as a dark sky area. He advised that this was unlikely to be full designation as a Dark Sky Reserve but that there are alternative designations. An action plan to take the project forward along with public and business engagement/consultation would also be included.

8. AONB Award for 2016

Eight nominations had been put forward

1. Community Shop /café Llandegla
2. Highfield Park, Llangwyfan
3. The new visitor Centre at St Teclas Church
4. The community of Llandegla
5. John Harrison
6. Friends of the Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB
7. James Yale & Mike Worsley
8. Village Bakery

The AONB Officer said that there were joint winners for the award, Volunteers, James Yale & Mike Worsley, and the Community of Llandegla.

The AONB Officer suggested that the AONB had two awards:

AONB Award - for outstanding contribution to the AONB, and a

Volunteer Award – for outstanding volunteers

Councillor Paul Cunningham proposed that the AONB have two annual awards, this was second by John Roberts

Discussion was held regarding the scoring of the nominations and whether there should there be some targets to be met to receive the award. The AONB Officer responded that he did not want the award to be over complicated.

However, it was agreed that a scoring matrix would be investigated ahead of next year's awards.

RESOLVED

- That the 2016 AONB Awards be presented to:
- Volunteers, James Yale & Mike Worsley
- Community of Llandegla including the Community Shop and the Visitor Centre at St Teclas Church
- A Scoring matrix to be investigated for next year's award

9. **Any Other Business**

- 9.1 The Senior Recreation Officer informed the meeting that the AONB had been successful in securing £33,000 additional funding from a Welsh Government Capital Access Grant Programme. The grant would support projects at Gop, Tan y Cut Woods work linked to Promoted Routes in the area.

The Chair thanked members for their contribution to the Working Groups and reiterated that going forward, these groups would continue to strengthen.
Meeting closed.

10. **Future Meeting Dates:**

AONB Partnership Meetings:

Friday 10th March 10th

Friday 23rd June 2017

Friday 6th October 2017