



**Bryniau Clwyd a  
Dyffryn Dyfrdwy**  
Clwydian Range  
and Dee Valley

Ardal o Harddwch Naturlol Eithriadol  
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

## **Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Annual Report 2016/17**



## **Contents**

- Introduction Page 3

### **Communities and People Page 4**

1. Governance
2. Community Engagement

### **Land Management and the Natural Environment Page 9**

3. Heather Moorland
4. Limestone Grassland, cliffs and Screes
5. Broad leaved woodland and Veteran Trees
6. River Valleys.

### **The Historic Environment Page 16**

7. Industrial Features and the World Heritage Site
8. Historic Defensive Features
9. Small Historic Features
10. Boundaries

### **Access Recreation and Tourism Page 22**

11. Iconic Visitor sites
12. Offas Dyke Path National Trail and Promoted Routes.

### **Landscape and Character and the Built Environment Page 30**

13. Landscape Quality and Character
14. The Built Environment.

## Introduction

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is the dramatic upland frontier of North East Wales.

This AONB almost touches the coast at Prestatyn Hillside in the north and stretches south as far as Moel Fferna, the highest point in the AONB at 630 metres, it covers 390 square kilometres of windswept hilltops, heather moorland, limestone crags and wooded valleys. The Clwydian Range is an unmistakable chain of purple heather-clad summits, topped by Britain's most strikingly situated Hillforts. The Range's highest hill at 554 metres is Moel Famau, a familiar site to residents of the North West. The historic Jubilee Tower surmounts this hill with views over 11 counties.

Beyond the windswept Horseshoe Pass, over Llantysilio Mountain, lies the glorious Dee Valley with historic Llangollen, a famous market town rich in cultural and industrial heritage.

The AONB is led by the Joint Committee (JC), the Committee consists of two Executive Members from each of the three local authorities that the AONB straddles. The JC members who have devolved powers from the Local Authorities, ensure that the AONB is relevant and also democratic. Each of the three authorities makes a substantial financial contribution to the AONB. Denbighshire County Council hosts the AONB Team and provides for financial, legal and democratic support. The Team is directly responsible to the Joint Committee via its Lead Officer.

The Local Authorities are supported by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) who gave a direct Grant to the AONB for staff and projects of £112,000 for 2016/17. They also fund work on the Offa's Dyke National Trail to £15,000 for 2016/17. NRW are also funding two other Projects, 'Active Alyn Valley' and 'Limestone Legacy.' The combined grant from these two projects over three years amounts to £272,000.

Welsh Government have again substantially supported the work of the AONB with a Grant for the Sustainable Development Fund for £87,000 and a one off grant for £30,000 for improving the Rights of Way Network.

The AONB Team manage 24 sites on behalf of Denbighshire County Council which includes some of the busiest honey pots of the AONB including Loggerheads Country Park, Moel Famau Country Park and Horseshoe Falls. The AONB Team has also taken over the management of Plas Newydd the historic home of the Ladies of Llangollen.

The rest of the report give the detail of the work of the AONB Team and its Partners.

Here are a few highlights:

- 847 volunteer days and 101 events advertised
- AONB Climate Change 10schools visited, 26 teachers trained and a lesson for 565 children
- Out and About had 53 events in the AONB attracting 2,667 people
- The Friends of the Clwydian Range now have over 190 members
- The Horseshoe Falls in the World Heritage Site attracted 111,401 visitors
- 5,190 people attended one of the Healthy Walks
- 70 Car Parking space created at Loggerheads Country Park

- 281 Planning Applications commented on
- 10 participants attained the AONB Badge

## COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE

### Management Plan Objective

PCO4 - Ensure that the governance of the AONB promotes effective partnerships and fosters opportunities for communities to engage in the management of the AONB.

### Governance

The governance of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB is structured to reflect an appropriate balance between its important strategic role within the 3 local authorities of Flintshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire, an effective working relationship with key outside bodies and an effective working partnership with the communities that make up the AONB.

#### Joint Committee.

The three Local Authorities of Denbighshire, Wrexham and Flintshire entered into a legal agreement to jointly discharge their AONB functions by means of a Joint Committee for the AONB in the summer of 2014. The Committee is made up of Lead members (members of the Authority's Executive or Cabinet) of each Local Authority and has the power to act on behalf of those Local Authorities in delivering the purposes of the AONB. It is supported by an Officer's Working Group of relevant officers from the constituent local authorities and Natural Resources Wales and the AONB Partnership.

The Joint Committee of the AONB has met 3 times in 2016 with each Local Authorities hosting a meeting.

#### The AONB Partnership

The AONB Partnership reports to and advises the Joint Committee in the development and delivery of the AONB Management Plan. It was established to ensure a wide range of interests are represented in planning and delivering the work of the AONB. There are 25 members representing:

- Urban Communities
- Rural Communities
- Landowners
- Recreation and Access
- Other Special Interests

Five Working Groups have been established to help focus the work of the Partnership in steering the delivery of the AONB Management Plan. These are:

- Landscape Character and Built Environment
- Land Management and Natural Environment
- Historic Environment
- Recreation Access and Tourism
- Sustainable Development Fund

Each Working Group is able to expand its membership to beyond the partnership and can co-opt members from relevant bodies to advise on particular aspects of work. The Land Management and Natural Environment Group for example includes the Biodiversity Officers from each of the Local Authorities and well officers from the north Wales Wildlife Trust. Similarly the historic Environment Group has co-opted representation from Cadw, the Royal Commission and CPAT.



The Partnership has met a total of 3 times this year. Most working Groups have met at least 4 times with the exception of the Landscape Character and Built Environment Group which has met 6 times. This group meets more often in order to consider planning applications.

### Familiarisation Visits

A series of Familiarisation Visits have been held for the Partnership in order to explore some of the projects taking place and some of the issues facing the AONB.

In all 6 Familiarisation Visits have been held across the AONB covering a wide range of aspects of AONB management. Visits have include:

- *Coed Nercwys – NRW / AONB Forest Partnership Working.*
- *Pontcysyllte Aqueduct – World Heritage Site Partnerships and Our Picturesque Landscape Landscape Partnership Scheme*
- *Aberdunna Quarry – Minerals Policy and Quarry restoration Scheme.*
- *Prestatyn Hillside – SSSI Management and Offa’s Dyke National Trail.*
- *Llangollen – Llangollen railway – Horseshoe Falls – WHS management*
- *Caer Drewyn, Corwen – Iron Age Hillfort Access Management.*

The AONB Annual Forum this year was themed around the Natural Environment and show cased some of the conservation initiatives currently taking place with partners, including the Alun and Wheeler Living Landscape Project – North Wales Wildlife Trust, Black Grouse Recovery Project – RSPB and Species Recovery – Chester Zoo. The Forum took Place in Twm o’r Nant Theatre in Denbigh with approximately **50 people attending**.

### **AONB Award**

Every Year the AONB Partnership present an award to an individual, group or business in recognition of an outstanding contribution to the landscape of the AONB. This year the Award went to the Community of Llandegla for their efforts in successfully sustaining and expanding facilities and services in the village. In particular the Partnership recognised the Community Shop, established in the old School building and replacing the Post Office which has recently closed. It also recognised the work of the St Tecla’s Church Group in establishing an Information Point and refreshment centre in the Church – providing an important facility for walkers of the Offa’s Dyke National Trail.

This year the Partnership also took the opportunity to establish a new award for Volunteering in the AONB. The Award was presented to James Worsely who volunteers at Loggerheads Country Park every week despite having suffered a brain injury as a teenager.

The award ceremony took place in the village of Llandegla followed by a tour of the village.



### **Volunteers**

The AONB has continued to provide and support a wide range of volunteering opportunities across the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley. Two Volunteer Programmes have been produced for both Winter and Summer Activities featuring **101 events**. A further 75 events were organised outside of the Volunteer Programme with specific groups and communities giving a total of **176 volunteering opportunities** provided by the AONB through the year.

There have been a total of **847 volunteer days** across a range of practical activities across the AONB.

Volunteers carried out a range of diverse tasks across the AONB, contributing their time to help with community projects, essential maintenance at AONB sites, landscape projects, conservation and habitat work and access improvements.

Highlights include the charcoal production at Loggerheads Country Park where volunteers produced enough charcoal to fill 15 bags which were sold in the Loggerheads Visitor Centre to raise money for further conservation work in the Park.

### **Young Rangers**

Young Rangers in the Dee Valley AONB have developed into a strongly attended group and have enjoyed their first full year of learning new skills and visiting different areas of the Dee Valley.

There are now 20 young rangers registered in the Dee Valley, most of whom attend regularly. Activities are spread over a wide range of sites and engaging with a range of partners. This year activities have included:

- Ty Mawr Country Park joint session with Wrexham Rangers – animal care
- Coed Pen y Pigyn – woodland activities
- Trefor Rocks – climbing
- Ty Mawr Country Park with Wrexham Rangers – balsam bashing
- Llyn Brenig (Welsh Water) – replacing posts on an archaeological site
- Llangollen – Bushcraft day
- Llangollen Canal with CRT – habitat management and canoeing on the canal
- Corwen Platform with Llangollen Railway – managing scrub on the line and a tour of the work sheds.
- Coed Pen y Pigyn – woodland management.
- Corwen – Cynwyd Railway Line – Coppicing and bushcraft skills.



In addition to our regular young rangers, joint activities with Ruabon Youth Group have also been undertaken, including 3 days of activities for their summer scheme.

The Young Rangers in the Clwydian Range have evolved with older members leaving for University and new young rangers joining. Events included coppicing at Loggerheads Country Park, wildlife surveying and monitoring, exploring Devil's Gorge and some of the mines around the Leete, coracle building and canoeing on the canal.

Young Rangers is continuing to provide a useful pathway into further study and potential employment in the environmental sector. For example Aled Williams, a Young Ranger for 2 years recently secured a place on a Forestry and Conservation course at Coleg Cambria after being inspired by the Young Ranger activities. Aled is now completing 300 work experience hours with the AONB as part of his course.

### **Supporting Community Groups**

The AONB has also provided practical support to a range of community groups in caring for their own local environments.

AONB staff for example have assisted Flintshare, a community food growing group based in Cilcain. Staff and volunteers helped to construct a new wooden bridge in order to improve access on to site. Approximately 40m of new path was also constructed. Funding was provided by the Sustainable Development Fund.

### **Corwen Community Garden**

The AONB has developed a partnership with Canolfan Ni and Exercise on Referral in Corwen providing opportunities for volunteers to develop a small area of land in the centre of Corwen as a Community Garden. Regular volunteer sessions started in November, every Wednesday, with sessions carrying out pruning and maintenance of the orchard trees. This has continued over the winter preparing new for planting. The development of the garden has provided the group with the opportunity to consider how to develop the garden and agree on general principles of growing good plants for pollinators and edible plants.

### **Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley**

The Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley continues to go from strength to strength. The group has put together a comprehensive events calendar, which includes visits to see black grouse and nightjars, Ruthin market, well attended talks on topics such as the weather, air crash sites, the AONB and behind the scenes visits to historic houses and sites not normally open to the general public. Through the efforts of the trustees the **membership** has now grown to over **190**. The Friends also sponsored a school group competition relating to the Picturesque Landscape of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley in addition to sponsoring the plants to restore the formal garden at Plas Newydd, in addition to providing a helping hand with the planting work!





## Ysgol Clawdd Offa Transition Project

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB worked with Denbighshire Art Service on a Project with Ysgol Clawdd Offa Year 6 students and their transition to secondary school. The children worked with two artists with their work being exhibited at The Oriol at Loggerheads. The School children then came on a site visit out to Loggerheads to visit the exhibition, completed a guided walk and activities along the industrial trail and a climate change workshop.

## Community Transport

The Sustainable Development Fund supported the AONB to establish a small fund available for groups for the hire of minibuses to enable them to travel and gain better access to the AONB. This is the fourth year the AONB has provided this service for community groups. In 2016/17 fund were accessed by four groups supporting 31 participants who would not otherwise have been able to visit the AONB.

## LAND MANGEMENT AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- Heather Moorland
- Limestone grassland crags and cliffs
- Broadleaved Woodland and Veteran Trees

### Management Plan Objectives

**HMRO1**- Work with the North Wales Bionet Group to maintain or extend the current extent of heather moorland within the AONB.

**HMRO2** - Bring areas of heather moorland into positive productive management.

**HMRO3** - Continue to monitor black grouse and other upland bird species as an indicator of habitat condition.

**HMRO4** - Associate high quality food production with ecosystem management.

**HMRO5**- Support and encourage sustainable grouse moors management where it has positive environmental and economic impacts.

**HMRO6** - Provide support to farmers and landowners in upland areas to bring moorlands into management schemes.

- River Valleys.

## Heather Moorland

### Clwydian Range

The AONB co-ordinated 2 days of heather burning in the Clwydian Range this year, one day supporting a grazier to carry out a controlled burn on Moel Arthur and one day carrying out a

controlled burn with volunteers within Coed Moel Famau in an area which has seen very little management over the last few years since the area was felled. This area is now ready to bring into positive heather management to increase the area of open forest edge, an important habitat for black grouse. The area also benefitted from 3 days of flailing using a robotic flail, provided by the Natural Resources Wales partnership and 2 days of heather cutting. **HMRO2 / HMRO6**

The annual black grouse count for the Clwydian Range was held on April 20<sup>th</sup>. This covers an area between Moel y Parc and Moel Fenlli. Although there was misty conditions, **38 males were recorded**, making it a record year for the Clwydian Range. **HMRO3**



### **Moel Findeg Local Nature Reserve**

Work to manage the heathland on the Local Nature Reserve at Moel Findeg has continued this year. One day of flailing and harrowing has taken place to break up pockets of bracken litter in order to stimulate the recovery of heather and bilberry.

Volunteers have also spent 11 days between October and March clearing scrub off the heathland and burning brash on a single fire site. Individual volunteer days amounted to **70 days**, adding up to **350 hours**. The extensive work programme this winter has significantly moved the heathland condition on the LNR. **HMRO2**

### **Clwydian Range Lamb**

The AONB has continued to support the production and promotion of Clwydian Range lamb into local markets. The project has developed a number of local markets for lamb farmed on Moel Famau and links the quality of the product and the conservation of the uplands at the point of sale.

The project has been showcased at two events exploring the benefits of Landscape Labelling in the wider food sector in promoting and supporting landscape conservation. AONB staff attended events in Cardiff and Brussels.

The AONB are now working with the Llangollen and Dee Valley Good Grub Club to explore the feasibility of Dee valley Lamb and other products linked to landscape management. **HMRO4.**

### **Llantysilio Mountain.**

The AONB team assisted Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust in an upland wading bird survey in June 2016, covering the western end of the Llantysilio Mountains, in the Bwlch y Groes area. Two pairs of curlew were recorded as part of the survey.

The AONB has been working with RSPB and the graziers on Llantysilio Mountain to target heather management to favour both black grouse and curlew as well as improving grazing for stock. In total approximately **20 Ha of cutting** has taken place

In addition the AONB has lead on a trial programme of corvid control in order safeguard the very vulnerable curlew population. Working with graziers, the AONB co-ordinated a programme of control throughout the spring.

The black grouse counts on Llantysilio Mountain recorded a total of **15 leking males** – up from only 11 in 2016. **5 pairs of curlew** also recorded.

## Limestone Grassland, Cliffs and Screes.

### Management Plan Objectives

**LGPO1**- Maintain the current extent of calcareous grassland and limestone pavement within the AONB.

**LGPO2** - Bring all areas of public owned / managed limestone grassland, cliffs and screes into favourable management schemes.

**LGPO3** - Provide opportunities for privately owned areas of limestone grassland and pavement to come into favourable management schemes.

**LGPO4** - Ensure that recreational pressure is minimised in sensitive areas.

## Loggerheads and the Alyn Valley – SAC

Local contractors spent five days clearing over 5000m<sup>2</sup> of scrub off the grasslands at Loggerheads Country Park as part of the Actif Alyn project. The clearance took place along the top of the cliffs and at the top of the park in an area known as the butterfly glades, which supports a small population of the grizzled skipper, a priority species.

An area of the glades has also been fenced in order to extend the area managed through conservation grazing. Approximately 1400m<sup>2</sup> has been fenced



which has also created greater flexibility and control of the grazing of the area with a greater ability to respond to changing conditions. **LGPO1/LGPO2**

### **Prestatyn Hillside SSSI**

The AONB has been working with NRW to extend and maintain the area of calcareous grassland across Prestatyn Hillside. This year 2500m<sup>2</sup> of bramble was removed by contractors to open up Manor Hill quarry floor which opens up areas of exposed limestone. 1300m<sup>2</sup> of scrub and woodland was also thinned to open up the impressive views of the quarry and to help reduce the instances of anti-social behaviour. **LGPO1/LGPO2 /LGPO4**



Contractors also spent 5 days clearing scrub from Prestatyn Hillside SSSI. Contractors removed tree saplings and gorse to benefit the sensitive limestone grassland around Pant y Fachwen cottage close to the Offa's Dyke Nation Trail. In all approximately 1500m<sup>2</sup> was cleared of scrub.

Contractor, staff and volunteers have opened up viewpoints and improved the footpath between the fish cave and Pant y Fachwen Cottage on Prestatyn Hillside by stabilising the lower bank, 30m of footpath was improved in total.

### **Rock Farm**

Through the Limestone Legacy Project work has taken place to improve and extend the species rich grassland around the Roadside Nature Reserve at Eglwyseg. Approximately half a hectare of grassland has been cleared working with both contractors and volunteers. The verge is also part of a wider SSSI and SAC, a species rich calcareous grassland with a rich floristic diversity including fairy flax, devils bit scabious, dwarf thistle and both early purple and common spotted orchids. Much of the grassland had become fragmented by encroaching scrub and pioneering woodland. **LGPO3**



## North East Wales Grazing Scheme

The AONB has taken the lead on a project that aims to bring areas of conservation interest into sustainable grazing regimes. Working with PONT and 9 partners across North East Wales the AONB has been successful in a stage one application to Welsh Governments Sustainable Management Scheme and is now developing the project further for a stage two application in September. The project covers 41 sites across 4 counties and will invest in the necessary infrastructure and clearance work required for the introduction of livestock for conservation purposes. The project will co-ordinate the introduction and movement of the appropriate stock for each site at the right time of year through and engage with communities, volunteers, colleges and develop monitoring programmes and training schemes. The project would also investigate landscape labelling opportunities and invest in interpretation. The project would include limestone grassland, heathland and heather moorland sites within the AONB. **LGPO1 / LGPO2 / LGPO3**

## Broad leaved Woodland and Veteran Trees

### Management Plan Objectives

**WVTO1** - Maintain the current extent of broadleaved woodland and veteran trees within the AONB having regard for other policies within the management strategy.

**WVTO2** - Protect veteran trees within the landscape across the AONB.

**WVTO3** - Maintain and restore broadleaved woodland towards a favourable condition through the implementation of Biodiversity Action Plans for Mixed Ash Woodlands, Upland Oak Woodlands and Wet Woodlands.

**WVTO4** - Develop publically owned woodlands as models of best practice in broadleaf woodland

## Loggerheads and the Ayn Valley.

As part of the Limestone Legacy Project contractors spent 6 days removing non-native grand fir trees from the Ayn Valley. The parent trees were also removed as they were a significant seed source for the emerging saplings covering an area of the ash woodland within Loggerheads Country Park. **WVTO1 / WVTO4**

The AONB has also spent 7 days working with arboriculture students from Coleg Cambria thinning the woodland at Loggerheads, removing beech and sycamore in favour of ash. **WVTO1 / WVTO4**

Volunteers assisted with 3 day work thinning the woodland at Coed Alex between Nannerch and Llangwyfan. **WVTO1 / WVTO4** As part of the North Wales Wildlife Trust Alyn and Wheeler Living Landscape Project school children from Cilcain helped to plant **200 trees** to link up two areas of woodland.



## River Valleys

### Management Plan Objectives

**RVO1** - Continue to monitor the extent of key indicator species such as otter and water vole in order to gauge habitat condition.

**RVO2** - Continue to develop a partnership of key agencies and bodies to ensure an integrated and landscape approach to management.

**RVO3** - Support and develop a landscape scale approach to a programme of invasive species control particularly in relation to Himalayan balsam.

**RVO4** - Raise awareness amongst the general public and landowners/managers of the importance of the river valleys for biodiversity.

### Alyn and Wheeler Living Landscape Project

The AONB has been working with North Wales Wild Trust to improve habitats in the corridor of the River Alyn and River Wheeler.

This year the project installed a new bridge at Y Ddol Uchaf nature reserve in place of pipes which were creating a barrier to fish movement up the river and also constricted the river causing it to burst its banks and flood an area of the reserve during winter when resident dormice hibernate at ground level.

The project also worked with AONB staff and volunteers to clear Himalayan balsam from approximately **8km** of riverbank on the Alyn and Wheeler

Last summer the project involved over 60 officer hours and 158 volunteer hours. The benefits of the project are visible as the area of coverage by the invasive species is declining in areas of previous clearance.

The project has also created a new pond at Afonwen and carried out habitat improvement works in the Wheeler valley linking up key habitats for dormouse and water vole. **RVO2 / RVO4**

The project has also held a mink trapping workshop with 7 landowners attending and interesting in carrying out control of the non-native predator. **RVO4**



## Dee Valley

The AONB continues to be key partners for the Big Dee Day – The Invasion.

Last year, the AONB held 3 volunteer days, focussing efforts in the Corwen area. In total, 34 people attended and have helped manage balsam on two key sites in Corwen, Ddol Afon and Gro Isa.

In addition to the three BDDI days, a Young Rangers Event was held at Ty Mawr Country Park to manage balsam with **11 attending**.

In addition a river dipping event on the Dee at Gro Isa was held as an opportunity for families with youngsters to explore and discover the rich aquatic life of the Dee – as well as having a function to raise the profile of BDDI – part of the event was to allow youngsters to pull balsam. **12 people attended**.



The AONB has also started working more closely with Corwen Anglers (CADAC) who have been managing Invasive Non Native Species on their section of the Dee for several years. Staff spent a day with **8 members of CADAC** clearing dense stands of balsam on various beats in the Cynwyd/Llandrillo area. AONB is hoping to develop this partnership further this year.

## HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

- Historic Settlement and Archaeology.
- Industrial Features and the World Heritage Site
- Historic Defence Features
- Small Historic Features
- Traditional Boundaries

### Historic Settlement and Archaeology.

#### Management Plan Objectives

**HSAO1** - Work towards a position where the condition/state of all archaeological sites within the AONB is known and appropriate management work is carried out. Utilise HER information, Pan Wales projects, Glastir agri-environment schemes and the planning process to facilitate this.

**HSAO2** - Encourage owners of Historic parks and Gardens within the AONB to maintain and restore existing parkland features as noted in the Register.

**HSAO3** - Increase the profile of the Historic Environment through effective and consistent Interpretation and information.

**HSAO4** - Incorporate information gathered as part of the Historic Environment Record into the continuous management process within the AONB.

### Gop Cairn

Work has taken place at Gop Cairn to address issued of tree encroachment onto the monument. Contractors have removed approximately .25 hectare of blackthorn and willow scrub that had been encroaching onto the site. The work as well as safeguarding the monument, has also improved the view of this impressive structure form Trelawyd and the approach to the site.

Funding from Welsh Government has also been secured to improve access to the site and to produce a leaflet. **HSAO1**





## Industrial Features and the World Heritage Site

### The World Heritage Site

#### Management Plan Objectives

**WHSO2** - Identify and maintain key views to and from the World Heritage Site and the visual and cultural setting in line with other policies in this strategy.

**WHSO3** - Take steps to manage the impact of visitor on the historic integrity and setting of the World Heritage Site through the provision of facilities, signage and services in appropriate locations.

**WHSO4** - Ensure a consistent or complimentary approach to interpretation, signage and quality of the experience for the World Heritage Site across partnership authorities.

**WHSO5** - Raise awareness of the importance of industrial sites and features within the planning and AONB.

**WHSO6** - Develop an “at risk “ register for key industrial historic sites and work towards programmes that will respond where action is required.

The AONB is working with Wrexham County Borough Council and the Canal and River Trust to review the Management Plan for the World Heritage Site. The work includes an updating the gazetteer of structures throughout the World Heritage Site and a formal survey of all these features has taken place. **WHSO1** **WHSO1** - Secure the integrity of the outstanding universal values of the World Heritage

#### Our Picturesque Landscape

The Our Picturesque Landscape Partnership Scheme was successful in securing a Heritage Lottery Grant to submit a Landscape Conservation Plan working towards a 5 year project. The Landscape Partnership has undertaken community consultations, detailed drawings for projects relating to the Dell at Plas Newydd and Wernffrwd, Habitat and Heritage Surveys. 5 successful funding applications have been made to Cadwyn Clwyd towards the project development. **WHSO1 / WHSO2**

#### Historic Defensive Features

##### Tomen y Rhodwedd

The AONB has been working with CPAT to clear vegetation from the motte and baily castle at Tomen y Rhodwedd near Llandegla. The site is one of only 3 motte and baily castle sites in the AONB and had become completely overgrown with gorse and scrub. Working with volunteers and students from Llyfasi the site has been cleared of scrub revealing the



impressive banks and ditches of the original site.

This enable geophysical survey work to take place which has been able to locate the entrance and a number of structures with the castle. This information has been used to produce an interpretation panel for the site. The landowner has agreed to grant public access to the site and new gates and waymarkers have been installed.

Not only is the site now visible from the road, but now have access to this fascinating and important site. **DFSO2**



### **Castell Dinas Bran**

With funding from Cadw, the Welsh Castles Group carried out geophysical works at Castell Dinas Bran. This work was able to cover an area including both the Iron Age hillfort and the medieval castle. Initial finding suggest that ridge and furrow crop growing may have been taking place within the ramparts of the hillfort and these possibly pre date the construction of the medieval castle.

**DFSO1 DFSO2**

### **Hillforts in the Clwydian Range.**

The AONB has continued to have a strong relationship with a number of universities engaged in long term excavation of hillforts in the Clwydian Range. Liverpool University have spent a 5<sup>th</sup> year at Penycloddiau on an excavation centred around a possible entrance to the hillfort on its Eastern edge. The work is also being used to train university students in excavation techniques.

Oxford University are also continuing with excavation work at Moel y Gaer hillfort in Bodfari. Both programmes have included public open days that have been well attended.



## Small Historic Features

### Management Plan Objectives

**SHFO1**- Raise awareness of the importance of small historic features within both the planning and highways environments by providing training sessions to professionals.

**SHFO2** - Encourage Communities to identify and map features within their communities on a standard database.

**SHFO3** - Encourage Communities to adopt these features and act as their champions by raising awareness within community councils and youth groups.

### Telephone kiosks

SDF provided investment to safeguard and upgrade 5 K.G .Gilbert Scott red telephone kiosk that are considered to be an important historic features of the AONB. Once under threat of removal these kiosks have now been preserved as part of the rural landscape. Working with a local design company and interpretation consultant all kiosk have a standard shell scheme which include and interpretation panel, informative map and local information which will and encourage visitors to explore the area further, prolonging their stay.

AONB officers held a day with local school children to develop interpretative ideas. **SHFO2 / SHFO3**.



### Pant y Fachwen

An area around the remains of a miners cottage on Prestatyn Hillside has been cleared as part of the Limestone Legacy project. The cottage is a prominent feature on the hillside but had become completely over grown. The project has cleared vegetation from around the site, reconsolidated some of the walls and installed a bench within the structure. **SHFO2 / SHFO3**

Vegetation from around other industrial features on Prestatyn Hillside have also been cleared as part of the project, in particular in Manor Hill Quarry.

### Hillside Gardens Shelter.

Also as part of the Limestone Legacy project the shelter at Hillside Gardens have been renovated. The shelter was built in the 1920s in art deco style and is now a listed building. The AONB worked with the local community to address structural issues with the view platform which forms part of the shelter and weather proofed the structure. The project also painted the building. **SHFO2 / SHFO3**



### Leete Culvert Survey and repair

Specialist stone masons have been engaged to repair the external arches of a stone built culvert across the leete close to Pantymwyn. The structure is one of the few original features that remain and has deteriorated significantly in recent years. A further report was commissioned into the integrity of the rest of the structure and recommendations have been made for further works in the centre of the culvert. Further remedial works will be carried out in the summer of 2017. Without this work there is a danger of further collapse. **SHFO2 / SHFO3**



## Boundaries

### Management Plan Objectives

**BO1** - Using SDF and other funds develop a Countryside Grant schemes to support projects That will maintain and enhance the most important boundaries in the AONB as well as other Special Features.

**BO2** - In line with aspirations within The Welsh Historic Environment Strategic Statement (2009) raise the skills base amongst the local workforce to increase the number of people who can carry out the necessary conservation and repair work.

**BO3** - Identify the most important boundaries within the AONB.

### **Countryside Grant Schemes**

Four boundary restoration and conservation schemes were supported in 2016/17 delivered in conjunction with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. An initial site visit is undertaken to advise on the scheme followed by the finished project inspection. Schemes took place in Pentrecelyn, Llangynhafal, Llandrynog and Penycae.

**BO1**



Volunteers assisted in the planting of 400m of new hedge as part of the car park landscaping scheme at Loggerheads. **BO2**

**400 metres** of hedge was renovated around Tomen y Rhodwedd with coppicing taking place and over 1,000 new whips planted.

As part of the Our Picturesque Landscape Project Development works hedgerows in the Dee Valley have been mapped using a combination of aerial photography and ground truthing visits. This is an initial step in establishing the extent and condition of hedgerows in the AONB. **BO3**

### **Drystone walling**

As part of the Volunteer programme of events volunteers have restored 20m of wall in Gwaenysgor, 10m of wall on the slopes of Moel Arthur and 15m of the boundary wall at Coed Nercwys. **BO2**



### **National Grid Landscape Enhancement Scheme.**

In initial application has been made to National Grid as part of their Landscape Enhancement Initiative to mitigate overhead lines. It is centred the Morwynion Valley and the Tremeirchion areas. The scheme targets hedge row and drystone wall restoration, working with landowners in these areas. A total of 12 schemes have been agreed locally and the initial application to National Grid was successful. A stage two application has now been submitted and the AONB is awaiting the outcome. **BO1 / BO2**

## ACCESS RECREATION AND TOURISM

- Iconic visitor and Cultural Attractions
- Offa's Dyke National Trail and Promoted Routes

### Management Plan Objectives

**IVCO1** - Ensure that visitors and the tourism industry understand the need for, and support the conservation and enhancement of, the special qualities of the AONB as key assets upon which tourism is based.

**IVCO2** Promote and assist convenient and sustainable access into the AONB and special places within it.

**IVCO3** Continue to develop public transport links and develop a strategy to reduce congestion between honey-pots and with other centres of population.

**IVCO4** Investigate ways to reduce congestion around key visitor areas.

The AONB have continued to work with a number of key business sector groups to strengthen the link between the high quality landscape of the AONB and the tourism economy and to promote activity tourism.

### Business engagement.

#### Dee Valley Active

With support from Denbighshire's Economic Development Board the AONB have been working with the outdoor sector in the Dee Valley to develop a single point of sale for outdoor activity tourism. Arran Cartwright Associates was commissioned to look develop an online mechanism for individual businesses to come together to promote activity packages. 10 businesses have come together and are working with the TIC in Llangollen to establish a single point of sale through webticketmanger.



In addition in order to promote and develop employment opportunities in the outdoor sector the AONB commissioned a skills audit for the outdoor sector and has developed a bespoke training package for river based activities. The training includes Paddle Sport Leader training, Swift Water rescue and First Aid.

The programme has also taken the opportunity to develop training sessions in the landscape, history and ecology of the river aimed at the outdoor sector lead by NRW, the AONB and the Canal and River Trust.

### **Clwydian Range Food Trail**

The AONB has continued to support the Clwydian Range Food Trail to link high quality produce with the outstanding landscape of the AONB. This year the group have worked with the AONB to develop a “pop up shop” and other promotional material. The popup shop will provide the group with the means to attend local food festivals and shows and will help to raise the profile of the group.

### **Llangollen and Dee Valley good Grub Club.**

The AONB has also been working with the food sector to establish a similar business group in the Dee Valley. The Good Grub Club was established in July and has already grown to 20 members. The group represent producers, retailers and farmers in the Dee Valley and have secured funding to develop a brand and are working towards a food directory. They are working closely with the Clwydian Range Food Trail.

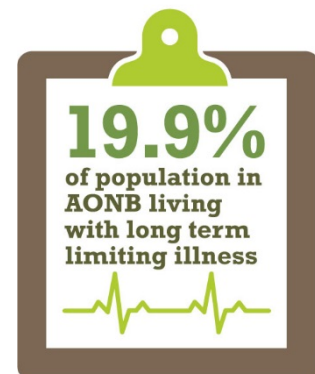
Officers have been developing connections with local authority tourism teams and North East Wales Destination Management Partnerships to improve working relations and understanding of the AONB. The AONB has featured in North East Wales’ Year of Legends Film and online brochure: <http://www.northeastwales.wales/listings/year-of-legends/> .

Officers have also delivered modules for the NEW Ambassador Programme, a similar initiative to the AONB Guides Course focused on the NEW Tourism offer.

## **Health and Wellbeing**

### **Dementia Project**

A successful joint project was developed with Denbighshire’s Art Department and GP Referral Team that combined art, walking, exercise and local heritage saw 45 people on the GP referral register attending a day which involved a guided walk providing information about Loggerheads’ heritage and nature inspired art workshops and a little exercise.



Gwynedd / Mon Vision Impaired group were taken on a joint walk with Snowdonia National Park to the summit of Moel Famau. The day was a tremendous success and a return visit is currently being arranged with vision impaired groups from this area.



### Troedio Clwyd – Lets Walk

The Let Walk Programme has continue this year with funding through the Sustainable Development Fund and Lets Walk Fund from Welsh Government. The programme has delivered 18 programmed walk per week centred around Rhyl, Prestatyn, Dyserth, Ruthin, Corwen, Llangollen Denbigh, Gwaenysgor and Loggerheads. A total of **5,190 people** have participated in the walks.

This year a Walk Leader training session was also held at Loggerheads Country Park with a further 10 Walk Leaders being Trained.

The project has engaged with the Dementia Network, Glyndwr University, Homestart, Tir Morfa Primary School, Visionary Wrexham & Mold, Ffordd Las Centre, North Wales Women’s Centre, Newcis, Visionaires and Dementia Imagination.

### Events

A full programme of events have been delivered under the Out and About 2016 programme which varied from outdoor, guided walks, archaeological walks, bird and bat walks, educational theatre performances, practical volunteering tasks and much, much more. **2667 people / children attended one of 53** events held in the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB.

### Climate Change

Climate Change Education Project visited 10 Primary Schools this year including Acrefair, Chirk, Cefn Mawr, Garth, Llangollen, Cilcain, Gwernymynydd, Dyserth, Llandyrnog and Llanarmon. **565 Children** received a lesson on the subject and 26 teachers were trained.





## Recreational Pressure

### Visitor Numbers

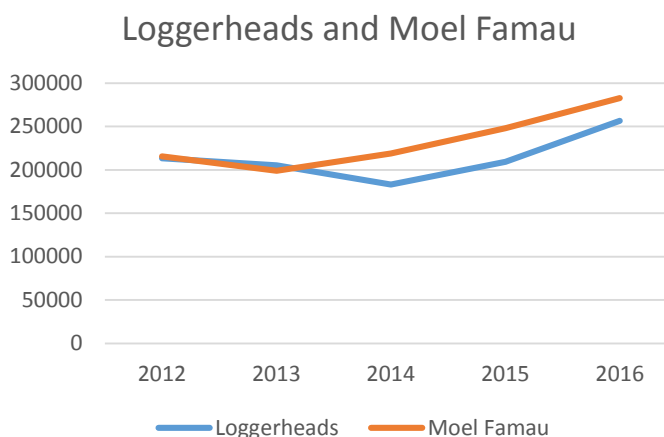
Visitor Counters at key sites across the AONB have shown a steady increase in visitors over the last 5 years and the trend is continuing to rise.

There has been an upward trend in visits to key sites across the AONB in recent years.

This year AONB has been monitoring 5 bike, 11 people, 2 car and 4 traffic counters around the Denbighshire including key sites in the AONB.

A considerable increase in visits to sites in the Dee Valley has been measured in the past five years – Of note are the comparison figures for Castell Dinas Bran and Llantysilio Green Car Park. Recent access improvement works between Llantysilio Green car park and Horseshoe Falls in Llangollen has directly resulted in a significant increase in the number of visits to the falls, with **111,401 visits recorded** using the new access point in the 2016-17 financial year. Figures for Castell Dinas Bran fell for the first time in five years, however trends are steady.

Other flagship sites, including Loggerheads have seen increases in visits recorded in recent years with a record 256,000 visits to Loggerheads in the 2015-16 year. In the past year **33% of visitors to the Country Park used the shop** and **24% of visitors used the AV room.**



Mountain Bike visits have also seen a steady increase, in line with wider surveys estimating a rise in participation and the economic value of the sport in Wales. The counter on the Red trail at Moel Famau shows a slight decline, however figures for the Moel Famau Blue Trail have increased by 24% on the previous years and overall visits recorded on the trails have also increased.

| SITE NAME              | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <b>South</b>           |           |           |           |
| Castell Dinas Bran     | 42830     | 45905     | 40383     |
| Horseshoe Falls        | 19820     | 107707    | 111401    |
| Llantysilio Green      | 21590     | 33213     | N/A       |
| Pen y Pigyn            | 8237      | 5048      | 7505      |
| <b>Central</b>         |           |           |           |
| Loggerheads Car Park   | 208904    | 256430    | 232232    |
| Llanarmon yn Ial (ODP) | 2245      | 1749      | 2979      |
| Llangwyfan (ODP)       | N/A       | 11544     | 22626     |

Work to extend the car park at Loggerheads was completed this year. This has been a significant undertaking requiring the purchase of neighbouring land and the redesign of the road layout approaching the park. Work is now complete with an **additional 70 spaces** now available.



There is a danger that increasing numbers people are coming to enjoy the outstanding landscape of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley could to have a detrimental impact on the very landscape they come to enjoy and there is evidence that this is happening in some of the busiest areas of the AONB. A congestion Study in 2017 will examine the opportunities and threats.

The study will he us to understand more fully the profile of visitors to our busiest areas and how we might be able to both build resilience into these sites whilst reducing numbers at peak times.

Further work should consider:

- Current Marketing and promotion key sites in the AONB
- Potential to spread the tourism benefits to surrounding areas



### **Promoting Environmental Good Practice in the tourism sector.**

The current Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the AONB whilst focusing on the benefits that the designated landscape brings to the tourism economy considers the impact of visitor numbers on the special qualities of the landscape.

The AONB has been working with a number of key business areas to raise awareness of the special qualities of the landscape and promote environmental good practice.

Working with Snowdonia Active and the North Wales Environmental Charter Group the AONB develop a series of training sessions across the outdoor sector.

A session was organised at Llandegla Mountain Bike Centre in the spring to raise awareness of access issues on the moorland adjacent to the forest which is part of Ruabon Mountain SSSI and SAC. A group of 10 participants which included mountain bike guides, instructors and representatives from the mountain bike centre rode up onto the moorland and met officers from the AONB, NRW and the gamekeeper for the Wynnstay Estate for a discussion on moorland management, ecology and access. The session was very received with all parties.



Further sessions for water sport activity providers are planned on the River Dee and on the Canal covering the ecology and geology of the river and the World Heritage Site. The sessions will bring outdoor activity businesses together with conservation specialists to discuss to promote a greater understanding of environmental issues.

### **AONB Guide Course**

In 2016 the AONB's Guide course was in its third year and saw the 23<sup>rd</sup> guide complete the course. This year's course had 10 participants from a range of tourism businesses including accommodation businesses, retail and promotion and marketing. The course provides a thorough look at the special qualities of the AONB over 8 sessions over 6 months. Sessions include historic environment, biodiversity, farming and agriculture, culture and moorland habitats. The Course was sponsored by Flintshire's Tourism Section.



## Management Plan Objectives

**ODPO1** - Continue a programme of Rights of Way improvement across the AONB through the use of the Community Miles initiative and other area access improvement works focusing on increasing opportunities to access the countryside.

**ODPO2** - Provide increased opportunities where appropriate for cycling and horse riding in the AONB and promote these opportunities.

**ODPO3** - Ensure each Local Access Forum has a good understanding of the needs of the AONB through regular liaison.

**ODPO4** - Raise awareness of the acknowledged health and well-being benefits provided by the AONB and develop initiatives promoting physical activity particularly walking and cycling.

**ODPO5** - Understand and work towards removing physical and psychological barriers to access enabling all sectors of society to participate in and benefit from outdoor access and recreational opportunities.

**ODPO6** - Investigate ways to promote the Trail with local tourism businesses and to develop initiatives that will strengthen business links.

**ODPO7** - Strengthen links between the National Trail and nearby settlements and places of interest utilising the wider Rights of Way Network and Public Transport.

**ODPO8** - Monitor erosion in key areas and develop a programme of measures that will reduce the impact of the Trail on the landscape by limiting width or depth of path as appropriate.

**ODPO9** - Identify key indicator sites to monitor visitor user numbers within the AONB.

## The Offa's Dyke Path and Promoted Routes

### Cyrn y Brain

Work over the winter of 2016, focussed on the continuation of replacing old railway sleepers with large York Stone slabs. Approximately 25m of sleepers to be replaced and in the process the path was moved away from a Bronze Age burial mound which had begun to suffer erosion. Approximately 5m of stone pitching has also taken place to link this work to previously constructed sections. **ODPO1**

### Moel Famau

A contractor has carried out work to improve the badly eroded section of trail north of the Jubilee Tower, small drainage grips have been added, stone steps have been put in to guide people along the path rather than the desire lines forming either side of the trail. Heather and stone buffers were put in to decrease the erosion issues to the side of the path and to try and deter cyclists. Some heather seed has also been spread either side of the path. **ODPO1**



A programme of finger post replacements, a new central fingerpost for the village of Llandegla and a replacement of broken or missing fingerposts from along the trail. The actual replacement of the fingerposts on the ground is ongoing.

**Promoted Routes**

Funding has been secured through Welsh Government to improve access in a number of key locations across the AONB. Improvements works have taken place at Tant y Cwt Woods near Ty Mawr Country Park and Gop Hill. In consultation with the Community Council in Minera the network around Mineral Lead Mines Country Park has also been improved. Improvements to the North Berwyn Way have also been developed linking the route to Liberty Hall above Corwen. **ODPO5**



Improvement works have also taken place at Devils Gorge to improve the surface of the path in the base of the gorge which has traditionally been very wet. A series of stone slabs have been laid to create a raise walkway allowing for much better access in to the mouth of the mine at the end of the gorge.



# LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

## Management Plan Objectives

**LQCO1** - Ensure that the natural resources and special qualities of the AONB are recognised and valued.

**LQCO2** - Ensure that the impacts of environmental change on the AONB are understood and a strategic response is developed and implemented.

**LQCO3** - Minimise the cumulative impacts of small-scale change that may erode the special character of the AONB.

**LQCO4** - Protect the tranquillity of the AONB and take steps where possible to reduce noise and light pollution.

**LQCO5** - Where possible reduce visual intrusion by screening or removing eyesores.

**LQCO6** - Investigate and increase our understanding of the cultural heritage of communities in the AONB.

**LQCO7** - Develop Partnerships that will help to stimulate awareness of and interest in the rich cultural dimension to communities in the AONB.

Following implementation of new governance arrangements for the AONB last year, the revised scheme of delegation for handling of planning and development related consultations in conjunction with the AONB Partnership Landscape Character and Built Environment Working Group and Joint Committee is now more established. The Working Group met on four occasions during the year and, in addition to commenting on policy matters and major development proposals, also took forward a number of important AONB Management Plan initiatives. These include preparation of an SPG for the AONB in conjunction with the three local planning authorities, protecting tranquillity by pursuing Dark Sky status for the AONB, reducing visual intrusion (e.g. undergrounding overhead power lines, Pontcysyllte sewage works and Kronospan Landscape Strategy) and monitoring landscape change. The Working Group has also engaged with a review of planning decisions in the WHS/AONB.

### Planning Consultations

The built environment is one of the special qualities of the AONB and contributes to the character and appearance of the area. There is pressure for new development in and around the AONB as an attractive place to live, work and visit, but particular care is required to ensure that new development fits well in the landscape. An important role of the Joint Committee and Partnership is to advise on development policies and proposals affecting the AONB.

The overall number of consultations referred to the **AONB in 2016-17 was 281**, which was fewer than the 325 received last year.

The majority of consultations (208 in number, 74% of the total) were planning or related applications for development referred by the three local planning authorities (LPA's). As expected, the majority (172) were from Denbighshire, followed by Flintshire (29) and Wrexham (7). Informal requests for pre and post-application advice continue to account for a significant proportion of all

consultations (48 in number, 17% of the total). Other consultations comprised policy related consultations (17), planning appeals (5) and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP's) (2). **LQCO2 / LQCO3**

The planning consultations cover a broad range of interests as detailed below.

| <b>Category</b>                    | <b>Proportion of Applications</b> |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| householder applications           | 37%                               |
| Residential, including conversions | 19%                               |
| Tourism related development.       | 12%                               |
| agriculture/forestry               | 10%                               |
| energy related applications        | 2% - down from 125 last year      |
| Other, minerals,NSIP, community    | 20%                               |

Policy/strategic consultations responded to during the year included Flintshire Local Development Plan (LDP) Strategic Options and several draft Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) notes referred to the AONB by Denbighshire (Trees and Landscaping, Biodiversity, Residential Development, Community Safety, Recreational Open Space and Caravans, Chalets and Camping). The AONB also commented in support of the Snowdonia National Park SPG relating to Intrusive Lighting, which complements the AONB's aspirations to protect its dark skies. Comments were also submitted on policy developments and changes proposed by Welsh Government, including the proposed National Development Framework and amendments to Planning Policy Wales in respect of protection of the historic environment. Comments were also made on the long-awaited Kronospan Draft Landscape Strategy which seeks to mitigate the impact of this major industrial complex on the AONB and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Llangollen Canal World Heritage Site (WHS). **LQCO2**

### **AONB Responses**

The majority of decided planning applications (81%) were granted permission, which is comparable with the approval rate in previous years. Only 11% were refused, and 7% of applications were withdrawn by the applicant prior to determination.

The AONB raised no objection to the majority of applications, but often suggested design, materials or additional landscaping to help conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the AONB. There were only ten in-principle objections lodged to development proposals, and significant concerns were raised in respect of ten further applications.

Analysis of LPA responses to substantive comments made by the AONB on planning applications shows that the majority of the comments (74% ) made by the committee were accepted in full (39%) or in part (34%), which is an improvement on last year's position. The remaining 27% of comments were not accepted or acted upon by the LPA's. Of the 19 comments not accepted, 18 applications were determined by Denbighshire and one by Flintshire. Therefore, in 2016-17 the AONB's comments on 36% of applications determined by Denbighshire were not accepted or acted upon by the planning authority. The equivalent figures for Flintshire and Wrexham were 7% and 0% respectively, although the sample sizes are inevitably smaller than for Denbighshire. For the

most part, comments made by the AONB which were not accepted related to design, materials and landscaping.

The majority (75%) of decided applications to which the AONB made an outright objection were refused by the relevant planning authorities.

### Appeals and Enforcement

Of the five planning appeals referred to the AONB during the year, three were dismissed by the inspector and two are still pending. The dismissed appeals were for demolition and development of 13 dwellings at Llanbedr Hall, extensions at Tyn y Ceubren, Glyndyfrdwy and a new dwelling at Colomendy Lodge, Corwen. The AONB's objections to the Glyndyfrdwy and Corwen applications were taken into account by the inspector. The pending appeals are for major developments at Kronospan, Chirk and residential development at 74 Gronant Road, Prestatyn.

During the year 18 potential cases of unauthorised development affecting the AONB were referred to the LPA enforcement teams for investigation. These included advertisement signs, caravans, engineering/tipping works, vehicle storage, access works and advertisements. **LQCO3**

### Dark Skies

With financial support from LEADER the AONB have engaged BRO consultancy and Dark Skies Wales to make an assessment of the quality of the night sky within the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley using the IDA Guidelines. In early 2017 the AONB launched the initiative and engaged over 50 stakeholders including biodiversity and planning officers, tourism providers and astronomy clubs. A number of events are planned for 2017 to engage communities and agencies to raise the importance of dark skies. Work will also include advice and guidance to communities and businesses in lighting schemes that will help to preserve the quality of the night sky whilst providing for lighting needs and the development of an Action Plan that will help to move the AONB towards a Dark Sky status. A programme of events has also been developed to raise awareness of the importance of dark skies that will include star gazing biodiversity events. **LQCO4 / LQCO7**





