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**Denbighshire Scrutiny Committee 20.3.19. Afternoon Session.
Evidence from Natural Resources Wales (NRW).
NRW role in the Management of Mynydd Llantysilio. Past, present and future.**

1. Background.

Mynydd Llantysilio is part of the Ruabon/Llantysilio Mountains and Minera Grasslands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that was notified as an SSSI in 1991. The designation as an SSSI recognises the National (UK) importance of the upland heath and blanket bog communities found on the mountain along with an assemblage of upland breeding birds species such as red grouse, black grouse and curlew.

The majority of the SSSI is also part of the Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This European designation highlights the European importance of the heathland habitats found on Mynydd Llantysilio. The whole area is within the AONB.

Mynydd LLantysilio is a series of contiguous registered mostly unenclosed Common Land Units. The freehold is owned by four main landowners with a series of smaller landowners around the periphery of the mountain. (Annex 1. Map showing the boundary of the SSSI on Mynydd Llantysilio).

Grazing is essential for the management of the upland heathland communities on Mynydd Llantysilio.

Ongoing management by small patch, controlled burning and mowing is also an essential part of the management of upland dry heath plant communities.

Other management is also required e.g the control of bracken by either cutting or the application of a suitable herbicide as well as the control of gorse. Gorse is a component of upland heathland, but large, dense stands of a monoculture of gorse hinder the management of the mountain. NRW would wish to see gorse as part of a mosaic of different heathland plants.

The control of scrub and trees into open areas of heathland is also an issue that needs addressing in some areas.

During the last 20 years the vast majority of Registered Common Land areas in Wales has seen a gradual decrease in the number of common land graziers turning stock on to the common, along with a decrease in the numbers wishing to undertake management of the vegetation.

2. Past Management

2a Section 16 Management Agreements on Mynydd Llantysilio 1998 -2013.

Where land is an SSSI NRW can enter into a Management agreement with the owners or occupiers of land to fund the positive management of the special habitats within the site. On Llantysilio this funding involved the cutting of heather and the control of bracken and gorse.

A series of 5 year Management Agreements were in place with the Llantysilio Estate from 1998 until the expiry of the last agreement in 2013. Through this mechanism NRW were able to make payments to the common land graziers for the management of the vegetation.

The amount of work undertaken through the Management Agreement is dependent on the number of common land graziers that are happy to undertake works. NRW can only encourage management through an agreement. The Denbighshire Countryside Service have undertaken a lot of good work during the last 15 years to support and encourage common land graziers to carry out suitable management on the mountain. This included the works carried out directly by the Heather and Hillforts Team, a 5 year project funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund. Without this support less management would have occurred on the mountain to date.

Below is a table summarising the number of graziers and total payments made by NRW for the years 2008-2012.

Blwyddyn Year	Faint o porwyr cafodd daliad am wneud gwaith Number of graziers who received a payment.	Cyfanswm taliadau Total payment
2008	2	£336
2009	3	£358.75
2010	1	£136.5
2011	5	£1333.30
2012	3	£802.46

2b Aerial photographs showing past heather management on Mynydd Llantysilio.

For large upland sites aerial photography is a very efficient and accurate way to record the heather management.

NRW have digital copies of three flights, for the years;

2009
2013-14
2013-17

Annex 2, 3 and 4 show the mountain for these three years at 1:25k. NRW can supply copies aerial photographs to the committee at a different scale (1:10K or other) if that would be helpful.

3. Current Management

3a Renewal of the management agreements.

NRW are currently in discussion with the Estate about the renewal of these agreements and are also reviewing the payments levels for the carrying out of works on the mountain.

3b Consents issued by NRW for the management Mynydd Llantysilio 2008 – present.

Where land is a SSSI and owner or occupiers within the SSSI are charged with consulting NRW about any activities listed on the “Operations Likely to Damage the Special Interest” for that site. NRW then issues permission or Consent for these works to go ahead.

Annex 5 is a table showing the number of Consents issues by NRW for Llantysilio mountain from 2008 to January 2019 where these relate to the management of the land. NRW work with the landowners and common land graziers and ask for modifications to the proposed management where we consider this necessary. We have no record of having refused Consent (permission) for any works on Mynydd LLantysilio.

The last Assent on this list is to Denbighshire CC Highways and Environmental Services for the mowing of the road verges on the Horseshoe Pass. This was issues in December 2017 and is valid for 5 years. A copy of this Assent is included in Annex 6.

4. Future Management.

4a. Future Management Agreements.

NRW hopes to have Management Agreements in place with the 4 major landowners within the SSSI and also any other landowners who would wish to undertake positive management of their land. Through these agreements NRW hope to work with the landowners and the common land graziers to actively manage the heathland on the mountain through mowing and controlled burning.

4b NRW letting of a contract for an expert assessment of the fire damaged areas.

NRW have gone out to tender to let a contract to secure the services of experts with past experience of the remediation of upland moorland damaged by fire. The tendering process has taken longer than expected, but has now been completed. The field work is planned for the next few months, with the report anticipated in early summer 2019.

4c Changes to agricultural subsidy in Wales.

The effects of Brexit on agricultural industry in Britain and particularly on the grazing of uplands is likely to significant. It is likely that changes in trade will affect the market for

small welsh lambs that are produced in this environment. Agriculture is devolved to Wales.

NRW will need to work with the new policies of the Agricultural department of Welsh Government. They are currently proposing a change to a payment system for public goods rather than agricultural production.

Annex 1. Map of the Llantysilio section of the SSSI.

Annex 2,3,4. Aerial photographs from 2009, 2013-14, 2013-17

Annex 5 Table showing the number of Consents issues by NRW for Llantysilio mountain from 2008 to January 2019.

Annex 6. Assent Issued December 2017 to DCC Highways for road verge mowing.

