

CLWYDIAN RANGE AND DEE VALLEY AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY JOINT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Committee held in Conference Room 1A, County Hall, Ruthin on Friday, 21 June 2019 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Bobby Feeley (DCC), Hugh Jones (WCBC), David Kelly (WCBC) and Carolyn Thomas (FCC).

ALSO PRESENT

Howard Sutcliffe (AONB Officer), David Shiel (AONB Senior Countryside Officer), Karen Weaver (AONB Communications Officer), Michael Skuse (AONB Partnership and Friends of AONB), John Roberts (Recreation, enjoyment & Understanding working Group), Steve Gadd (Chief Accountant DCC), Paula O'Hanlon (Senior Finance Officer, DCC), Huw Rees (Head of Countryside & Heritage Services DCC), Lisa Jones (Legal Services Manager, DCC), Kate Thomson (Our Picturesque Landscape Partnership Officer), Tom Woodall (FCC) and Karen Evans (Democratic Services Officer, DCC).

1 INTRODUCTIONS, APOLOGIES AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Apologies were received from Councillors Derek Butler (FCC) and Tony Thomas (Chair, DCC) and Officers Anna Irwin (Senior Conservation & Environment Officer, WCBC), Martin Howarth (Rights of Way, WCBC), Ceri Lloyd (AONB Sustainable Development Officer, DCC) and Andy Worthington Chair of AONB Partnership.

In the absence of Councillor Tony Thomas (Chair) Councillor Carolyn Thomas (Vice Chair) chaired the meeting.

Some Councillors had had difficulty accessing the agenda pack from the internet link circulated via email, hard copies were available at the meeting.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8TH MARCH 2019

The minutes of the Joint Committee held on 8 March 2019 were submitted.

Accuracy.

Councillor David Kelly was present at the meeting.

Matters arising.

Page 5, item 2 – an appointment of Coordinator had been made to the Grazing Animals Sustainable Management Scheme.

Page 7, item 6 – Chairs of the Joint Committee had met with the WHS Board Chair to draft a joint statement of intent to reflect the working partnership. The Statement would be presented to the next AONB Joint Committee.

Page 7 item 8 - A letter had been drafted by the Joint Committee Chair, the Leaders of Flintshire County Council Wrexham County Borough Council and Denbighshire County Council regarding working together on specific topics.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the amendment, the minutes of the Joint Committee meeting held on 8 March 2019 be approved as a correct record.

3 DRAFT MINUTES OF AONB PARTNERSHIP 22ND MARCH 2019

The AONB Officer (HS) informed the Committee that a further meeting of the AONB Partnership had taken place since the 22 March meeting but the minutes were not yet available.

Comments on the minutes included:

Page 12 – Moorland Fire on Llantysilio Fire. the AONB Senior Countryside Officer disagreed with the statement regarding the reduction of grazing sheep being partially responsible for spread of fire on Llantysilio Mountain, his rationale being that sheep did not graze on heather. The poor management of the extensive heather growth was more of an issue.

Page 13 – Flailbot. The Chair of the Recreation, Enjoyment & Understanding Working Group (JR) had attended the latest AONB Partnership meeting (last week). There had been an interesting discussion on the Flailbot which could operate in difficult areas, cutting heather and providing a fire break.

Page 13 – Ash Die Back. Councillor David Kelly asked about the distribution of the Tool Kits and the management of a dead or dying trees?

The Access and Natural Environment Manager (TW) advised that Flintshire County Council were considering how to proceed. There was to be a seminar in the coming weeks for Flintshire's Tree Officers and a working group was being formed to identify an action plan. Trees were being considered on a case by case basis. Blanket felling was to be avoided in case there were trees that had developed a resilience to the disease. It was noted that the disease did not kill the trees but made them more susceptible to other diseases that did.

Following further discussion it was agreed that raising the public's awareness would be beneficial, as would a dedicated telephone contact number if new cases were identified.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the AONB Partnership Board 22 March 2019 be noted.

4 DRAFT MINUTES OF OUR PICTURESQUE LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP 11TH APRIL 2019

The report (previously circulated) was submitted for information purposes.

The Committee were advised that the Digital Trails (ibeacon) linked up with other North Wales authorities and the Celebration Events listed on page 21 were covered in the annual report to be presented later on the agenda.

RESOLVED that the draft minutes of Our Picturesque Landscape Partnership meeting on 11th April 2019 were noted.

5 JOINT COMMITTEE BUDGET

The report was presented by the Chief Accountant (SG). SG explained that:

- appendix 1 was reviewing what was spent compared to what had been budgeted;
- appendix 2 showed the budget for the coming year. Funding was in place at the same level (with a slight inflationary increase from Denbighshire);
- appendix 3 was the legal framework around the Joint Committee, including the Statutory Annual Return that needed to be signed off by the Chair to be forwarded to the external auditors.

Responding to questions from the Committee the Chief Accountant responded:

- The late receipt of the SDF Grant showed an increase in the AONB reserves from £119k to 259k. That was misleading as it had been partially allocated and therefore not all available. The reserve levels were deemed sensible.
- The incomes listed on appendices 1 and 2 were the same funding sources (but had been labelled differently). It was agreed to call them the same on future reports.
- The Joint Committee outturn, accounts and draft budget should be available on Wrexham and Flintshire's websites as well as Denbighshire's (SG to check).

The Chief Accountant went through the Annual Governance Statement asking the Committee to confirm each statement listed and asked the Chair, Councillor Carolyn Thomas to sign the Audit report.

RESOLVED that subject to the above that:

- I. The financial outturn for 201/19 be noted;**
- II. The draft budget for 2019/20 be approved;**
- III. The Annual Return for 2018/19 be agreed and**
- IV. The reserve balances as at 31st March 2019 be noted.**

6 AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN

The AONB Senior Countryside Officer (DS) updated the Committee on the AONB Management Plan, explaining that they were in the final year of the management plan and had a statutory duty to produce a new one. Having secured Welsh Government funding to take it forward there needed to be a decision on whether to undertake a review or full revision of the plan.

DS said he would like to work with the various AONB working groups to ascertain priorities before taking the consultation wider to communities. It was anticipated that a draft plan would be completed and presented to the Committee by spring 2020.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

7 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND ANNUAL REPORT

Unfortunately the AONB Sustainable Development Officer was unable to attend the meeting.

RESOLVED that the item be re-tabled for the next AONB Joint Committee meeting on 22nd November 2019.

8 JOINT COMMITTEE LEGAL AGREEMENT REPORT

The Legal Services Manager (LJ) reminded the Committee that the AONB Local Authorities Legal Agreement was a 5 year agreement due to be reviewed. The opportunity was being taken to update the schedules etc. To that end each Local Authority would need to consent to the Joint Committee's amendments prior to signing and sealing the agreement.

The recommended amendments were minor and had already been shared with the Head of Legal in both Wrexham and Flintshire. LJ highlighted the amendments listed in section 4 of the report (previously circulated).

Reviewing the Structure diagram in Schedule 3 the Committee noted that:

- More of the flow of information arrows needed dual direction around the Joint Committee box – particularly back to the respective Local Authorities;
- The Landscape and Planning Working Group was incorrectly named and
- There was no mention of the Tourism Group.

The AONB Officer agreed to update the Structure Chart before it was signed.

RESOLVED that subject to the above amendments and inclusion the Legal Agreement be approved and adopted by the three partner Councils.

9 VISITOR APPRAISAL STUDY REPORT AND PRESENTATION

Due to the problem accessing the agenda pack prior to the meeting and the substantial amount of information contained in the consultant's report it was agreed that the item would be re-tabled at the next AONB Joint Committee.

The AONB Senior Countryside Officer (DS) gave a presentation summarising the report's findings. The report was based on six key sites across the AONB and gave a breakdown of the economic value by site as:

- Chirk Aqueduct and Viaduct - £3,574,797
- Loggerheads Country Park - £2,290,187
- Moel Famau Country Park - £4,648,031
- Panorama - £1,127,811 (mostly spent in Llangollen)
- Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Trevor Basin - £9,273,469
- Horseshoe Falls and Llantysilio Green - £3,156,015 (mostly spent in Llangollen).

The six sites supported 449 FTE jobs which equated to 19% of all jobs in tourism in rural Denbighshire in 2018 (WCBC & FCC did not collect data on rural areas).

In terms of wellbeing and contribution to the level of life satisfaction 92% of residents that lived in/near the AONB responded positively. Visitors benefited to the tune of £8.8million (using wellbeing valuation methodology), 6.5% higher than the Wales national average.

The health benefits (cardio exercise and weight management) derived from walking was estimated to be £38.1million health spending on cardio vascular disease and type 2 diabetes related issues forgone.

The social impact of visitors at these sites included:

- Traffic congestion and over-crowding, the community around Horseshoe Falls reported a negative impact.
- 130 tonnes of litter collected.
- 8.2 tonnes of dog fouling collected at Loggerheads, 4.7 tonnes at Moel Famau.
- The cost of litter picking was £17,500.
- 14 sheep killed by dogs over the last 3 years.
- Mountain Rescue incidents increased by 30%, there were 9 rescues in 2018 alone.
- Erosion of the countryside, particularly in special areas of conservation.

The report would be used to create an action plan for the AONB that maximised the social and economic benefits of visitors to those sites whilst reducing the environmental impact.

It was suggested that given the evidence of the monetary value of health benefits to walking visitors that a letter be compiled to the Head of Public Health Wales, to seek financial support for AONB maintenance. The Committee proposed to do so after the report had been discussed further at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the Visitor Appraisal Study Report be added to the agenda for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Committee meeting on 22 November 2019.

10 AONB ANNUAL REPORT PRESENTATION

The AONB Officer (HS) informed the Committee that the AONB was part of a National association that was celebrating its 75th anniversary, representatives had attended the National Conference.

There were 5 AONB in Wales, efforts were being made to improve their profile. The Welsh Government Minister would like to see equal standing for the AONB with National Parks.

It was a new era for the Our Picturesque Landscape (OPL) Team based at Plas Newydd, with a new scheme of work including:

- the community access into Plas Newydd;
- Trefor / Clinker path access to the canal;
- working with youth groups establishing what the WHS meant to them.

Other significant areas of work within the AONB included:

- liaising with Scottish Power to replace overhead electricity lines with underground cables at the Ponderosa and northwards.
- establishing Nature for Health, a project creating bee friendly gardens, allotments & community gardens. Also looking at working on Denbighshire owned green space.
- archaeologists looking for a hunting tower at Chirk Castle;
- landscaping of a caravan park at Carrog;
- use of a Flailbot to traverse and maintain steep slopes (potential to purchase one on a spend to save basis);
- a garage had been sympathetically built in Tremeirchion to match the farm house;
- Restoration of the loading gauge at Meliden Goods Shed and
- The square in Llangollen had been completed with the use of Sustainable Development Funds, further work investing in highways and traffic movement would follow.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

11 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL REPORT

The AONB Officer (HS) presented the report (previously circulated) informing the Committee that there had been a similar amount of planning applications to the previous year. A summary of all the planning consultations was attached.

Discussing the report the Committee noted:

- a potential conflict between tourism and preserving the AONB;
- an increase in applications for Glamping Pods;
- the need for applications to fit in with the local environment;
- concern that over saturation of camping sites would drive down the price/cost and affect income generation;
- sites for accepting year round occupancy should be discourage as they have a negative impact on schools and medical facilities etc. and

- newly build sites were easier to control planning wise than established existing sites.

Councillor Bobby Feeley (DCC) raised concerns about the massive egg production units that were being built in the area. Though not in the AONB they do have a negative impact by being in view of it. It was suggested that Councillor Feeley raised the issue with Councillor Martyn Holland (DCC) who would be attending the Landscape and Planning Working Group meeting (open to the public) the following week.

RESOLVED that the Planning and Development Annual Report be noted.

12 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The AONB Officer (HS) presented the Forward Work Programme and reported on the main items scheduled. HS also noted that they need to consider the AONB Tourism Plan with Wrexham and Flintshire partnership working groups – focussing on the Management Plan.

RESOLVED that:

- I. the Visitor Appraisal Study report be added to Committee meeting on 22nd November 2019 and**
- II. that the Forward Work Programme be agreed.**

13 NEXT MEETING

The Senior Finance and Assurance Officer (POH) informed the Committee that the meeting scheduled for 3 July 2020 was too late for the Annual Return to be completed.

The Clwydian Range Communications Officer agreed re-arrange the meeting to accommodate the completion of the Annual Governance Statement.

RESOLVED that subject to the above the dates be noted.