

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 on Friday, 11 September 2020 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Bobby Feeley and Tony Thomas (Denbighshire County Council)
Councillors Carolyn Thomas and Derek Butler (Flintshire County Council) and
Councillor David Kelly (Wrexham County Borough Council).

ALSO PRESENT

Steve Gadd (Head of Finance and Property DCC), Lisa Jones (Deputy Monitoring Officer DCC), Howard Sutcliffe (AONB Officer DCC), David Shiel (Assistant AONB Officer DCC), Karen Weaver (AONB Co-ordinator DCC), Tom Woodall (FCC), Anna Irwin (Senior Conservation and Environment Officer WCBC) and Alun Price (NRW).

1 INTRODUCTIONS, APOLOGIES AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Apologies were received from Councillor Hugh Jones, Wrexham County Borough Council.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 21.11.19

The minutes of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Committee held on 21st November 2019 were submitted. They were agreed as accurate and there were no matters arising.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Committee held on 21st November 2019 be approved.

3 DRAFT MINUTES OF AONB PARTNERSHIP 14.2.20

The draft notes of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership on 14th February 2020 were provided for information.

Matters Arising.

Item 4 page 9:

- DCC Corporate Services Review. The role of Communications Officer had been reviewed and rewritten as A.O.N.B. Coordinator.
- Designated Landscapes – additional capital funding. The Pembrokeshire coast national Park won the bid to host the Protected landscape Forum.

RESOLVED that the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership draft notes be received.

4 JOINT COMMITTEE ANNUAL RETURN

The Head of Finance and Property, Steve Gadd, introduced the report (previously circulated) drawing attention to the following aspects:

- summary of the financial outturn;
- Statutory Return (requiring agreement and signatures from the meeting) and
- draft budget for approval for 2021 (delayed due cancelled meetings resulting from Covid-19).

The Chief Finance Officer's statement (page 16) highlighted no change to contributions from either Flintshire County Council or Wrexham County Borough Council and the level of grant from Natural Resources Wales remained consistent with 2019/20/

The Committee were advised that the Reserves shown on the balance sheet of £315,000 included monies allocated to specific projects. The actual balance available to support the 2020/21 budget and manage risk of future delivery of projects was £47,000.

Covid-19 had had a significant impact on Local Authority finances. Welsh Government had indicated that in addition to the ad hoc funding received to date that there would be a financial package for the rest of the year (details yet to be announced). Future contributions to AONB Committee funding could not be confirmed.

The Management Accounts for the final Outturn (page 19 &20) showed that:

- I. there had been grants received;
- II. there had been more expenditure and
- III. contributions had been used from reserves.

The Core Draft Budget (appendix 2) showed that the employment costs remained consistent. There was an increase in the Sustainable Development Grant and slight increase in expenditure but nothing that raised any concerns.

The Balance Sheet (page 24) reflects all the AONB reserves - £315,000 net worth – appendix 4 explained how they were funded.

The Annual (Statutory) Return – required passing by internal and external audit review. Due to the delays (caused by Covid-19 lockdown) the return had undergone a preliminary review by Audit Wales and would be sent for their approval following agreement by the Joint committee that day.

There had been some amendments to the return statements following advice from Internal Audit:

- Statement 1 – additional text - “Due to Covid 19 the meeting to approve the annual return has been delayed until the 11 September. If approved this will

enable WAO to sign off the Accounts by the statutory deadline of 15 September.”

- Statement 5 – additional text – “The Internal Audit report highlighted the need for a formal risk register to be brought together which will be undertaken during the current financial year.”

[action Paula O’Hanlon, Howard Sutcliffe and Steve Gadd to meet to produce list of risk for register for next AONB Joint Committee meeting]

RESOLVED that the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Committee:

- I. note the financial outturn for 2019/20 (Appendix 1);**
- II. formally approve the 2020/21 draft budget (appendix 2);**
- III. reviewed and authorised the Annual Return for 2019/20 (Appendix 3) and**
- IV. Note the Reserve Balances as at 31st March 2020 (Appendix 4).**

5 UPDATE ON MANAGEMENT PLAN

The AONB Senior Countryside Officer, David Shiel informed the Committee that JBA Consultancy had been appointed prior to the lockdown who had carried out a Stakeholder mapping exercise to ensure engagement with as many people as possible in producing the plan. An initial questionnaire had been sent out to the Partnership and Joint Committee to agree the scope of the review.

They were attempting to find ways of undertaking meaningful consultation under the pandemic restrictions and were about to send out a Survey Monkey questionnaire on the key features of the AONB for views on what broader issues might be to the whole of the stakeholder partnership in addition to attaching it to the website.

It was envisioned that a series of consultation events would be held to aid the objective and policy setting of the plan. It had been intended that these would be face to face meetings /workshops themed around the key elements of:

- the management plan;
- historic environment;
- natural environment;
- land management and
- tourism/recreation.

However the change to WG guidance and restriction regarding people meeting meant that these would probably now have to be online meetings – probably around October time. A schedule of the stakeholder engagement events would be circulated as soon as it was available.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

6 ANNUAL PLANNING REPORT 2019-20

The report (previously circulated) was introduced by the AONB Officer, Howard Sutcliffe highlighting the excellent co-operation between the local authorities that had seen them achieve some supplementary planning guidance (SPG) already and they hoped to get further SPG on Dark Skies.

The report showed that the majority of planning applications were granted – 87% with 83% of those having either the Local Authorities taking part of or the representations of the AONB.

Members raised the following:

- That due to the Covid-19 restrictions there was a significant backlog of planning applications;
- There was increasing pressure for sustainable energy which see an influx of applications;
- Queried the approval of planning consent on flood plain areas and heard that there were different categories of flood plain – some categories could mitigate risk by taking relevant action;
- Noted the increase in applications for tourism, particularly camping cabins / pods. AONB JC members who also sat on their respective planning committees sometime felt a conflict of interest. They asked if the AONB JC could have a policy/rule to guide on such instances?
- Asked to undertake a review across the 3 local authorities to look at the accumulative impact of tourism and development on the AONB and
- Highlighted that some residents were afraid of the potential expansion of the AONB but the 87% approval rate for planning would indicate their fears to be groundless.

The AONB Officer suggested that the AONB SPG could be amended in relation to camping cabins/pods but first there needed to be an understanding what was already happening with regards these.

RESOLVED that:

- I. Information be gathered on the location and concentration of camping cabins/pods in Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham;***
- II. The current policy regarding camping cabins/pods within each Local Authority and***
- III. The Annual Planning Report be noted.***

7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The AONB Officer presented the AONB JC forward work programme (previously circulated). He explained that whilst on lockdown the Chairs of the five working groups, the Partnership and the Joint Committee for a virtual meeting which had

worked well. It was anticipated that those meetings would continue in the same format going forward.

If the easing of the Covid-19 restrictions remained it was hoped that small groups could meet at the end of October to look at the work around Plas Newydd with Our Picturesque Landscape.

The AONB Officer advised the Committee that:

- Scottish Power had removed the lines and poles that led up to their station at the edge of the ancient monument on Moel Hiraddug.
- Unauthorised occupants had caused some destruction on the Offa's Dyke at Chirk – CADW had intervened to halt further damage.
- 35 acres of land had been purchased as part the main route up to Dinas Bran.
- Work was being undertaken with the new NRW Landmap Officer on development guidance regarding Climate Change.

The Committee discussed the impact of increasing visitor pressure on the AONB, particularly in relation to car parking, toilet facilities and litter. Welsh Government had provided some funding to look at congestion and a minister would be meeting with the Chair of JC at Moel Famau the following Monday to discuss further. Over tourism needed to be managed and the visitor sites which were protected landscapes made fit for purpose – sustainable tourism. It was agreed to relook at the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

The AONB Award had been reviewing two nominations – Llanberis Art Group who had public exhibitions at Loggerheads and Cilcain Primary School in Flintshire who were working to become Carbon Neutral.

RESOLVED that:

- I. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy be reviewed and***
- II. The AONB Joint committee forward work programme be noted.***

8 FUTURE MEETING DATES

The next meeting for Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Committee was scheduled for 13th November 2020.