



Meeting of the
AONB Partnership
Friday 19th February 2021
At 10 am Online Teams Meeting

AONB Partnership Members

In Attendance

AONB Partnership Members

Councillor Tony Thomas	DCC
Chair of Joint Committee	
Councillor Christine Marston	DCC
Councillor Martyn Holland	DCC
Councillor Hugh Jones	WCBC
Councillor Sonia Benbow-Jones	WCBC
Councillor Frank Hemmings	WCBC
Councillor Paul Cunningham	FCC
Vice Chair of the Partnership	

Chair of the Partnership
Andrew Worthington OBE

Representing Rural Interest
Christine Evans, Roger Cragg

Representing Business Interest
Dewi Davies

Representing Landscape Interest
Michael Skuse

Representing Historical Interest
Tony King

Representing Urban Interest
Ian Papworth, Rajan Madhhok,

Representing the Natural Environment
Les Starling, David Davies

Representing Land Management
Sandy Archdale, Huw Morgan,

Representing Recreation and ROW
John Roberts

Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB

Howard Sutcliffe	AONB Officer
David Shiel	AONB Area Manager
Karen Weaver	AONB Coordinator
Ceri Lloyd	AONB SDF Officer
Kate Thomson	OPL Partnership Officer
Rachel Jones	AONB Senior Ranger (North)
Rhun Jones	AONB Senior Ranger (South)
Graham Berry	Moorland Field Officer
Paul Williams	Plas Newydd Site Manager
Tony Hughes	AONB Planning Officer

Representing Flintshire County Council
Tom Woodall Head of FCC Countryside
Service & ROW

Representing Natural Resources Wales
Alun Price



Apologies for absence were submitted from, Allan Forrest, Councillor Colin Legg, Del Roberts-Jones, Huw Rees, Phil Durrell, Rhian Peirce, Councillor Owen Thomas,

1. Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed members to the first online Partnership meeting.

2. Covid Update

AONB Area Manager, David Shiel explained that apart from the Ranger Team all staff were still working from home. The Ranger Team staffing had been doubled up over weekends. They were working in close partnership with the police.

The sites had seen increased visitor numbers over the Christmas period, this was followed by a fall of snow and there was again an increase of visitors. During a national lockdown this was unacceptable. The road leading up to Moel Famau was closed, and this was manned by the police. The road has since reopened for access for locals who live there. Signs had been erected to inform that the car parks remained closed. Social media key messaging was increased.

It was expected that the sites would be busy over the Easter holidays, and the Team was now preparing for this.

Discussion was held regarding the capacity of the car parks and how visitors could be diverted to other areas of the AONB. A concern was raised that in some areas the roads were very narrow and the infrastructure was not in place to cope with large numbers. Visitors to the Countryside getting lost was also raised with the expectation that landowners with tractors would assist them when they became stuck. The possibility of signage to inform when the car parks were full was proposed.

The AONB Area Manager reported that Welsh Government Green Recovery Programme. Funding had been made available to invest in sustainable tourism, and to take account of the increasing numbers visiting the sites and parks. The capacity of the car parks at Moel Famau was currently being developed.

This was a joint project with DCC Highways Department. A report had been commissioned and during the next months some capital work should commence.

It was acknowledged that the dispersion of pressure of visitors throughout the AONB was not always straightforward and the AONB had submitted another bid to Welsh Government to consider how the visitor pressure could be spread around the AONB, car parks would also be considered. It was hoped that this would be taken forward within the next twelve months if the funding bid was successful. The police had reported that most visitors who had broken the travelling rules by visiting sites were from local areas.

Cllr Martyn Holland said that Moel Famau was a key part of his ward and that he was very grateful to David and Ranger Team, the Police and Enforcement Team. Everything had been well managed.

3. Update from the AONB Officer

Membership of the Partnership

AONB Officer, Howard Sutcliffe, said that he was currently reviewing membership of the Partnership and asked if members would confirm if they were willing and able to carry on with their membership. Also if they knew of anyone that would be suitable for membership he would be grateful to receive details.

Action

The Coordination Officer would email to all members to enquire if they are willing to continue to serve on the Partnership.

Highway Design Guide

The AONB Officer referred to the Wye Valley AONB Highway Design Guide (previously circulated) and explained that that a similar protocol was required to ensure that the AONB were consulted on highway design, as there was currently a of lack of partnership working. This would be recommended at the next Joint Committee meeting. As an example, yellow salt bins had distributed throughout Denbighshire in unsuitable areas, with some being visible from the top of the Horseshoe Pass. Another example was thick double yellow lines within the AONB. Discussion was held. Cllr Martyn Holland said that the bins had been distributed to ease the pressure on gritting vehicles, and it was noted that green or brown bins would have been preferable. It was felt that 'clear ways' signs or 'restricted parking zone' could be used in the AONB instead of double yellow lines. However, it was acknowledged that people seemed to give more regard to double yellow lines.

Action

- The Chair proposed that a Task and Finish Group to be convened to consider Highway Design as a one off issue.
- Any members that would like to be part of the group were asked to contact Karen.

Ash Trees

A member enquired about the removal of ash trees in the area between Dyserth and Lloc area and the impact this had had on the views from the Gop. Discussion was held and it was felt that any trees felled should be replaced by a suitable alternative native species. Consideration should be given on how they could be replaced. Flintshire County Council (FCC) Countryside Service Manager, Tom Woodall said that the trees had been removed purely for highway safety, and that was why the removal was not part of a consultation. However, the tree scape should be given consideration and FCC did have a Woodland Plan, but the present focus had to be risk of the diseased and dying trees.

Dinas Bran	30 acres of land had been obtained, Rhun Jones was currently drafting a Management Plan.
Treatment Works at Pontcysyllte Aqueduct	A meeting had been held with lead members of Dwr Cymru, and landscape options were being considered for the site.
National Association of AONBs	NAAONB were having regular meetings with lead officers. Ian Rappel had convened 4-weekly AONB Wider Teams meetings.
National Grid	There would be another round of funding. And also for the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).
Management Plan	There had been some difficulties with the consultations. The structure of the plan had been agreed, and data was being collected for the State of the AONB report.

Parity between National Parks & AONB's Review

The AONB Officer said that 425k had been provided for joint working with National Parks. The Protected Landscapes for Wales Group had also been created. The annual budget from NRW had not been released to date.

4. Progress of the Dark Sky Project

AONB Area Manager, David Shiel explained that the project had been delayed due because of Covid. The draft Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) was complete and had been agreed by the three Local Authorities. The draft would now be submitted to the planning committees to start the consultation process.

Quick Guide to Dark Skies	A quick guide to dark skies had been completed that included the 'dos and don'ts' for lighting. This document would complement the SPG.
Dark Sky monitoring	Dark Sky monitoring would commence shortly and the results would be included in the Dark Sky for Wales report.
Dark Sky Festival	All events were held online. Astro photography had been taken to showcase the quality of the skies along with time lapse films.
Lighting at Loggerheads	Funding had been obtained from Welsh Government for improvement to the lighting at Loggerheads. Working in partnership with DCC all of the lighting would be replaced and it would include movement sensors. This was a pilot project for other AONBs and National Parks.
Dark Sky Nation	Dark Sky Wales had approached Visit Wales regarding Wales becoming a Dark Sky Nation. However, the current priority was for the AONB to achieve 'Dark Sky Community Status'.

Discussion was held and it was raised how existing housing with extensive lighting should be addressed, it was agreed that this was a challenge however, it was hoped that by changing the lighting at Loggerheads this might lead to a change in mindset for those responsible. It was noted, though, that dark sky friendly lighting was currently hard to find and purchase and this was another difficulty.

The possibility of the lighting guidance being rolled out to areas just outside the boundary of the AONB was raised, and it was explained that the AONB were working in partnership with the three Local Authorities and it was hoped that this would lead to increased take up.

5. Projects Update

To receive an update from:

Plas Newydd

Planning and preparation

Plas Newydd Site Manager, Paul Williams said that the gates and grounds had been kept open in order for locals to have their daily exercise and that, and they were now planning for the upcoming season and hoped to open from Easter. Risk assessments were being completed, and funding had been submitted for an audio trail. Tour companies were starting to get in contact, and there was optimism that there would be a season.

Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

SDF Officer, Ceri Lloyd, said that she was now closing down the 2020 projects, and 18 projects had been supported. The Annual report would be drafted shortly. Most projects had been affected by Covid. However, only one project had not been able to make any progress. The 2021 Expressions of Interest process was now underway.

Discussion was held and concerns were raised regarding the outcome for a failing project due to Covid, and whether it's funding would continue. It was explained that only funding for one project had been withheld as it had not been possible to undertake proposed activities. The SDF Officer had worked closely with project applicants and all of the other projects had been able to fulfil expectations. However, if there had been a concern, the terms of the approval letter would cover that.

It was proposed that long term business cases should be considered for some projects. The Chair of the SDF Group, Roger Cragg, assured members that the most serious consideration was given to all applications and he praised his colleagues for their attention to detail and the high standard of debate.

Action

SDF processes to be added to the agenda of the next working group meeting.

AONB North

Senior AONB Ranger for the North, Rachel Jones completed an update on some of the projects in progress:

SMS Grazing Project	The project had struggled with the Covid situation, grazing on sites and habitat work has been successful. Currently working on community engagement, scrub clearance. Belted Galloways were grazing at a site in Prestatyn and the Carneddau ponies had been grazing on the dunes and were now at Moel Findeg. Soay sheep had been grazing on Butterfly Glade at Loggerheads. Wool felting sessions would be held with schools.
Loggerheads Flood	Loggerheads had flooded once again. However, owing to previous work the damage had been minimal. The area was now drying out.
Offa's Dyke Path 50th Anniversary	The anniversary was in July but all plans were on hold at the moment. Waymarked '50 anniversary' disks would be erected along the trail.
Green Recovery Bid	The bid was for access work at Loggerheads and Moel Findeg – paths and gates would be replaced.

Discussion was held and it was raised whether the Carneddau ponies had been chipped, it was explained that the ponies were semi feral and this would be considered further.

AONB South

Senior AONB Ranger for the South, Rhun Jones provided a brief update on some of the projects being completed the south of the AONB.

Caer Drewyn	Gorse clearing was being completed in partnership with PONT at Caer Drewyn.
Wenfrwyd	Rhun and the team had been completing work transforming the old landfill site into a small park, pathways were being installed with links to Llangollen and WHS paths were being opened up fully. There would be parking for 35 cars, and it was hoped that the site would open for Easter.

Our Picturesque Landscape (OPL)

OPL Partnership Officer, Kate Thomson said that the last few months had been very challenging, Hannah Marubbi was covering Sallyanne Hall's maternity leave, and had settled well into the role. A meeting had been held with Heritage Lottery to consider the outputs of the project. Volunteering and events had not been able to be held, however, some projects had still gone ahead (see presentation).

Dinas Bran Event	It was hoped that the event at Dinas Bran would be held this year if possible.
Artist in Residence post	Thirty applicants had applied for the post.

Ram pump and housing at Plas Newydd	50 years of vegetation had been uncovered, there had been a lot of community engagement and social media coverage.
Wenfrwyd Pocket Park	Work was being completed on trails at the Park.
Woodland Management of WHS	Felling licenses were required, it had been problematic for forestry workers to be on site, and the work may have to be completed during autumn.

Moorland Project

Moorland Officer, Graham Berry explained that he had been appointed for the three year project following the Llantysilio moorland fire, and that his role was shared between Denbighshire County Council (DCC) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

Four key areas would be considered as part of the project:

Reducing Incidents of Wildfire	Engagement with landowners and North Wales Fire and Rescue Service. Moorland management guidance was being drafted along with social media messaging.
Community Engagement	Reconnecting communities with the moorlands.
Restoration programme for Llantysilio	1ha of heather would be cut and collected in March to be airlifted by helicopter to the fire damaged side of the mountain where it would be spread out to reduce soil erosion and create conditions for re-colonisation. An upland grass seed mix will also be sown on 68ha.
Sustainable funding for moorland management	Sustainable management would be considered.

Any Other Business

Big Covert

Councillor Martyn Holland raised concerns regarding large scale tree felling at the Big Covert Llanarmon yn Ial

Action

The AONB Officer to contact a representative from NRW and invite them to attend the next Landscape Character and Built Environment Working Group Meeting to discuss further.

IT Issues

Some members were still having difficulties accessing Microsoft Teams, It was explained that Teams was the preferred online platform for DCC and was what all the school children were using to complete online lessons, and in theory should be very accessible. To date the use of zoom had not been allowed.

Action

The Coordination Officer would contact DCC IT department again and raise the issue and ask for authorisation for the use of zoom.

National Association of AONB's (NAAONB)

The Sustainable Development Officer, Ceri Lloyd reported that the National Association for AONB's were currently developing a new website platform and there would be a Wales AONB Forum. It was hoped that Partnership members would be able to join in on some aspects.

6. Future Meeting Dates

Friday 28th May	2021	10 am	To be decided
Friday 15th October	2021	10 am	To be decided
Friday 18 th February	2022	10 am	To be decided
Friday 20 th May	2022	10 am	To be decided
Friday 14 th October	2022	10 am	To be decided

DRAFT