

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE AONB:

2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Background

1. 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 proposals and policies affecting the AONB.

Consultations

2. The overall number of consultations referred to the AONB in 2020-21 was 301. This is an increase in activity compared to last year (274), which is unexpected given that 2020-21 has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. There was a decline in activity during the first half of the year, but during the second half of the year there was a significant upturn in consultations.
3. The majority of consultations (217 in number, 72% of the total) were planning or related applications for development referred by the three local planning authorities (LPA's). The majority of these were from Denbighshire (81%) followed by Flintshire (19%). Two planning consultations were referred by Wrexham. Formal and informal requests for pre and post-application advice continue to increase (71 in number), which reflects a substantial increase on last year (46) and now account for a significant 24% of all consultations. Policy related matters (6 in number) accounted for 3% of all consultations, which is a reduction in activity over previous years. This may be a response to the Covid-19 pandemic as public bodies shifted their attention to pandemic related work. Planning appeals (5) made up the remaining consultations.
4. A summary of all planning consultations to which the AONB responded during the year are attached as Appendices covering the two half-yearly periods. These show details of the proposal, a summary of the AONB's comments, the LPA's decision where this has been made and an assessment of their response to the AONB's comments.
5. The largest category of proposals continues to be for householder development (35%) followed by new housing (23%), including conversions. The proportion of tourism related development proposals is consistent (18%) and remains the third largest category of development, followed by agriculture (10%), commercial/retail and industrial proposals (4%)

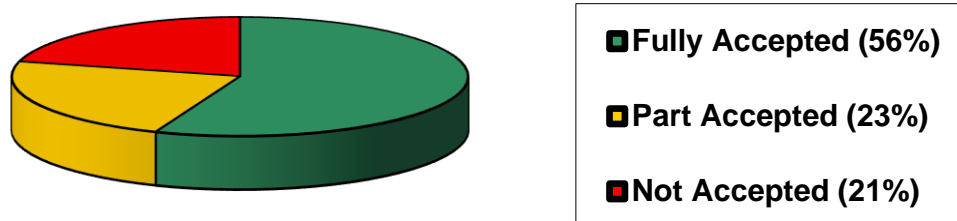
and energy/utility developments (3%). The remaining consultations comprised access works, mineral proposals, community/educational developments and Listed Building applications.

6. The majority of decided planning applications (81%) were granted permission, which is comparable with the approval rate in previous years. Only 8% of applications were refused but there was an upturn in the proportion of applications withdrawn by the applicant prior to determination (11%).
7. The AONB raised no objection to the majority of applications, but often suggested design changes, alternative materials or additional landscaping or lighting conditions to help conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the AONB. There were 21 formal objections lodged to development proposals, and significant concerns were raised in respect of 14 further applications, which is comparable to last year's position. In many cases development proposals are amended to reflect the AONB's views and result in a better development outcome.

Local Planning Authority Response to AONB Comments

8. Analysis of LPA responses to substantive comments made by the AONB on decided planning applications (see pie-chart overleaf) shows that the majority of comments (79%) made by the AONB were accepted in full or in part. Only 21% of comments were not accepted or acted upon by the LPA's. Although this performance is slightly down on the previous year when 81% of comments were accepted in full or in part, it is encouraging to note that there was an increase in the proportion of comments accepted in full from 51% last year to 56% in the current year.
9. Of the 19 determined planning applications where the AONB's comments were not accepted by the LPA's, 18 applications were determined by Denbighshire and 1 by Flintshire. There were no cases in Wrexham where the AONB's comments had not been accepted in full or in part. Taking into account the overall number of decisions made by each authority, the percentage of cases where the AONB's comments were not accepted or acted upon was 23% in Denbighshire and 9% in Flintshire. Comparable figures for Denbighshire over the previous three years were 25% in 2017-18, 20% in 2018-19 and 18% in 2019-20. The equivalent data for the proportion of decided applications in Flintshire where the AONB's comments were not accepted was 36% in 2017-18, 16% in 2018-19 and 12% in 2019-20.
10. For the most part, comments made by the AONB which were not accepted related to design, materials, lighting and landscaping, and to suggestions for enhancement as part of a development project.

LPA Consideration of AONB Comments 2020-21



Planning Appeals

11. Five planning appeals were referred to the AONB during the year. All were decided and dismissed by the inspectorate. The majority of the appeals related to applications for new housing within the AONB at Carrog, Llanbedr DC, Llandynan and Eryrys. The AONB had objected to or raised significant concerns in respect of all these applications which were taken into account by the inspectorate.

Unauthorised Development

12. During the year, 31 potential cases of unauthorised development affecting the AONB were referred to the LPA enforcement teams for investigation. This is a notable increase over the 25 reported cases last year. It is disappointing that some developers and landowners appear to have used the cover of the pandemic to carry out works without the benefit of planning permission when LPA enforcement officers were hampered by lockdown and travel restrictions. The majority (22cases) were in Denbighshire, 8 in Flintshire and 1 in Wrexham. A significant proportion of these cases were concerned with engineering operations, earth moving and access works, but there were also cases of change of use, external storage, holiday chalets/yurts, new kennels, extensions and alterations, works to trees, deviation from approved plans or a failure to comply with conditions. In addition, an unauthorised traveller encampment was established just outside the AONB at Nant y Ffrith near Llandegla. Enforcement matters are often complex and take some time for the planning authorities to investigate and resolve. Many cases are still outstanding.

Policy/Strategic Consultations

13. The number of policy and strategic consultations referred to the AONB in 2020-21 was 6, which is a considerable reduction in activity over previous years. During the year, policy work by public bodies was significantly hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic as many were forced to shift their attention to responding to the public health crisis. However, the AONB did respond to Welsh Government consultations on *Noise, Air Quality and Soundscape: Review of TAN 11* and the *Litter and Fly Tipping Prevention Plan for Wales*. In addition, representations were submitted to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) *Dark Skies Policy Consultation*.

Landscape Character and Built Environment Working Group

14. The AONB Partnership Landscape Character and Built Environment Working Group leads on planning and development matters affecting the AONB. The group normally meets on three or four occasions during the year but during 2020-21 the group only met once as progress faltered as a result of the pandemic. This was an online meeting which, in addition to the usual review of planning and development consultations, considered and endorsed the draft AONB Dark Sky Supplementary Planning Guidance Note (SPG) *Planning for Dark Night Skies* for public consultation. The group also considered current planning compliance and enforcement matters and expressed concern about the increase in unauthorised development which had apparently taken place across the AONB during lockdown. Two further AONB Management Plan related initiatives which are at an early stage were supported by the working group. These are intended to make a positive and practical contribution to conserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the AONB and include a proposed review of Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) and a new highways design guide to be prepared in partnership with the local highway authorities.