

Meeting of the AONB Partnership
Friday 20th May
at 10:00
Community Hwb, Llysfasi / Hybrid Meeting

In Attendance

AONB Partnership Members

Councillor Bobby Feeley DCC
Councillor Paul Cunningham FCC

Chair of the Partnership
Andrew Worthington OBE

Representing Landscape Interest
Michael Skuse, David Davies

Representing Urban Interest
Rajan Madhok

Representing the Natural Environment
Les Starling

Representing Land Management
Huw Morgan, Sandy Archdale

Representing Recreation & Rights of Way
John Roberts

Representing Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
Carole Rothwell, Lyndsey Rawlinson

Representing Snowdonia Active
Dr Emma Edwards-Jones

Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB

Howard Sutcliffe AONB Officer
David Shiel AONB Area Manager
Karen Weaver AONB Coordinator
Rachel Jones AONB North Senior Ranger
Kate Thomson OPL Project Manager
Hannah Arndt Access & Recreation Officer
Graham Berry Moorland Officer
David Williams AONB Planning Officer

Representing Flintshire County Council
Tom Woodall Access & Natural
 Environment Manager

Representing Natural Resources Wales
Alun Price Partnerships Officer
 Northeast

Representing Wrexham County Borough Council
Kathryn Moore

Meeting Observers
Friends of Clwydian Range & Dee Valley
Julie Masters
Nick Ward

Apologies for absence were submitted from:

Roger Cragg, Christine Evans, Councillor Hugh Jones, Tom Johnstone, Ian Papworth, Huw Rees

1.

**Welcome
The**



**Apologies
AONB**

Officer, Howard Sutcliffe, opened the meeting and welcomed members to the Partnership. He explained that the meeting was being held hybrid and that the Chair would be chair present online. He welcomed Natural Resources Wales Officers, Carole Rothwell and Lyndsey Rawlinson, and Dr Emma Edwards-Jones, from Snowdonia Active, along with, Friends of the Clwydian Range & Dee Valley Trustees, Julie Masters, and Nick Ward. He also introduced and welcomed the newly appointed AONB Planning Officer, David Williams. Members introduced themselves around the table.

2. Appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair

The AONB Officer explained that the role of the Chair and Vice Chair was for a period of two years and that it was now time to appoint a Chair and Vice Chair for the Partnership once again.

The AONB Officer asked for nominations for the Chair. Cllr Paul Cunningham proposed that the current Chair Andy Worthington remained as the Chair, this was seconded by John Roberts. The Chair confirmed that he was willing and able to carry on.

The AONB Officer then asked for nominations for the Vice Chair. John Roberts proposed the existing Vice Chair, Cllr Paul Cunningham, and this was seconded by David Davies. Cllr Cunningham confirmed that he was willing and able to continue as Vice Chair.

Resolved

- That Andrew Worthington to be appointed as Chair of the Partnership until June 2024.
- That Cllr Paul Cunningham to be appointed as Vice Chair of the Partnership until June 2024.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on February 4th 2022

The Chair explained that most 'Matters Arising' would be covered within the meeting.

AONB Management Plan

AONB Area Manager, David Shiel reported that the public consultation period had now ended, with good feedback received. It was hoped that a draft of the plan would be available from June.

Application for Dark Sky Status

Two publications had been published

'A guide to the Constellations and their Welsh tales' and a 'Lighting Guide'.

A copy of the booklets was circulated to meeting members.

Visit by the Minister for Climate Change Julie James

Ken Skates MS was coordinating arrangements for a visit to the AONB with the Minister.

The minutes were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

3b. Minutes of Our Picturesque Landscape Steering Group Meeting

Partnership Officer, Kate Thomson explained that the OPL bus service was running again this year. Further information was available on the AONB website.

The next OPL report would be circulated to the group.

4. National Park for Northeast Wales

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Officers, Carole Rothwell (Principal Adviser, Landscape), and Lyndsey Rawlinson (Head of Northeast Wales Operations), gave a power point presentation (see attached). This explained the procedure for designating a landscape as a National Park and clarified that designation of a landscape was inevitably a lengthy and detailed process (a five-year plan) and that currently the process in relation to Northeast Wales was at a very early stage. Welsh Government had agreed (as part of its manifesto) to create a new National Park for Northeast Wales, and for the AONB to be extended. However, the designation process was the statutory responsibility of National Resources Wales (NRW). There would be governance and scrutiny around the proposed designation and a key consideration would be how the designation could affect the people who lived, worked and farmed in the area. They emphasised that the designation would involve considerable commitment and cost, and it was essential that all appropriate steps were taken and ensure that it was the correct decision for the area.

It was explained that the current AONB was not large enough to be designated a National Park, and other areas would be considered to extend it. Discussion ensued. It was raised whether Hirathog/Denbigh Moors, would be considered and if so, could there be a precedent with wind turbines already present there. It was explained that the size of renewable energy sites within protected landscapes was a concern and that the natural beauty of the landscape would be considered. The Berwyn was also raised by members as a potential extension area, it was currently a National Nature Reserve but invited serious consideration for additional designation.

NRW would also consider landscape restoration, Climate change and biodiversity as part of the process.

It was noted that with a National Park designation, planning would be the responsibility of the Park's Board. There were misconceptions that there would be more restrictions with National Park status, but it was felt that evidence on other areas surveyed that these doubts were unfounded. A member proposed for clarity that a template be drafted, explaining the planning process of a National Park.

Concerns were raised regarding the condition of the infrastructure in the area not being adequate, for a potential influx of visitors, and toilets being closed down. The AONB Officer responded that the landscape was nationally important, and education would be vital. A single purpose authority would be able to address all the type of problems that had been raised. National Park status would come with significant funding directly from Welsh Government.

In summing up the Chair said that there were clearly some exciting opportunities and challenges ahead, and that these must be fully shared and discussed with the farming communities and the people who lived and worked in the area. NRW and the AONB Teams must ensure that they would be able to fully answer any questions from them.

Lyndsey Rawlinson stressed that the designation was at the beginning of a long process and that NRW valued the input of the Partnership.

Action

- Lyndsey Rawlinson and Carole Rothwell be invited to the next partnership meeting to update the group.
- Presentation to be circulated to the group

5. **Recreation Plan for Central Clwydian Range**

Snowdonia Active, Projects Manager, Dr Emma Edwards-Jones, provided a power point presentation. (See attached). Discussion ensued.

Car parking costs - the AONB Area Manager explained that tariffs at AONB sites were used to help manage visitor pressure (the longer you stay the more you pay), to encourage visitors to think about how long they intended to stay, he added that all the money raised from tariffs went directly back to the service and assisted with the running of the sites.

It was suggested that there should be a consistent approach across all the Local Authorities within the AONB regarding tariffs.

In summing up the Chair said that as more visitors use the AONB for recreational purposes, and as we begin to progress with the National Park designation, communication with landowners and the farming community was vital. Some of the pressures that the AONB have is because of inadequate infrastructure. Most of the recommendations required resources and that was why National Park status would be welcome to help to address these issues in an efficient way. The plan contained valuable information and intelligence that could be fed into a National Park designation.

6. **Update from the AONB Officer**

AONB Officer, Howard Sutcliffe provided a verbal update:

- Welsh Government - Three-year funding had been obtained for Special Places, (nature recovery and decarbonisation). Also, a three-year grant of £50k had been obtained for the Sustainable Development Fund and an extra 50k for delivery of Management Plan.
- AONB had recently purchased a UTV and had an electric van.

- Grazing Seminar – the project had now ended, and the AONB hoped to carry on with some of the work completed by the project.
- Green Communities – Hannah Arndt was leading on the project, for communities within the AONB, DCC and WCBC.

AONB Planning Officer

Dave Williams had commenced his role as Planning Officer for the AONB. Dave had recently retired from his previous role as Head of Planning for Wrexham County Borough Council. His working days were Wednesday and Thursday.

Membership of Partnership

Following the recent Local Government elections, the following members were retiring:

Former Chair of the Joint Committee Tony Thomas
 DCC Members: Martyn Holland, Owen Thomas
 FCC Members: Colin Legg, Derek Butler
 WCBC : David Kelly, Sonia Benbow-Jones

Resignation from the Partnership

The AONB Officer reported that it was with regret that Tony King had submitted his resignation from the group. Tony was a long-standing member of the Partnership and previous JAC, as well as a member of the Heritage, Culture and Communities Working Group. He was also a member of the Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, as well as a long-standing volunteer. The AONB Officer thanked Tony for all his support for the AONB over the years and wished him well for the future.

Action

The Chair to write a letter of thanks to Tony King and retiring Members.

AONB Award for 2022

Nominations were now being received for the award.

7. Any Other Business
 No other business was raised.

8. Summing up of the Meeting from the Chair

The Chair thanked the NRW Officers, Carole and Lyndsey for their presentation, adding that the extended area would need to be considered in detail, and that the AONB would look forward to working in a genuine partnership with them. A six-monthly update would be very welcome. He also thanked Snowdonia Active Officer, Dr Emma Edwards-Jones, and looked forward to future discussion and taking the recommendations forward. The Chair congratulated Wrexham on gaining city status.

9. Future Meeting Dates

AONB Joint Committee Meeting	Friday 29 th July	2022	14:00	Venue to be decided
AONB Annual Forum	Thursday 22 nd September	2022	19:00	Venue to be decided
AONB Partnership Meeting	Friday 14 th October	2022	10:00	Venue to be decided
AONB Joint Committee Meeting	Friday 4 th November	2022	10:00	Venue to be decided