

<b>Report to</b>	<b>Communities Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>9<sup>th</sup> March 2023</b>
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	<b>Councillor Win Mullen / Emlyn Jones</b>
<b>Head of Service</b>	<b>Emlyn Jones, Head of Planning, Public Protection &amp; Countryside Services</b>
<b>Report author</b>	<b>David Shiel, AONB Area Manager</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Progress Report on the Denbighshire Moorlands Project</b>

## **1. What is the report about?**

- 1.1. To monitor progress against the objectives of the Denbighshire Moorland Project established as one of the recommendations of the Llantysilio Mountain Fire Review in 2019.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

- 2.1. To provide an update on the progress of the Denbighshire Moorlands Project established by this Committee as a recommendation of the [Review into the Llantysilio Mountain Fire](#) 2019 and following the appointment of the Moorland Officer in 2020 and to highlight the future commitments of the project.
- 2.2. To set out future commitments of the Denbighshire Moorland Project in the light of the progress made against the original objectives.

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

- 3.1 This is an update report and Members are asked to comment on the progress made to date and to support the efforts to extend the existing partnership with Natural Resources Wales.

## 4. Report details

- 4.1. A full Report is included as an appendix – In summary:
- 4.2. **Moorland Partnership Board** - A Project Partnership Project Board has been established with representation from Denbighshire County Council (DCC), Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS). Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) have recently joined this partnership board.
- 4.3. **Llantysilio Mountain restoration** - Working with NRW the Moorland Officer has led on the programme of work to restore around 15 Ha of the most severely damaged areas of Llantysilio mountain from the 2018 fire. The restoration was informed by Penny Anderson Report and Assessment of damage commissioned by NRW. A number of specialist techniques have been adopted to help restore the most severely damaged areas. Approximately 5 Ha treated with upland grass mix with heather brash and seed cut harvested from undamaged areas of the site - flown by helicopter – dropped on damaged areas.
- 4.4. Approximately 10 Ha have been hydro seeded – upland grass seed mix with organic ameliorant sprayed onto areas of most severe damage. Areas where there has been most severe soil loss with little or no natural regeneration. Grasses and mosses are slowly returning.
- 4.5. 60 long term monitoring plots across the mountain have been established in order to continue to monitor regeneration.
- 4.6. **Habitat / Fuel load Management** – The project has taken a wildfire risk assessment approach to targeting management.
- 4.7. The Moorland Field Officer has facilitated and organised works over key areas of the Clwydian Range, Llantysilio Mountain and Llandegla Moor. Approx. 140 Ha of cutting has taken place across these areas in order to reduce fuel load and improve habitat. In some areas cutting has taken place to help with agricultural and stock management.

- 4.8. The Moorland Officer has also supported NRW's work to negotiate and secure Section 16 Management Agreements on key parts of Llantysilio Mountain. This provides a framework for NRW to agree and fund works that the landowner and graziers would want to take forward over the next 5 years. The Agreement was confirmed in the Autumn of 2022 and a number of graziers have already been able to carry out works through this framework.
- 4.9. Funding has also been secured through the Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places programme for National Parks and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB's) to support moorland management across the Clwydian Range. The funding has supported the Moel Famau graziers to carry out works on Moel Famau, Moel Fenlli and Moel Dwyll. It has also supported the graziers on Moel y Parc and work on Moel Arthur and Moel Findeg.
- 4.10. National Peatland Action Programme - Further funding was secured through the NPAP for works in 2021 and 2022 focused on moorland areas of deep peat. This has enabled work on Llandegla Moor to carry out peatland restoration. Heather cutting and the removal of trees has taken place over 10 Ha. Ditch blocking has also been carried out – re-wetting a significant area of this important habitat and carbon store.
- 4.11. **Works with Fire Service** - The project has developed a close collaboration with NWFRS. A multi-agency Fire Response Plan is now in place detailing the assets and resources available in the event of wildfire. A number of joint training exercises have taken place with NWFRS AONB and NRW staff working together on prescribed burns in the Clwydian Range. AONB teams have supported NWFRS at a number of wildfire incidents working alongside fire crews and sharing specialist equipment. A film to promote the rules and regulations around prescribed burning has been produced by NWFRS which featured the Moorland Officer and AONB staff to help promote good practice.
- 4.12. **Future Commitments and Priorities** – The achievements of the Project so far have demonstrated the impact of having an officer to co-ordinate and facilitate works to reduce the risk of wildfires through fuel load management. A future programme will seek to build on these achievements. Specifically, it will:

- *Continue to support moorland management works across the Clwydian Range, Llantysilio Mountain and Llandegla Moors and extend activity south towards the north Berwyn.*
- *Maintain inter-agency relationships through continued joint training exercises and operational collaboration – in particular with NWFRS and NRW.*
- *Continue to secure capital funding to deliver a programme of works that will reduce fuel load, improve habitat and habitat connectivity and enhance moorland ecological resilience to wildfires in future.*
- *Engage and collaborate with local communities, landowners, graziers and farmers about wildfires and moorland management.*
- *To support NRW in the progress of Management Agreements to support works on designated sites.*
- *Continue a programme of monitoring for the project including habitat condition and programme of works carried out in the project area.*
- *Continue a public information campaign to promote responsible behaviour and the risk of wildfires especially in the Summer.*

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Themes?**

- 5.1. The Project sits within the Corporate Plan Theme – **A Greener Denbighshire** and is delivering against Aim 3: *Support communities to mitigate and cope with the impacts of climate change by:*

*Encouraging the management of moorland to reduce the risk of wildfires, working with landowners, farmers, communities and statutory bodies.*

Through the management of Denbighshire's moorlands, the project is also delivering against A Greener Denbighshire Aim 1: *Deliver our Climate and Ecological Change Strategy to become a net carbon zero and ecologically positive council by 2030, including:*

*Grow the amount of habitat available for pollinators and wildlife.*

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

- 6.1. The Moorland Post has been funded jointly by Denbighshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales. Denbighshire has already indicated an on-going

funding commitment to the role and the project. In 2020 NRW gave a 3-year commitment to funding which comes to an end in August 2023. Talks have begun with NRW to secure further funding to continue the project with an early indication that there is a willingness to continue to support the project.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

7.1. A Well-being Impact Assessment has not been completed for this progress report.

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1. This progress report is based on recommendations from a previous Communities Scrutiny Committee with contributions from the public and partner agencies.

8.2. The Moorland Partnership Board provides a framework for consulting with project partners and the graziers.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1. Funding was agreed for this activity in conjunction with our partners as part of the previous Corporate Plan. This report has no additional financial implications for the Council at this stage.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1. The current Partnership with NRW expires in August 2023. Discussions are underway to seek to extend this partnership.

10.2. The Moorland Partnership Board has oversight of the issues and the work programme associated with the project.

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1. Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

11.2. Section 7.4.1 (d) and (e) of the Council's Constitution.