

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 26th November 2013

Lead Member / Officer: Huw Jones

Report Author: Howard Sutcliffe

Title: Proposed Joint Committee for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

1. What is the report about?

In 2011 the Environment Minister Mr John Griffiths confirmed the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Designation Order. This order gave new national recognition and landscape protection to a substantial part of Counties of Denbighshire and Wrexham. The AONB geographically stretches from Prestatyn in the North, to Chirk Castle in the South; it includes the attractive towns of Llangollen and Corwen and encompasses 390 square kilometres of the three Counties of Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire. (Map Appendix 1)

In recognition of the expanded area, the existing AONB Committee, the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) reviewed its membership, and to be inclusive decided to have a balanced membership for Local Authorities (LA). Each of the LAs was invited to send 3 members to future meetings of the JAC Committee.

The JAC Committee commenced on a review of its governance by a series of seminars and papers. The Committee then recommended to officers that they would like to see a stronger relationship with the LAs and it was agreed that the Joint Committee (JC) Model was the best mechanism to achieve this aim.

The Chair and AONB Officer have pursued the JAC's recommendation of a JC by meeting with the Leaders, Chief Executives and Lead Officers to seek their views on a JC, all were supportive.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

A decision is required to create a Joint Committee (Draft Legal Agreement Appendix 2) by a formal agreement, there needs to be support by the appropriate committees/executives of Denbighshire, Wrexham and Flintshire Councils. That agreement defines the Joint Committee's delegated powers and roles. The key power of a Joint Committee is to 'discharge the delegated functions of AONB management.' The key role of the JC is 'the conservation and enhancement of the area's natural beauty.'

Subject to the establishment of a Joint Committee, the JC will be fully supported by an AONB Partnership, an officer Working Group and an Annual Forum.

3. What are the Recommendations?

The recommendation is that the Cabinet supports the formation of a Joint Committee for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB.

The Authority signs with Wrexham and Flintshire the Legal Agreement prepared by legal, financial and the AONB officer.

The proposed Joint Committee will comprise of 6 members, two from each Authority. This would create an efficient and effective committee. Denbighshire County Council should nominate two cabinet members to the Joint Committee. (Subject to Cabinet support all three Leaders have indicated they are prepared to be on the Committee.)

4. Report details.

There is no doubt that the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB incorporates a significant central geographical land mass (nearly 39,000 hectares), with popular attractions such as Llandegla Mountain Bike Centre (300,000 visitors per annum) together with attractions with potential such as Minera Lead Mines.

The AONB provides a significant health and wellbeing opportunity to the conurbations in Deeside, Wrexham, Cheshire and Merseyside who choose to come and enjoy the landscape of the AONB.

The economic function of the three Authorities has been undergoing a radical change over the last 50 years. There has been a reduction in heavy manufacturing, engineering and mining, together with a mechanisation and rationalisation of farms holdings and subsequent loss in employment in the rural economy.

This has meant that an increasing reliance on rural tourism in the three authorities. Most of the significant tourism attractions in North East Wales lie now within the AONB and it is the setting in the landscape of the AONB that makes each one so attractive, Ty Mawr Country Park, the Llangollen Railway and Loggerheads are all key destinations that are and can work in harmony with the AONB.

The key benefits of the Joint Committee are:

- **Greater Visibility of the AONB-** a Joint Committee has the delegated power to champion the designation and achieve the Vision. The AONB has its own voice and can agree actions with others.
- **Improved clarity-** a Joint Committee has clearly defined roles, responsibilities and accountability for the governance of the AONB.
- **Improved co-ordination of AONB Actions-** a Joint Committee has the authority to act across the local authority boundaries.
- **Improved efficiency and effectiveness-** a Joint Committee is the single point of contact for all AONB governance issues. It is small enough to make decisions and large enough to generate debate.
- **Explicit strategy-** a Joint Committee has a clear programme to deliver the AONB Vision.
- **Focused Leadership-** a Joint Committee has the resources to implement the AONB programme, with elected members focussing on the purpose of AONB designation and the needs of citizens and service users. They will deliver a high quality, cost effective service.
- **Responsible stewardship-** a Joint Committee is held to account; it is responsible with resources, especially other people's resources.
- **Icons-** there are specific jewels which straddle more than one Authority. The Joint Committee will influence and contribute to the management of them they

include: The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Llangollen Canal World Heritage Site, Moel Famau and the Jubilee Tower and Offa's Dyke National Trail.

Although the Joint Committee is seen as 'good practice' for the governance of the AONB; the AONB Officers will be taking forward many of the current aspects of the existing Interim Joint Advisory Committee.

The Joint Committee will establish the AONB Partnership at its first meeting; it will be made up of a number of outside bodies including representation from communities, landowners and business. It will also have representation from the four key aspects of the AONB Plan; Access and Recreation, the Natural Environment, The Built Environment and the Historical Environment. The Partnership will also be looking for inspirational individuals that will give the AONB a more comprehensive partnership.

To show a comprehensive approach to consultation the AONB will also hold an Annual AONB Forum. Each Forum will have a topical theme. Local County Council members and Community Councils who have all or part of their Ward will be invited together with other interested bodies and individuals.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- **Economy-** there is no doubt that rural tourism economy plays a key role to the success of rural Authorities; the AONB supports this aim through a framework of the Europarc Sustainable Tourism Charter that was granted to the AONB in 2009. This of course only related to the smaller Clwydian Range AONB. The business Group formed from the charter now has over 120 members. The Charter is due to be renewed 2014 taking in to account the larger geographic area the AONB now occupies. The funding for the strategy is in place. Over the previous 5 years members of the AONB Team have brought in over £3,000,000 in external grants. These have included the 'Centre of Excellence Cycling Project', 'Communities and Nature' development project, 'Walking with Offa' and 'Heather and Hillforts' Heritage Lottery Project.
- **Health and Wellbeing-** Both visitors and residents are encouraged to participate in outdoor events from walking, cycling, education to specific health events. In the future one aspect of work will focus on an inclusion project on education for other areas in North Wales and the North West.
- **Community-** Welsh Government has in recent years, played a pivotal role in supporting the AONBs through their Sustainable Development Fund. This has meant at least £50,000 per annum going to local projects; in 2013/14 that figure is £70,000.

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

Denbighshire is the Lead Authority for the AONB as it has been since Local Government Reorganisation in 1996. It will continue to be the lead Authority for the Joint Committee; as such it will provide the following Officers for the Joint Committee: the Secretary and Treasurer. The Joint Committee meetings will be hosted by each Authority in turn; the host Authority will provide the Secretariat for that meeting. These costs will be mainly to Legal and Democratic Services.

Denbighshire will provide a separate Budget Line and Report to the Committee. As with all Joint Committee Budgets the budget will have to be independently audited. These are costs to Finance and Countryside.

In terms of the budget, the current budget can be seen in the legal agreement. Over the next five years the budget will become, by negotiation equitable between the three Authorities.

7. **What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.** (Appendix 3)

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

The Clwydian Range IJAC has been consulted and is awaiting the formation of the JC. The LA Leaders, Lead Members, Chief Executives and Lead Officers have been briefed. Legal Officers from all three Authorities have drafted the Legal Agreement. Finance Officers have been consulted and have inputted into the Agreement. The AONB Officer has consulted informal cabinet. All three of the Cabinets/Executives or other Committees are now being asked to endorse the Joint Committee.

9. **Chief Finance Officer Statement**

The agreement will provide the AONB Joint Committee with improved financial planning and stability while ensuring that budgets are agreed annually which will allow all member authorities to respond to changes in financial circumstances. There are no additional costs to DCC as a whole as the additional financial, legal and administration support will be provided within existing staffing structures.

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

- **Financial-** the risk is low, but a considerable amount of time and effort has gone in from officers to get to the point when the Cabinet is being asked to make a decision in support of the Joint Committee. The AONB Committee has also invested a considerable amount of volunteer time in debating an improvement in accountability and governance.
- **Reputation-** The officers see stronger collaboration between the Local Authorities as the way forward for the AONB, in previous guises this has been informal. The Joint Committee formalises this and shows that the Local Authorities can work in a structured and collaborative way. Other outside bodies may well use the Joint Committee to fund projects in North East Wales that focus on the AONB.

11. **Power to make the Decision**

The Legal basis to establishing a Joint Committee lies in Section 101(5) of the Local Government Act of 1972 and the Local Government Act 2000, where Local authorities can enter arrangements to 'Discharge functions jointly with one or more other local authorities by means of a Joint Committee'