

<b>Report to</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of meeting</b>	18th February 2025
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Councillor Alan James
<b>Head of Service</b>	Emlyn Jones, Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services
<b>Report author</b>	Huw Rees, Lead Officer – Countryside and Heritage
<b>Title</b>	Denbighshire County Council Interim Statement on the Proposed National Park for North East Wales

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

- 1.1. To discuss and agree an interim statement from Denbighshire County Council on the proposal to create a new National Park in North East Wales as part of the current Natural Resources Wales (NRW) consultation.

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

- 2.1. A decision is required to agree the draft interim statement (Appendix 1).
- 2.2. NRW have requested an interim statement from all the constituent Local Authorities potentially affected by the National Park proposal for North East Wales as part of the current public consultation.

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

- 3.1. That Cabinet agree the interim statement as presented in Appendix 1
- 3.2. That Cabinet approve it as the Authority's response to the current NRW consultation on the National Park proposal.

## 4. Report details

4.1 Natural Resources Wales (NRW) was commissioned by Welsh Government, in its Programme for Government, to assess the case for a new National Park, based on the existing Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape (formerly known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or 'AONB'). The programme commenced in 2022 and is expected to conclude in 2026.

4.2 There is a detailed process, led by NRW, to ascertain the 'desirability to designate'. NRW have published a preferred boundary (Candidate Area) and other information to support a public consultation. The public consultation is intended to provide an opportunity for wide participation and inform discussion.

4.3 As part of that consultation, NRW have asked Denbighshire County Council, for an interim 'position' on the proposal. The interim statement in Appendix 1 has been drawn up by officers based on the various internal consultations (member workshops and Cabinet Briefings) outlined in the consultation section of this report, meetings with various departments potentially affected by the proposal and other discussions across the organisation. It is a 'best guess' gauge of the feeling the organisation has for the proposal, given the information available to it, currently.

5. It may help Cabinet members to know how the other local authorities involved have responded. *Powys County Council* does not support the designation proposal. It has stated that the area should not be designated, and Powys should be excluded from the process. *Flintshire County Council* have stated they do not support the new designation currently. They cite lack of information, short- and long-term costs and funding, bureaucracy, timing and the effect on Planning and the LDP.

## 6. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

6.1. At this stage of the consultation process, the interim statement on the National Park proposal has no impact on the Corporate Plan. As stated in section 4 of this report, NRW are responsible for the work to formulate a decision on this proposal. This has not been completed and the Authority are therefore not able to ascertain its contribution to the Corporate Plan.

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

- 7.1. One of the main reasons for proposing the response as outlined in the interim statement is the lack of clarity on cost and its impact on other services. Until more information is made available, an Authority position on the National Park proposal is not possible.
- 7.2. The interim statement outlines that the Authority believes there will be costs associated with the proposal and is requesting more information from NRW and Welsh Government.
- 7.3. The interim statement also outlines that the Authority believes there will be an impact on other services, particularly Planning, Countryside and Public Rights of Way. More information about the governance arrangements for the National Park proposal have been requested to understand these.

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

- 8.1. A WIA is not possible for this at this stage as there is a lack of information.
- 8.2. It is worth noting that NRW have further work scheduled. They will be carrying out assessments on the impact of the proposal on the Welsh Language, Economy, Equalities and Health. A benefits analysis will also be undertaken.

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

- 9.1. Denbighshire County Council has engaged with the process set out by NRW from the beginning. The Authority is represented by officers on both the Advisory and Technical working groups. There have been several meetings to discuss the area of search and various options put forward by NRW.
- 9.2. The NRW have, over the last two years, attended Cabinet Briefing twice. They have led two member workshops. The first was in the public engagement period (around autumn 2023) when there was a published area of search and suggested areas to be added or omitted. The second workshop was just prior to

the public consultation period (November 2024) to set out the rationale for the publish boundary (Candidate Area), summarise work completed and explain the next steps.

9.3. Members and Officers have been made aware of the various online and drop-in events held by NRW over the last couple of years with dedicated emails and encouraged to engage with the current consultation.

9.4. A draft version of the interim statement was discussed at CET in January 2025 and Cabinet Briefing on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2025.

## **10. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

10.1. The interim statement (Appendix 1) queries the costs of the process and how future funding will be found if the National Park is designated.

10.2. There are no financial implications for the Authority in sending the interim statement to NRW apart from Officer and member time.

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

11.1. The interim statement outlines the lack of information to date for this proposal. It is difficult to evaluate the risks to the Authority from the National Park proposal until more information is available and there is some clarity on the concerns identified in the interim statement.

11.2. There is no risk attached to sending the interim statement to NRW.

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

12.1. Under the Council's Constitution determining responses to consultative documentation likely to have authority-wide implications is a function for which Cabinet is responsible.