

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 15 June 2016
Report Subject	Progress Report on the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Environment
Report Author	Chief Officer (Planning & Environment) and AONB Officer
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report is a Progress Briefing on the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (Appendix 1 Map of AONB).

Part of Flintshire lies within the AONB and is managed in partnership with Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council and Wrexham County Borough Council via a Joint Committee and an AONB Partnership. Work is carried out on behalf of the three authorities by the AONB Officer and the AONB Team.

This report details (at 1.01 onwards) the 2014-15 mechanism for governance of the AONB and the work carried out across the AONB, particularly in the Flintshire area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To note the progress of and support for the work of the AONB.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE AONB
1.01	Governance: The governance of the AONB has been overhauled over the past three years. Leading the AONB is a Strategic AONB Joint Committee (JC). This Joint Committee has been delegated the responsibility for managing the AONB from the three authorities. The JC membership is made up from two cabinet members from each of the three authorities. Flintshire has appointed Councillors Derek Butler and Bernie Attridge to the

JC. This strategic committee has met three times per year and has its own budget. Natural Resources Wales also contribute to the budget in addition to the three authorities.

The JC has appointed an AONB Partnership to support the JC and its officers. This consists of nine County Councillors: three from each local authority and 16 other members. The three Flintshire Members are Councillors Paul Cunningham, Carolyn Thomas and Colin Legg. Councillor Cunningham is now Vice Chair of the Partnership.

The 16 members applied to join the Partnership to represent land management, rural interests, urban interests, landscape, natural, historical, built and access and recreation. In addition, we have three individual members. The Partnership has met twice formally plus four Working Group Meetings and four familiarisation days.

Sites: two sites are jointly owned by Flintshire and Denbighshire: Loggerheads and Moel Famau Country Park. Natural Resources Wales also own three Forestry Blocks in Flintshire that have a jointly funded Warden with the AONB.

Sustainable Development Fund (SDF): The Fund has been instrumental in supporting projects across the AONB (Appendix 2 gives a full list of specific projects funded in Flintshire).



Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley: Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley launched on 15 July 2016 and since then has grown to exceed all expectations. A small group of enthusiastic trustees successfully registered the organisation with the Charity Commission.

The membership of the Friends now stands at 134, which is an amazing achievement in less than one year. The group has arranged a number of events and activities, some in partnership with others. Visits to increase awareness and understanding of the special features of the AONB have been arranged to Tomen yr Rhodwydd, Bryn Alyn, Chirk and the World Heritage Site, Moel Arthur and Penycloddiau, Golden Grove Historic House and Gardens. Talks have been given by the AONB Officer and the members have participated in activities such as litter picks. Over 200 people have attended these events. Over the next year, the Friends will continue to arrange events, but also hope to deliver projects within the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley. Some suggestions that are currently being investigated are mapping the viewpoints of the AONB and crash sites of World War Two aircraft. One member has already registered 33 sites on Moel Famau, seeking grant aid to help purchase a tramper for use at Loggerheads Country Park and Ty Mawr and more practical activities.



Planning: The majority of consultations (242, which is 73% of the total) were

for planning and related applications from the three local planning authorities, but the second largest type of consultation is now for informal pre and post application advice (64, which makes up 20% of total consultations). This is up from last year. The remaining consultations were policy type consultations (13, which includes various Welsh Government consultations, LDP and SPG consultations), planning appeals and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (The North Wales Windfarms Connection Project).

Of the planning and related application consultations from the local planning authorities the majority, as expected, were from Denbighshire (172 which represents 72% of the total), followed by Flintshire (54, which is 22%) and Wrexham (16, which is 7%).

During the year, 12 potential cases of unauthorised development affecting the AONB were referred to the Planning Enforcement team in Denbighshire, including caravans, tipping, tree felling, and advertisement signs.

Health Walks 2015-15: Llanasa has a walk every month with on average 18 participants. Gwaenysgor has weekly walks with on average 12 participants. Trelawnyd has weekly walks with on average 19 participants and Loggerheads has a weekly Nordic walk with on average 25 participants.

Flintshire Individual Groups within Flintshire have benefited from the AOMNB and its staff: NEWCIS (Carers Association) have come to Moel Famau, Loggerheads and Prestatyn. Castle Heights (Sheltered housing in Flint) have done short walks around the grounds and come to Loggerheads. CAIS (Drugs and Alcohol) have attended walks at Loggerheads and Moel Famau, Greenbank Villas (Supporting People in Flint) attended events at Loggerheads including walks.

The Healthy Walking Officer has trained staff to become walk leaders at Greenbank Villas, whilst attending The Well-Being Event at Mold Law C and the Family Open Day at Airbus Broughton.

Biodiversity: Work to move the grasslands at Loggerheads towards favourable condition has continued this winter. As part of this, there has been a programme of non-native invasive species removal – in particular rose of Sharon and Cotoneaster from the cliff faces. Volunteers have assisted with bracken removal and scrub control on the grasslands. In addition six Hebridean sheep have been introduced as part of a programme of conservation grazing. The small population of adders is breeding for the first time since 2011.

The AONB is a partner in the Alyn and Chwiler Living Landscape (ACLL) Project which centres on the Alyn (up to Mold) and Wheeler River corridors both of which are predominantly within the AONB. This partnership approach is facilitating larger scale conservation work on the river valleys, contributing to the delivery of AONB management plan objectives, as well as other partners work programmes. It also means the partners work programmes are better coordinated and more effective on a landscape level. Partners include NWWT (North Wales Wildlife Trust) (lead), NRW, NEWW, FCC, DCC and BASC. Over £30,000 has been spent through the project within the AONB between April 2015 and April 2016.

Work done by AONB staff in partnership with the ACLL Project has included: Himalayan balsam removed from source of River Alyn to Trial Hill (approx. 19km). A new patch was discovered in the Cacwn brook area and removed. Over 100 volunteer hours spent removing Himalayan balsam from the River Alyn in the AONB.

The AONB supported Himalayan balsam removal on the Wheeler by assisting in the surveying and arranging volunteer removal days. SDF funded the interpretation and production of leaflet for the project and restoration of a river bank on the Alyn using natural materials instead of stone gabions.

The AONB, through the NRW Partnership, has continued to develop approximately one acre of Upland acid hay meadow in the centre of Coed Nercwys. Volunteers and Young Rangers have helped with weed control. Seven hebridean sheep have been introduced as part of this management which aims to establish a flower rich meadow. Over the summer, a traditional skills workshops was held providing training in traditional scything.

Dry stone walling in Coed Nercwys - 24 volunteers helped over four days to restore approximately 20m of wall.

A hedge laying competition for volunteers was held at Llangwyfan in February. This was an opportunity for volunteers, who have over the years developed significant expertise in rural crafts, to demonstrate their skills. Over 30 volunteers took part and laid over 150m of hedge. At Loggerheads a coppice rotation was completed with volunteers to increase biodiversity within the woodland. Volunteer work has started on removing invasive trees from the SAC woodland, particularly sycamore and grand fir. Eight pied flycatcher nests were confirmed in the Park over summer.

Volunteer have spent five days thinning the woodland at Coed Alex near Llangwyfan. This is a young woodland, it was planted approximately 15 years ago, so this is the first thin.

Outreach: The AONB is working with Flintshire Local Voluntary Council and Flintshire Mind to support the 'Step Up, Step Out' Programme which provides opportunities for people who may have suffered mental health issues, to follow an eight-week programme of outdoor voluntary work in the countryside and gain the John Muir award. Over the last 12 months the groups have worked on a number of projects in the AONB including the development of the hay meadow at Nercwys, access work, clearing conifer at House for a Grouse on Moel Famau, birch management on Moel Findeg and litter picking, as well as guided walks.

The AONB provides three placements for students at St Christopher's Special School in Wrexham. The students spend four hours per week at Loggerheads and Mole Famau. The AONB has provided support for the Flintshare Community Growers – the volunteers have assisted the group to improve their access issues and have constructed a bridge onto the site. The AONB has assisted pupils at Ysgol Terrig to build a round house using materials from the quarry at Coed Nercwys.

The Brownies have been out at Moel Famau to help with conservation work and staff have supported the Brownies in Llangollen to build a bug hotel in their grounds. Moel Famau Family Fun Day took place again this year which provides an opportunity for the AONB and NRW to showcase their work. A range of children's activities and walks took place as well as demonstrations in arboriculture and conservation. At Loggerheads volunteers have completed the restoration of a set of original mine trucks which were part of the heritage interpretation for the park.

Young Rangers: The Young Rangers in the Clwydian Range continues to grow. A programme of activities has been published for the summer and winter months. Activities have included woodland skills, dormouse monitoring, and bird box construction. The successful Young Rangers model in the Clwydian Range has been replicated into the Dee Valley.

Sustainable Tourism: Support has been given to the Clwydian Range Food Trail Group to develop a "Clwydian Range Breakfast". A range of locally produced ingredients have been sourced and are being promoted to B&Bs, cafes and other hospitality businesses as a concept of a Clwydian Range Breakfast. A launch event was held at Loggerheads Country Park – with cooking demonstrations and meet the producers' session. Over 50 businesses attended.

Archaeology: Gop cairn (Scheduled Ancient Monument) is the second largest prehistoric earthwork in the UK, second only to Silbury Hill in southern England. There were some excavations at the site in the late Victorian period when it was thought that it may be a large burial cairn or chambered cairn dating to the Neolithic period. It is still thought to date to this period because although burials were not found in the mound, they were found in the cave below. In 2014 the site became a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). It had become very overgrown with scrub which is bad from both the archaeological and the natural environment perspective. With a 100% grant from Cadw extensive and sensitive clearance took place on the site, such that you can now see the profile of the site much more clearly. NRW have at the same time negotiated a management agreement with the owner of the site such that it will be strimmed in future so will remain and open grassland site.

The excavations continued for the 4th year at a site on the eastern ramparts of Penycloddiau hillfort. The excavation is directed by Dr Rachel Pope, a lecturer at Liverpool University, and is run as training excavations for students. The construction of the rampart was finally identified as a dry stone wall about four metres wide in its original format. Excavations are also taking place on the site of a platform which is possibly the site of an iron age house within the hillfort. The excavators are able to attract academics from a wide range of backgrounds to use new techniques on the site. In the summer of 2015, archaeologists from the Museum of London conducted a drone survey in order to produce 3D plans of the site. Denbighshire Countryside Services organised open day visits to the site for members of the public. Work will continue in the summer of 2016.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Flintshire currently contribute £26,500 to the AONB.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	N/A

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	Flintshire County Council's contributions are key to the continuation of the AONB. The AONB contributes to the 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015'.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 AONB Map Appendix 2 Sustainable Development Projects

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Contact Officer: Howard Sutcliffe AONB Officer Telephone: 01352 810614 (Loggerheads Country Park) E-mail: howard.sutcliffe@denbighshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) - The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB was first designated in 1985 and extended to cover the Dee Valley in 2011. It is one of Wales's eight Protected Landscapes considered the finest in Wales. It is one of 5 AONBs and together with the three National Parks are a Nationally Protected Network.
7.02	AONBs are recognised by the International Union for Conservation and Nature as a Category 5 Landscape (this is recognised worldwide - two other Category 5 Landscapes are The Lake District National Park and Yosemite National Park).
7.03	Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) is given by Welsh Government to the five AONBs. Although it is a variable amount, it averages around £60,000 which normally levers in around two to three times that amount in match funding.