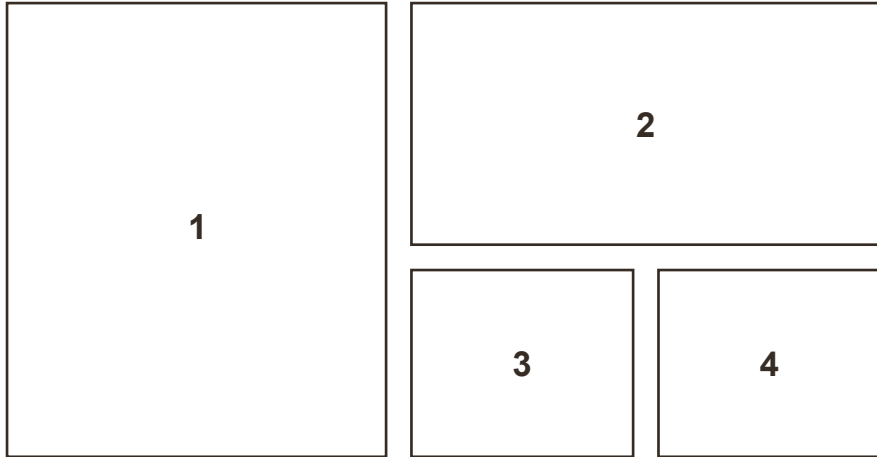




Flintshire Coast Regional Park - A Scoping Study

JUNE 2022



Photos on front cover:

1. Greenfield Dock
2. Flint Castle
3. Wales Coast Path, River Dee
4. Flint Dock

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SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Policy Review

Regional Park Precedents

Executive Summary

This Study sets out a potential pathway for the Flintshire Coast to attain a formal Regional Park status. The Study discusses whether a formal Regional Park designation should be pursued or whether the existing informal Coast Park brand should be more deeply embedded in local policy and priorities.

As part of the process, Chapter 2.0 reviews Regional Park precedents in the UK, describing their journey from inception to designation. This includes the Valleys Regional Park in south Wales which has established considerable momentum without a formal designation compared with the Lee Valley Regional Park in London and Hertfordshire which was established in legislation in 1966 and therefore has legal status and funding permanence.

Chapter 3.0 provides an update on the six gateways listed in the 2015 Flintshire Coast Park prospectus and concludes with the Coastal Communities Online Consultation of February 2022. The consultation reaches out to Flintshire residents and the comments include confirmation of the most popular destinations and activities, opportunities for improvement along the coast and the frequency of visits.

Chapter 4.0 highlights the potential Regional Park's fit with existing legislation, policies and programmes, while Chapter 5.0 summarises contributions from stakeholders including those from

Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Dee Estuary Conservation group and Our Dee Estuary.

Why Designate is the topic for Chapter 6.0 and the narrative sets out the benefits of the designated Lee Valley Regional Park (LVRP) including the transformation of post-industrial land over a 50-year period and governance under the LVRP Authority. This is compared with the non-designated Valleys Regional Park in south Wales which has nevertheless set up a partnership with 13 local authorities, received substantial funding from Welsh Government and is referenced in Future Wales: The National Plan 2040. Both precedents work extensively with local communities by drawing residents into the natural environment, imparting new skills and supporting physical and mental health.

Chapter 7.0 sets out several potential footprints for the Regional Park or Coast Park alternative. Option One has a coastal focus based on the 2015 Flintshire Coast Park prospectus but with two additional gateways at Llannerch-y-môr and Saltney. Option Two would have the same coastal focus as Option One but with additional connection green infrastructure (GI) corridors from neighbouring assets. Option Three 'Dee Viewshed' would include all the elements of the previous options and would extend into the hinterland, where views from higher ground include the Dee Estuary. Option Four would include all the elements of Option One, Two and Three and would have an extended footprint to include the remaining areas of the Lower Dee catchment in Wales (mirroring the Our Dee Estuary initiative).

Addressing challenges is the subject of Chapter 8.0 and it outlines some of the challenges faced by the coastal communities in terms of socio-economic factors, infrastructure for business and visitor economy and how these could be addressed by a Regional Park or Coast Park alternative.

Chapter 9.0 draws together the findings of the scoping study described in the preceding chapters and recommends three stages (transitional, implementation and management) in the setting up and establishment of a Regional Park or Coast Park alternative.



1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In December 2021, Flintshire County Council (FCC) appointed The Environment Partnership (TEP) Ltd to carry out a Scoping Study (the Study) to examine the potential for a Flintshire Coast Regional Park designation. The Coast Park already has an informal status arising from a 2015 Flintshire Coast Park prospectus which has been endorsed by FCC.
- 1.2 The Study sets out a potential pathway for the Flintshire Coast to attain a formal Regional Park status. The Study discusses whether a formal Regional Park designation should be pursued or whether the existing informal Coast Park brand should be more deeply embedded in local policy and priorities.
- 1.3 The Study reviews Regional Park precedents in the UK, describing their journey from inception to designation.
- 1.4 In relation to Flintshire, the Study:
- Reviews progress of projects listed in the 2015 Flintshire Coast Park prospectus
 - Examines legislation and planning policy hooks for a Regional Park
 - Elicits contributions from locally based stakeholders
 - Maps options for potential footprints of a Regional Park / Coast Park
 - Considers challenges faced by the Flintshire Coast and how some of those could be addressed

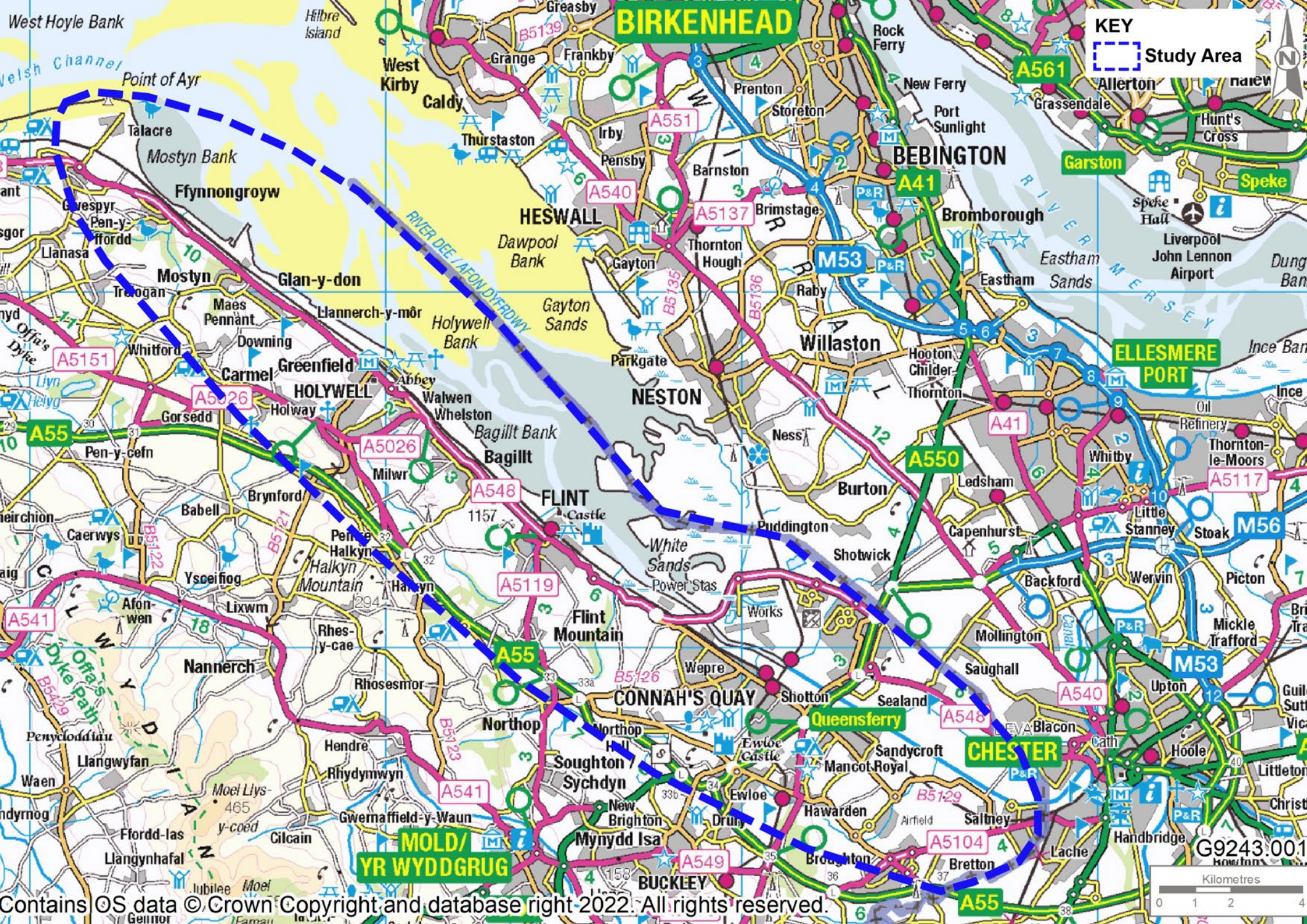
- 1.5 The Study concludes with separate recommendations for next steps in relation to either a formal Regional Park designation or embedding the more informal Coast Park status.
- 1.6 The Scoping Study has been led by Flintshire County Council's Access and Natural Environment Team supported by a client steering group and a wider stakeholder group who have contributed to online discussions.

What is a Regional Park?

A regional park is an area of land preserved on account of its natural beauty, historic interest, recreational use or other reason, and under the administration of a form of local government.

Study Area

- 1.7 The broad 'Area of Search' for the Study is illustrated opposite. It focusses on the Dee Estuary upstream from Point of Ayr, including the hinterland to the Flintshire coast, and then following the River Dee towards Saltney and the local authority boundary with Chester.
- 1.8 The 'Area of Search' provided a starting point for consideration of the potential boundary options for the footprint of the Regional Park or Coast Park.



KEY
Study Area



Structure of the Report

- 1.9 This report presents the main conclusions of the Study. It comprises an initial introduction of to the commission, followed by eight chapters addressing key issues arising out of the Study.
- 1.10 Chapter 2 sets out precedent for regional parks in the UK, including examples from Wales, England and Scotland. The chapter includes reference to legislation and policy and a useful summary of research into regional parks carried out by the North West Development Agency. It also includes an introduction to the Living Levels Landscape Partnership (Gwent Levels).
- 1.11 Chapter 3 sets out the context of the Flintshire Coast in terms of the prospectus (published in 2015) and an update on activity completed since that date. It also includes a summary of the Coastal Communities online consultation undertaken early during 2022.
- 1.12 Chapter 4 highlights the potential Regional Park's fit with existing legislation, policies and programmes.
- 1.13 Chapter 5 summarises contributions from stakeholders and includes reference to the Review of the Wales Coast Path on its 10th Anniversary.
- 1.14 Chapter 6 considers reasons for a Regional Park designation.
- 1.15 Chapter 7 examines potential footprints for a Regional Park.
- 1.16 Chapter 8 considers some of the challenges faced by the Flintshire Coast and how some of those challenges could be addressed by a regional park or coast park.
- 1.17 Chapter 9 provides next steps for the Regional Park designation and the Coast Park alternative.



View from National Cycle Route 5 south of Baginbun

2.0 Precedent

2.1 This chapter presents an outline of three regional parks across three of the UK’s home nations, including where relevant, reference to the formal processes required in their designation. There is also an introduction to the Living Levels Landscape Partnership in Gwent. The chapter concludes with the findings of a research study into Regional Park models in the UK. The three regional parks are:

- Valleys Regional Park, South Wales
- Lee Valley Regional Park, Hertfordshire and Greater London
- Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, West of Scotland

Valleys Regional Park, South Wales

2.2 The Valleys Regional Park (VRP) spans the former south Wales coalfield (see image adjacent). Defined in Future Wales: The National Plan 2040, the VRP area stretches from the western borders of Monmouthshire in the east to the Valleys of Carmarthenshire in the west; the Brecon Beacons National Park in the north; and the major cities of Cardiff, Swansea, and Newport to the south.

2.3 It covers an area of over 200,000 hectares (570 sq. miles) and is home to over one million people, approximately one-third of the Welsh population. Given this physical spread,

the park initiative operates within the local authorities of Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen and provides an example of regeneration practice that looks across administrative boundaries. The VRP is also intended to be more than existing parks, forests, open spaces and amenity areas but is also to include settlements, heritage sites, industrial sites, derelict land and brownfield sites. It includes the footprint of the South Wales valleys coalfield. Due to the mix of landscapes, the VRP is not suitable for National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation.



Location and Boundaries of the Valleys Regional Park Area

2.4 The concept of a Valleys Regional Park was considered in the South Wales Outline Plan (1949) and feasibility work was undertaken during 2008-2010 and post 2010 through the Valleys Regional Park Strategic Delivery Framework 2012 - 2020. However, the VRP was not officially incepted until 2019 and it has not yet been formally designated. During 2022 the intention of the Board will be to decide whether to pursue formal designation of the VRP.

2.5 Key to understanding how the VRP can act as a model for Flintshire is its fit with legislation and existing and emerging policies (discussed further in Chapter 4.0), including:

- Environment (Wales) Act 2016
- Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015
- Prosperity for All: The National Strategy
- Future Wales: The National Plan 2040
- Welsh Government Natural Resources Policy

2.6 The VRP has its own policy reference in the Future Wales: The National Plan 2040, and it states that Welsh Government supports the establishment of the VRP and that Strategic and Local Development Plans should embed its principles into their planning frameworks. Welsh Government will work with local authorities, the third sector and key partners to support the Valleys Regional Park and maximise opportunities for new development.



VRP Discovery Gateways



Ynysangharad War Memorial Park

Discovery Gateways

- 2.7 VRP has been promoting Discovery Gateways as ‘launchpads’ into the landscape and heritage that tell the Valleys’ story. There are currently 12 Discovery Gateways including the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre, Ynysangharad War Memorial Park and the National Lido of Wales and Llyn Llech Owain.
- 2.8 The VRP is funded by the Welsh Government Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys and the European Social Fund. Funding is currently secured for a further 12 months until April 2023. VRP is managed by a strategic and operation lead, with five supporting posts covering communications, partnerships, communities, landscape and recreation.

VRP Guardians

- 2.9 The VRP Guardians are a dedicated team of experts delivering nature-based activities across the Welsh Valleys. Working through the Discovery Gateways and within local communities, the Guardians offer opportunities to connect with the nature on the doorstep whilst learning new skills in how to care for natural habitats and landscapes. There are 10 projects up and running, including three green social prescribing pilots.

Big Boc Bwyd

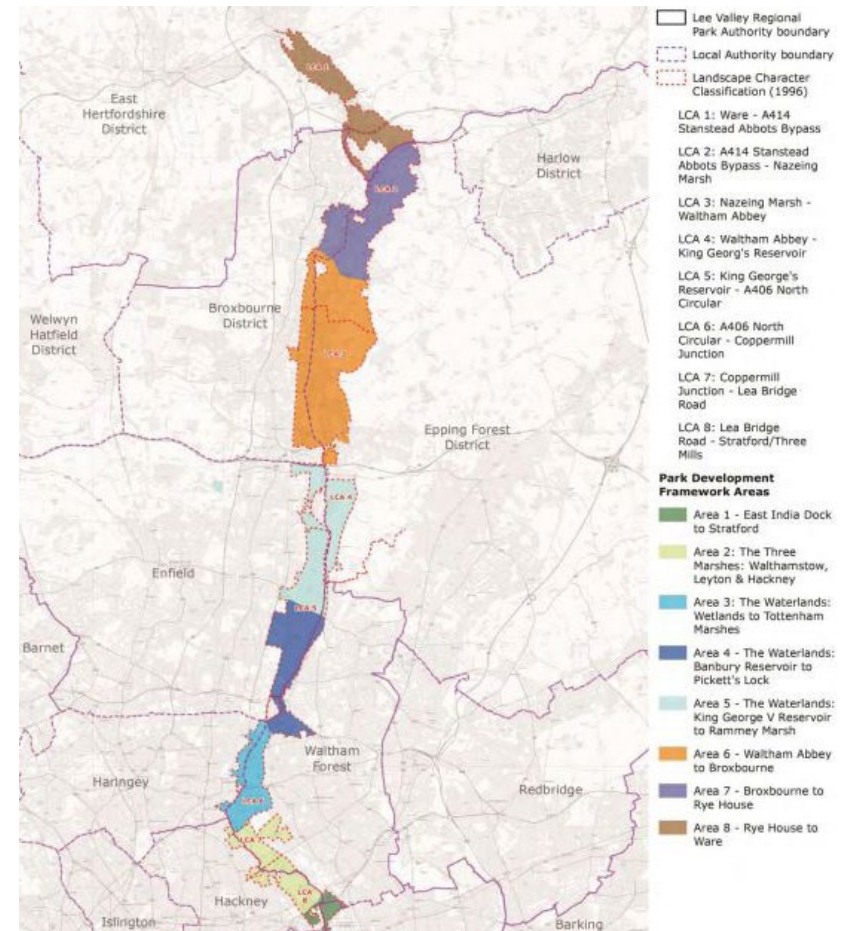
- 2.10 VRP partners with other organisations in the Big Bocs Bwyd (BBB) initiative. Working with schools, BBB’s aim is to ensure that no child is hungry and that every child can learn how to make good food choices that enable them to thrive. BBB works with the four purposes of the Curriculum in Wales and works with children in learning about food, the benefits of growing food and cooking food.

Lee Valley Regional Park (LVRP)

2.11 Established by legislation in 1966, LVRP follows the course of the River Lee through Hertfordshire, Essex and Greater London. The LVRP has been working alongside partner organisations to transform the post-industrial land along the River Lee into a place for leisure, recreation, sport and nature.

The Regional Park is now a mosaic of open spaces, heritage sites, country parks, farms, golf courses, lakes and riverside trails, campsites, marinas, angling and boating locations, attracting more than seven million visitors a year. In terms of designated sites for nature it includes eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Ramsar and Special Protection Area.

2.12 The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (LVRPA) was created in 1967 following the Lee Valley Regional Park Act 1966. The Act sets out the duty of the Authority to “develop, improve, preserve and manage the park as a place for the occupation of leisure, recreation, sport, games or amusements... for the provision of nature reserves and for the provision and enjoyment of entertainment of any kind” (Section 12 (1)).



Location and Boundaries of the Lee Valley Regional Park Area

2.13 The Lee Valley Regional Park Act 1966 Section 14 made special provision about planning. As a result a this a suite of planning policy documents have been prepared and then updated over time. In July 2010, the Authority adopted the Vision, Strategic Aims and Principles followed by adoption of

a series of Thematic Proposals in January 2011 which set out development and management proposals on a broad Park-wide thematic basis. These have been subsequently updated by the Park Development Framework (2019). Despite the bespoke planning framework for LVRP, planning powers are conceded to the relevant planning authorities.

Governance

2.14 Guided by the governing legislation which created Lee Valley Regional Park Authority in the 1960s, the Authority is run by 28 Board Members drawn from across London, Essex and Hertfordshire. The board meets through a series of committees and full Authority meetings.

Plans and Developments

2.15 (LVRPA) has a mission and strategic business plan which aims to continue to transform the Regional Park into a world class visitor destination. The vision is to create a premier destination that brings together the best of nature, sport and discovery. By working together with a range of public and private sector partners, LVRPA intends to open up all of the Lee Valley, from the heart of the London to the Essex and Hertfordshire countryside, so that it becomes a unique combination of sights, activities and experiences.

2.16 A key focus is to create a zone of sporting excellence within Lee Valley Regional Park made up of the facilities delivered as part of the legacy of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, including:

- Lee Valley White Water Centre near Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire
- Lee Valley VeloPark; and
- Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centres, all within the Olympic Park at Stratford.

Funding

2.17 The Authority generates the majority of its income from commercial and business activities, maximising a range of opportunities in order to lessen the demand on council tax payers.

2.18 The rest comes from a levy on council taxpayers in London, Essex and Hertfordshire – which equates to 80p per person per year. The ceiling for the levy is determined by a formula set out in ‘The Levying Bodies (General) Regulations 1992’ which is adjusted annually to account for inflation.

2.19 The levy helps to keep Lee Valley Regional Park’s parklands maintained to a high standard and its venues as accessible as possible. It also ensures that the park remains a regional attraction offering unique mix of nature, sport and leisure

facilities to the people of London, Essex and Hertfordshire and beyond. It attracts around eight million visits a year. Around 80% of visitors are from London, Essex and Hertfordshire, with the remainder from other places both nationally and internationally.

- 2.20 Lee Valley Regional Park Authority has a statutory remit to develop and preserve leisure, recreation, sport and nature and so the money raised through the levy is directed to assets such as its eight Green Flag winning open spaces, three Green Heritage Sites and its sport and leisure venues.

Ranger Service

- 2.21 A dedicated team of 21 full-time and part-time Parkland Managers, Rangers, Assistant Ranger and Admin, look after open spaces within the 40.5 sq. km (15.6 square miles) , 26-mile long, LVRP.

Website

- 2.22 There is a dedicated website providing access to plans and developments and governance arrangements. Also available is the Lee Valley for nature, sport and discovery website for the general public.

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, West Scotland

- 2.23 [Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park](#) covers an area of 265 sq. km (108 square miles) across three local authorities: Renfrewshire Council, Inverclyde Council and North Ayrshire Council and has 700,000 visitors a year. In the 1960's Renfrew County Council proposed the Renfrewshire Regional Park and implemented a programme to manage an area of 30,000 acres (12,500 ha) including the creation of Muirshiel Country Park in June 1970. This was the blueprint for a modern-day Regional Park system in Scotland.
- 2.24 In 1981 the Wildlife and Countryside (Scotland) Act provided the enabling legislation for Scottish Regional Parks. In this Regional Parks are defined as *“large areas of countryside parts of which are available for informal countryside recreation”*.
- 2.25 The policy statement on Regional Parks for Scotland by NatureScot points out their aims: *“...to facilitate both the appropriate understandings and enjoyment of the countryside and the integration of this with the other uses of the area, such as farming, forestry and other development, with the context of maintaining and enhancing a quality natural heritage setting. This type of approach is fully consistent with thinking about countryside management, as it has development over the last 20 years. Regional Parks have indeed been to the fore in applying this more integrated approach in Scotland”*.



Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park Objectives

2.26 The objectives of the Park are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, biodiversity and cultural heritage of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.
- To encourage and enable learning, understanding and enjoyment of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.
- To promote and foster environmentally sustainable development for the social and economic well-being of the people and communities within the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park area.

2.27 The Park has three visitors' centres (Greenock Cut, Muirshiel and Castle Semple) which provide a centre for information with refreshments, toilets, car park, provision for outdoor learning and outdoor activities and a network of tracks and trails. The Park is supported by a countryside ranger service and an outdoor activity team and there are two conservation volunteer groups. There is an extensive Special Protection Area (SPA) in the central part of the Park.

2.28 The Park has a dedicated website and brand confirming details about: outdoor activities, events, outdoor learning, volunteering, land management, interpretation and heritage job. There is also information on governance and job opportunities.

2.29 The Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park Authority Joint Committee is governed by a Minute of Agreement (MoA) which was most recently agreed by Renfrewshire Council, Inverclyde Council and North Ayrshire Council in 2004. The annual budget of the Park was £1,323,000 in 2010/11. Apart the direct funding of the Park, the three partner local authorities continue to apply for external funds from Scottish Government agencies such as Nature Scot.

The Living Levels Landscape Partnership, Gwent

2.30 The Living Levels Landscape Partnership (LLLP) delivers a programme of work which will promote and reconnect people to the heritage, wildlife and natural beauty of the historic landscape of the Gwent Levels. The Living Levels Partnership came together in 2014 to develop and then deliver a sustainable vision for the Gwent Levels. It is a cross-organisational partnership, spanning administrative boundaries, working closely with communities and other stakeholders to produce evidence-based plans for the sustainable management of this landscape. Partners include the RSPB, NRW, Monmouthshire Council, Newport City Council, Cardiff Council, National Trust, the Wildlife Trusts, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Gwent Archives, Buglife Cymru, Museum of Cardiff and Sustrans.

2.31 The Scheme covers an area of 225km squared extending from Cardiff and the River Rhymney in the west to Chepstow on the

River Wye in Monmouthshire to the east. Predominantly low-lying agricultural land, criss-crossed with an intricate network of drainage channels and field ditches, the project area also includes the inter-tidal zone of saltmarshes, mudflats and sands that are revealed at low tide along the northern coastline of the Severn Estuary within Wales.

2.32 The Programme seeks to conserve and restore the important natural heritage features of the area, to develop a greater appreciation of the value of the landscape and to inspire people to learn about and participate in the heritage of the Gwent Levels. A £2.5 million grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, awarded in 2018 will help to lever in further funding and deliver a £4 million scheme from the date of the award.

2.33 LLLP has five members of staff, with a programme manager and other officers covering: community engagement, access and interpretation, finance and administration and volunteer coordination.

2.34 In terms of branding, marketing and outreach, Living Levels has an interactive website with an online geographical information system (GIS) linked to citizen science opportunities. There is a regular e-newsletter and You Tube channel. There are also Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts that promote the LLLP.

Summary of Regional Park Precedent

Table 1: Summary of Regional Park Precedent

Name of Regional Park	Legislation	Key theme	Potential parallels with a Flintshire Coast Regional Park
Valleys Regional Park, South Wales (Envisaged in 1940s, but formally incepted in 2019, awaiting legal designation)	No primary legislation for Welsh regional parks currently available	Linking local people to landscape through the Discovery Gateways	Includes countryside, settlements, industrial sites & brownfield land
Lee Valley Regional Park South-East England (Envisaged in 1940s, designated by bespoke law in 1966)	Lee Valley Regional Park Act, 1966	Transforming post-industrial land into leisure, recreation, sport and nature	Mosaic of open spaces near to international and national sites designated for nature Close to high levels of human population
Muirshiel Regional Park, West Scotland (Established 1990)	The Wildlife and Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981	Focus on conservation while accommodating socio-economic well-being	Focus on integration of Park with other uses of the area, such as farming, forestry and other development, while maintaining and enhancing a quality natural heritage setting Upland area overlooking the Firth of Clyde

Table 2: Summary of the Living Levels Landscape Partnership, Gwent

Key Theme	Funding	Potential parallels with a Flintshire Coast Regional Park
Reconnect people to the historic landscape of the Gwent Levels	National Lottery Heritage Fund and direct funding from partners	Reconnecting people to the coastal landscape

Research into Regional Park Models

- 2.35 Research into regional park models was completed on behalf of the former North West Development Agency (NWDA)¹. This detailed review covered five key points which are transferable to Flintshire's coast:
- 2.36 Variety of Vision and Success: Regional Parks are very varied with different origins, objectives, roles and levels of success.
- 2.37 Variable Definition: The term Regional Park is applied to a wide range of projects, which are not always 'distinguished by something that is recognisably regional.' They include outdoor recreational projects that could easily be categorised in other ways.
- 2.38 Need for distinctive branding of the RP concept: There are relatively few Regional Parks in the UK and the concept would benefit from a better profile if this type of park is to be promoted.
- 2.39 Importance of regional brand: A 'theme' is of great value if a large area is to be designated as a Regional Park. 'There should be at least one thing that the Regional Park is noted for or that it does very

well, and ideally better than anywhere else, at least in the region and preferably wider.'

- 2.40 Value for Integrating Land Management towards shared objectives: Regional Parks should provide a focus for integrated land management and the management of change. *'If an extensive area is managed collectively, there is greater prospect of accommodating different demands whilst reducing the possible conflicts.'*

¹Research into Regional Park Models, NWDA (2003)

3.0 Flintshire Coast Park Prospectus Update

3.1 Chapter 3 sets out the context of the Flintshire Coast in terms of the prospectus and an update on activity completed since that date. It also includes a summary of the Coastal Communities online consultation undertaken early during 2022.

3.2 The Flintshire Coast Park Prospectus was published in 2015 as an expression of the aspirations of the Council and its partners for the coast. It identified the significant work that had already been achieved including the implementation of the Wales Coast Path but recognised that access to the shore remained constrained and poorly presented in places. This was undermining the area’s potential to develop the coast for recreation, tourism and appreciation of the unique wildlife and cultural heritage of the Dee Coast and Estuary. The vision and priorities for the coast park are:

Our vision is for an accessible coast park which celebrates the natural environment and heritage of the Welsh coast. Our vision can be achieved through sustained investment and by working with key partners including community, businesses and public bodies who share the vision for the Coast Park.

The Coast Park’s priorities are:

- Enhancing our tourist, recreational and cultural activity;
- Improving gateways to the coast at Connah’s Quay, Flint, Bagillt, Greenfield and Talacre;

- Increasing useage by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders along the Wales Coast Path; and
- Stimulating interest in the coast’s natural history and maritime culture.

3.3 The Prospectus proposes six key gateways (or hubs) onto the River Dee and its estuary including:

- Northern Gateway
- Connah’s Quay Dock
- Flint Waterfront
- Bagillt Inlet and Bettisfield Hill
- Greenfield Dock and Greenfield Valley
- Talacre

3.4 The Prospectus includes indicative proposals for each hub, such as potential improvements to docks, inlets and re-development that would support the Coast Park aims and objectives.

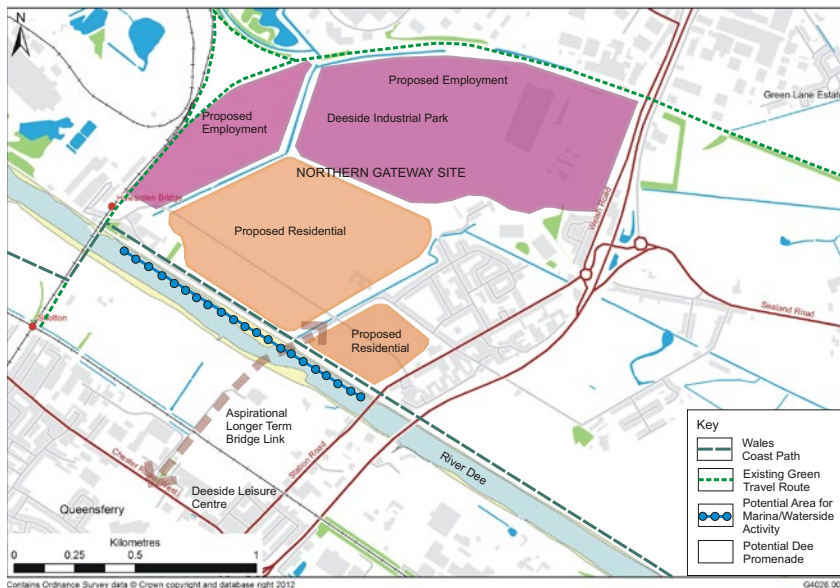
3.5 As well as the site-specific proposals for the hubs, the overall use of the Wales Coast Path and links onto it from the hinterland is also a key consideration in the 2015 Prospectus.

3.6 During February and March 2022, TEP conducted several stakeholder interviews to establish progress of projects identified in the 2015 Prospectus. The findings inform Chapter 7.0 Potential Footprint.



Northern Gateway

3.7 The proposals for Northern Gateway include the longer-term delivery of 5,000 jobs and 1,000 homes. However, progress on the site has been delayed due to planning constraints and challenges to the market. The prospectus envisages a reconfigured waterfront onto the Dee with marina and waterside activity and a potential new foot and cycle bridge link to the Deeside Leisure Centre. As momentum builds at the Northern Gateway, there will be opportunity to promote and deliver the ideas from the prospectus.



Northern Gateway

- 3.8 Recent works in the locality of the Northern Gateway include the upgrade of the cycle route infrastructure forming part of the Hawarden Railway Bridge to support the network of national cycle routes (NCN) 568 (Wirral-Neston) and 5 (Chester-Prestatyn).
- 3.9 The charity Care and Repair (North East Wales) has taken a lease for a building and part of the grounds at the Corus Shotton Sports and Social Club and they have converted a former bowling green into a garden. The Council's rangers have implemented tree planting in the Wepre Riverside area and the Wales Coast Path link (also NCN 5) to Connah's Quay Dock are off-road and in good condition.

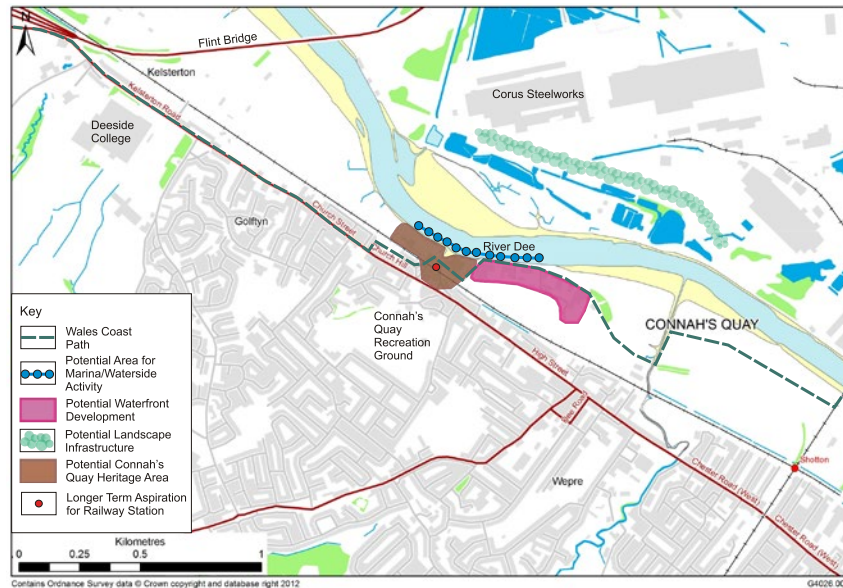
Connah's Quay Dock

- 3.10 The Quay Waterman's Association has been promoting the Kathleen and May heritage centre in a refurbished community building next to the historic harbour. More recently public realm improvements have been undertaken on the quayside. There are also proposals to restore the dock by de-silting it, which would also enable summer boat trips onto the Dee Estuary.
- 3.11 The Wales Coast Path from Connah's Quay Dock to the eastern edge of Flint initially follows Kelsterton Road (B5129) and then Chester Road (A548). NCN 5 follows a similar pattern but includes a route through Golftyn to avoid parts of the B5129. The section of the Wales Coast Path and NCN 5 between Flint

and Oakenholt is particularly constrained as it joins the footway of the A548. Opportunities for an off-road Coast Path requires further investigation. At the eastern edge of Flint, both the Wales Coast Path and NCN 5 leave the main road and follow the coastline towards Flint Castle.

realised. However, there are a number of projects proposed as part of the 2022 Levelling Up Fund bid (LUF22) and these are described under Chapter 5 – Local Wisdom.

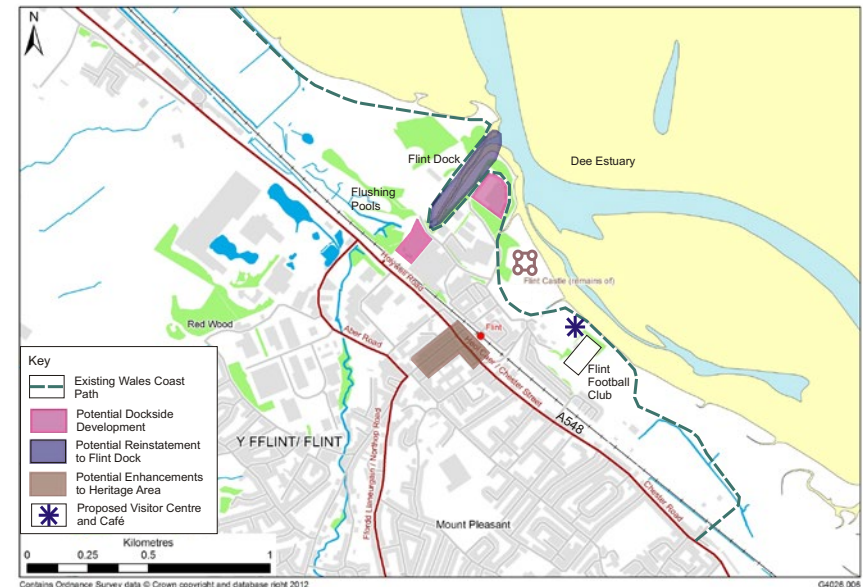
- 3.13 The Wales Coast Path follows the edge of the dock and then the coastline towards the Bagillt Inlet. After passing to the south of the castle and dock, NCN 5 re-joins the A548 towards the eastern edge of Bagillt.



Connah's Quay Dock

Flint Waterfront

- 3.12 The prospectus envisages that Flint town becomes reconnected to the castle and waterfront, with a potential visitor and interpretation centre near to the castle. Other proposals include a dockside development between the castle and the dock and the reinstatement of the dock. These opportunities are yet to be



Flint Waterfront

Bagillt Inlet and Bettisfield Hill

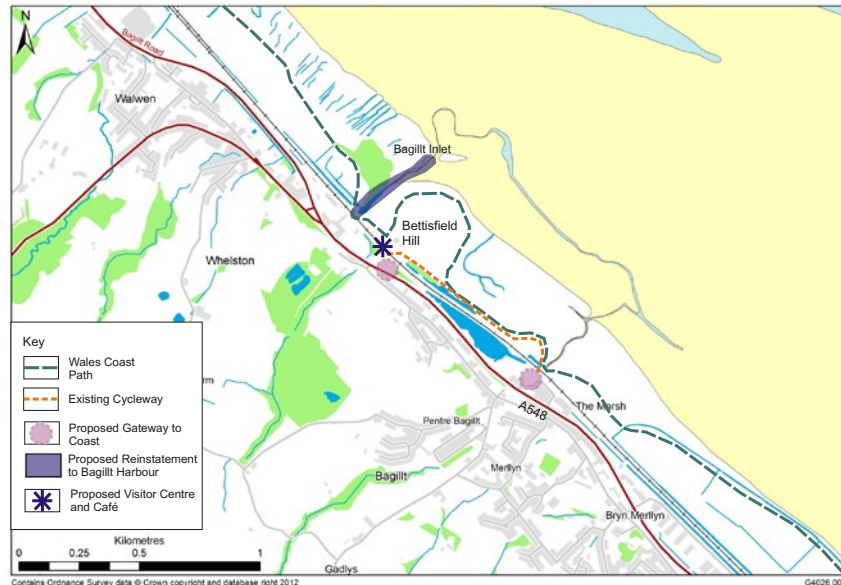
- 3.14 The proposal envisages the reinstatement of the inlet for improved access to fishing boats and the conversion of the old colliery winding house into a heritage centre and café. The

proposal would also require access improvements from the coast road (A548). These opportunities are yet to be realised, however there has been recent engagement with local schools in terms of the heritage of the area. Hedgerows have been planted and new fences installed to manage anti-social activity.

- 3.15 The Wales Coast Path follows the coastline from Bagillt Inlet to Greenfield Dock. The section from Bagillt (sewage works) to Greenfield Dock is also available for cyclists.
- 3.16 Near to the eastern edge of Bagillt, NCN 5 joins Holywell Street (parallel to the A548) and heads west away from the coastal area along Gadlys Lane. NCN 5 follows an inland route, on high ground, before re-joining the coastal area at Gronant.

Greenfield Dock and Greenfield Valley

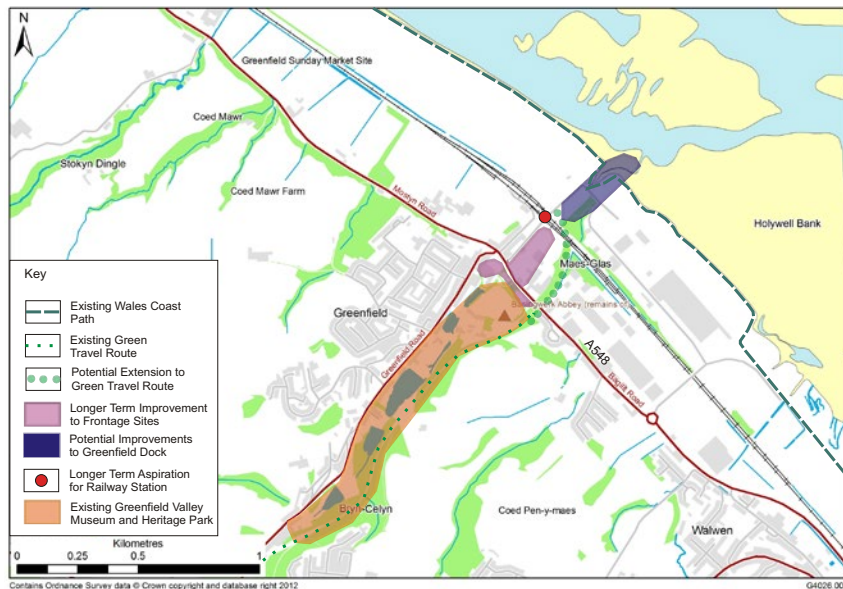
- 3.17 The prospectus proposes improvements to the slipway of Greenfield Dock for fishing, cockling and leisure activities and the refurbishment of the former security gatehouse into a café. Some of these improvements have been completed, however stakeholders have reported some conflicts between pedestrians using the Wales Coast Path which passes through the car park at Greenfield Dock and the use of the same facility at certain times by cocklers and fishermen.
- 3.18 Since the publishing of the prospectus, the Greenfield Valley off-road route has been extended over the coast road (A548) with links to Greenfield Dock through the Abbey View Trading Estate and connecting road network. The longer-term ambition is to extend the off-road route over the railway so that it connects with Greenfield Dock and the Wales Coast Path enhancing links between the coast with Greenfield Valley and Holywell.
- 3.19 The Wales Coast Path follows the coastline from Greenfield Dock to Mostyn, although it follows a small detour around the inlet where the Duke of Lancaster (Mostyn Funship) is docked. The inlet is subject to high tides and this causes access issues near the Duke of Lancaster. There is an aspiration to bridge the inlet to avoid the use of a detour for users of the Wales Coast Path.



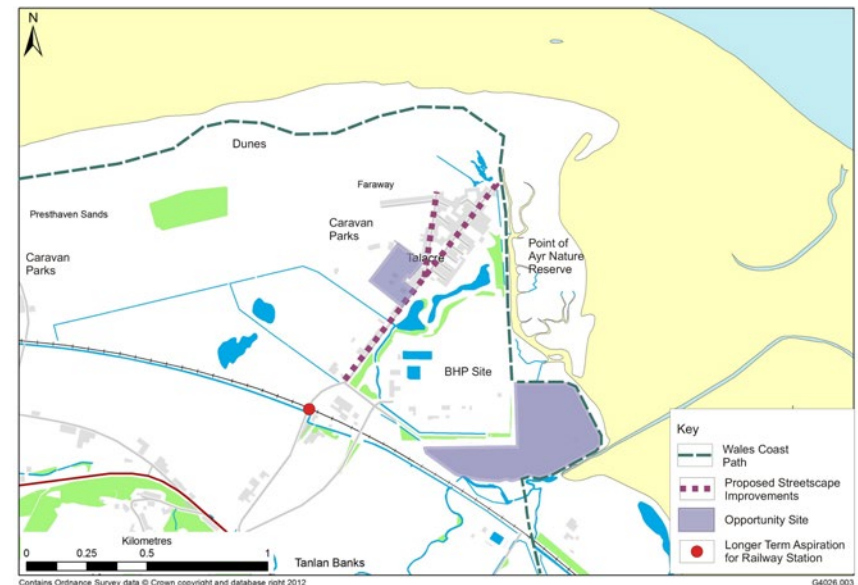
Bagillt Hill and Bettisfield Hill

3.20 The Path continues along the coastline, although it returns to the coast road near to the eastern edge of the Port of Mostyn. It continues west along the road and then takes a detour through Fynnongroyw.

3.22 The prospectus considers that Talacre is already a very successful hub and the challenge will be to draw Talacre’s visitors along the coast to other potential visitor hubs at Greenfield, Flint and Connah’s Quay. Transforming the opportunity site (former colliery) for recreation and nature could contribute to the first steps towards this.



Greenfield Dock and Greenfield Valley



Talacre

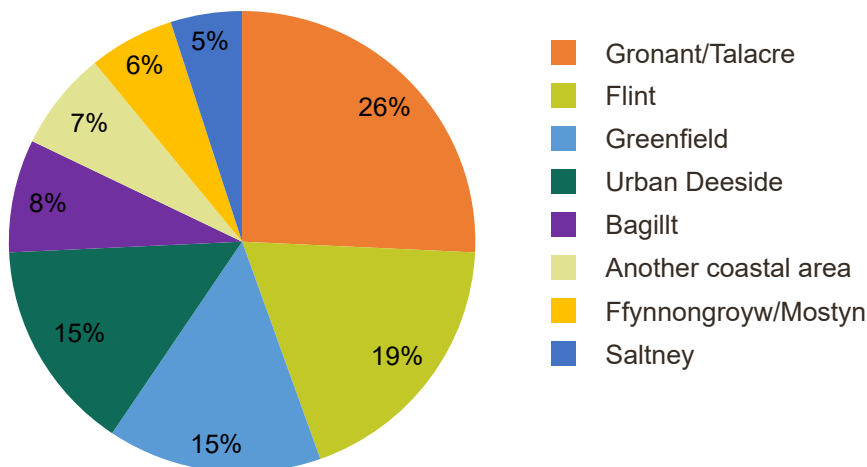
Talacre

3.21 After crossing the coast road, the Path continues off-road towards regaining the coastline at the eastern edge of the ENI site and heads north towards Talacre beach. The former colliery opportunity site (see plan below) identified in the prospectus remains an aspiration in terms of contributing to the coast park.

Coastal Communities Online Consultation (February 2022)²

3.23 The online consultation was undertaken to provide evidence in support of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid to be submitted during 2022. The consultation was structured as a questionnaire to establish the preferences of residents living in Flintshire. Approximately 1,500 people chose to respond to the questions and a summary of the consultation questions and responses is provided below. The consultation responses provide useful evidence as to how Flintshire residents use the coast and provides a steer for the regional park or coast park alternative.

Q1. Which of the following Flintshire coastal areas do you visit most?



Q2. What are your main reasons for visiting your chosen coastal locations?

Leisure & Recreation	81%
Tourism Activities	29%
Shopping	19%
Visiting Family & Friends	15%
Food & Drink	14%
Local Services	9%
Work / Business	8%
Community Facilities	7%

Respondents permitted up to 4 answers

Q3. If going for fun or leisure what activities do you do at the coast?

Walking / running	79%
Visit the Beach	68%
Visit Attractions	40%
Cycling	19%
Bird Watching	15%
Fishing	5%

Respondents permitted up to 3 answers

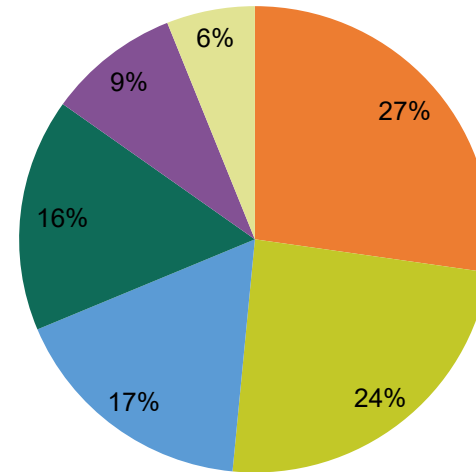
² Coastal Communities – Final overview report Generated 15-02-2022

Q4. When you are visiting Flintshire's coast, what is most important to you?



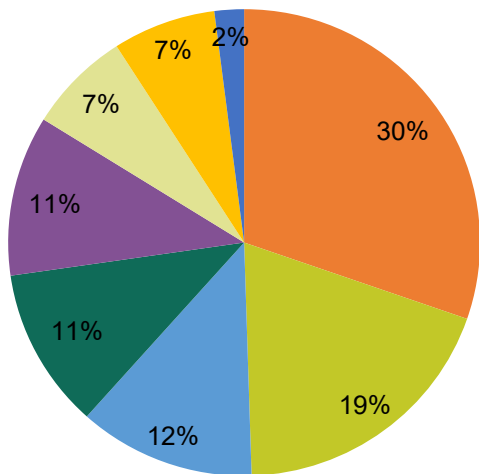
1. The attractive environment
2. Feeling safe & secure
3. Availability of facilities
4. Plenty of things to see & do

Q6. Are there any particular reasons why you haven't visited some coastal areas?



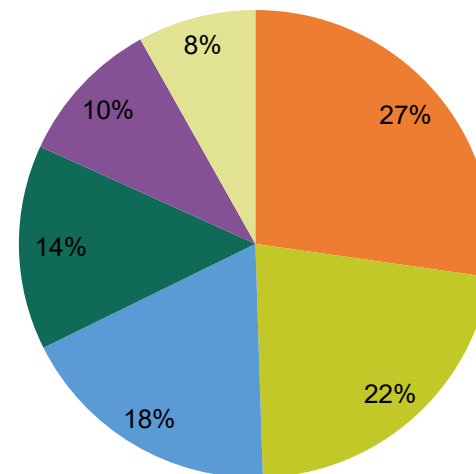
- Didn't know of attraction/area
- Lack of facilities
- Inaccessibility
- Safety & reputation
- It does not interest me
- Worries about Covid

Q5. For the spots you visit on the coast, what would you most like to improve?



- Car Parking & Toilets
- Additional Walking Trails
- Additional Cycling Trails
- Cafe & Snack Kiosks
- Seating & Picnic facilities
- Better Disabled Access
- Visitor Attractions
- Improved Signage

Q7. How frequently do you visit Flintshire's coast?



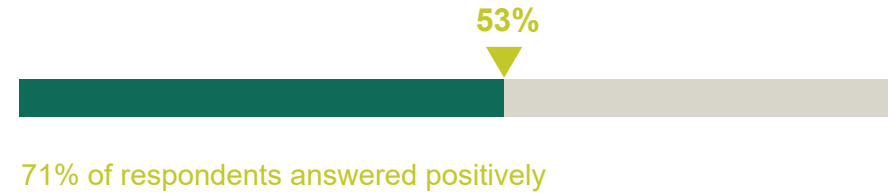
- Several times a month
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Several times a week
- Daily
- Annually

Q8. What are your considerations for working or/ & running a business by the coast?

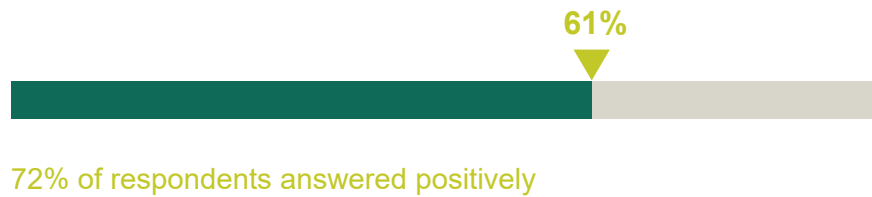
It's an attractive environment	56%
Good access & public transport	36%
Good quality premises	31%
Good local workforce	24%

Respondents permitted up to 2 answers

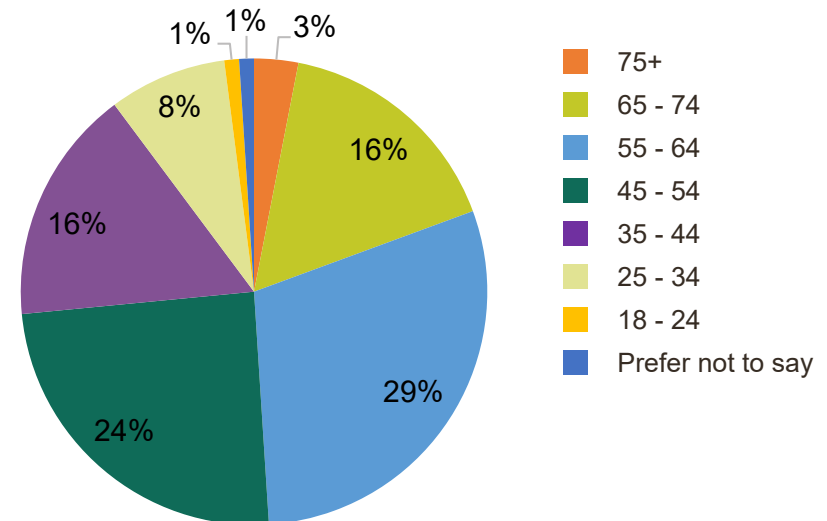
Q10. Do you feel the coastal wildlife is being protected & enhanced?



Q9. Do you feel connected to the Dee Estuary?



Q11. What is your age?



Summary Analysis

3.24 The online consultation provides details of Flintshire residents' responses in terms of: preferred location for visits, reason for visiting, the need for improvements, frequency of visits, consideration for running a business. It also includes the age range of respondents.

Question 1 – Which of the following Flintshire coastal areas do you visit most?

3.25 The top three areas are Talacre, Flint and Greenfield and this partly reflects the existing key gateway (hubs) from the Flintshire Coast Park Prospectus. In future there will be opportunity to attract visitors to the less popular locations such as Bagillt, Ffynnongroyw/Mostyn and Saltney.

Question 2 - What are your main reasons for visiting your chosen coastal locations?

3.26 The top three reasons for visiting are leisure and recreation, tourism activities and shopping. In future food and drink could be targeted as an offer as a means of extending visitors' dwell time on the coast and to increase spend in the area.

Question 3 - If going for fun or leisure what activities do you do at the coast?

3.27 The top three activities are walking/running, visiting the beach and visiting attractions. The regional park or coast park alternative could direct investment on the infrastructure and maintenance needed to support these activities. Cycling and bird watching are currently less popular, however future proposals for the coast could priorities these activities to diversify the offer on the coast.

Question 4 - When you are visiting Flintshire's coast, what is most important to you?

3.28 Respondents placed the following in order of importance: the attractive environment, feeling safe and secure, availability of facilities and plenty of things to see and do.

Question 5 - For the spots you visit on the coast, what would you most like to improve?

3.29 The top three items for improvement are car parking and toilets, additional walking trails and additional cycling trails. These are relatively low cost to implement, so any future proposals along the coast could prioritise investment on these items and secure more visits and loyalty towards visiting the area.

Question 6 – Are there any particular reasons why you haven't visited some coastal areas?

- 3.30 The top item is lack of awareness of attraction/area and this could be addressed at relatively low cost with online information and on-site interpretation and leaflets.

Question 7 - How frequently do you visit Flintshire's coast?

- 3.31 Over 90% of the 1,400 respondents to this question reported visiting Flintshire's coast monthly or on a more frequent basis. This indicates that the coast is visited relatively frequently by Flintshire residents. Investment in infrastructure, facilities and information could encourage even more frequent visits by Flintshire residents.

Wider Consultation

- 3.32 To establish the responses of visitors from outside Flintshire, further consultation could be undertaken and it is likely that this would be best undertaken in-person on site. A particularly interesting comparison would be the frequency of visits from those outside the county compared with Flintshire residents.

4.0 Legislative and Policy Hooks

4.1 This chapter highlights the potential Regional Park’s fit with existing legislation, policies and programmes and includes reference to:

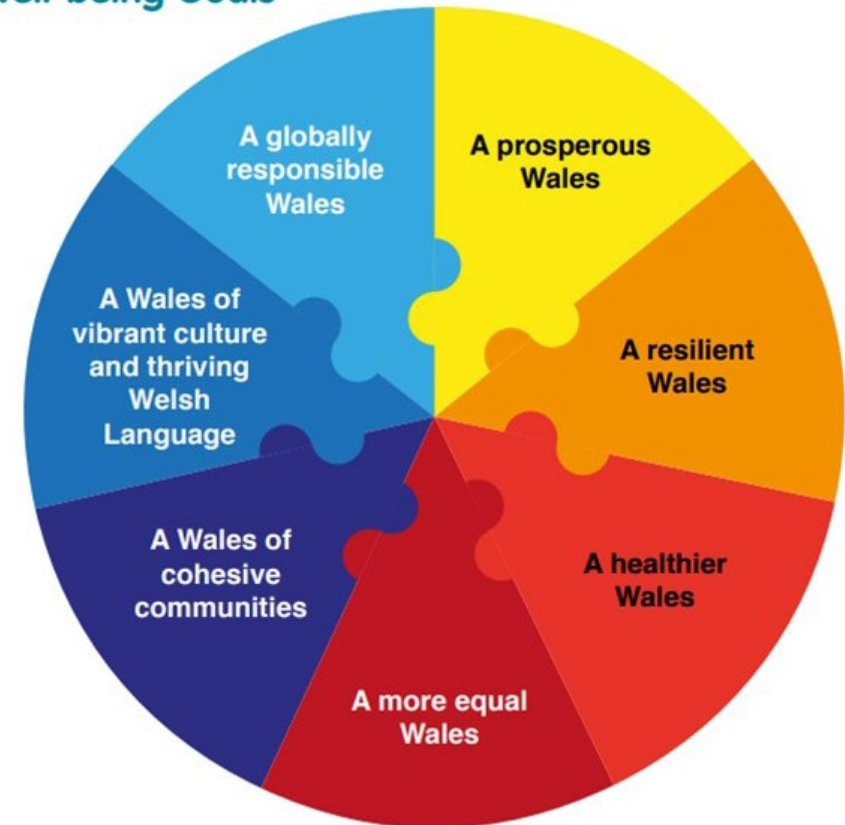
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Environment (Wales) Act 2016
- Planning Policy Wales Edition 11
- Future Wales: The National Plan 2040

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

4.2 The Well-being of Future Generations Act places a duty on public bodies to carry out sustainable development, requiring an improvement in the delivery of all four aspects of well-being: social, economic, environmental and cultural and the seven well-being goals.

4.3 Public service boards’ wellbeing assessments and wellbeing plans could inform the delivery of a Flintshire Coast Regional Park and provide existing mechanisms for engaging local communities to ensure they are integral to delivering local benefits from the sustainable management of the coast’s natural resources.

Well-being Goals



Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act Well-being Goals

Environment (Wales) Act 2016

4.4 Area Statements are required under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and are produced by Natural Resources Wales (NRW). The Area Statements could have a key role in providing evidence and driving forward the actions needed to achieve a Regional Park vision.

4.5 The North East Wales Area Statement covers the three counties of Flintshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham and consists of five themes:

- Climate emergency: resilience and adaptation
- Develop and improve urban and rural green infrastructure
- Increasing woodland cover for social, environmental and economic benefits
- Promoting the resilience of ecosystems in maintaining and enhancing biodiversity
- Protecting water and soil through farming and sustainable land management

4.6 The Flintshire Coast Regional Park could be an exemplar for the implementation of such a natural resources policy, taking an integrated and collaborative regional approach.

Planning Policy Wales Edition 11

4.7 Planning Policy Wales (PPW) Edition 11 was published in February 2021. PPW sets out the land use planning policies of the Welsh Government and is supported by a series of Technical Advice Notes, Welsh Government Circulars and policy clarification letters.

4.8 The Flintshire Coast Regional Park could be an exemplar in terms of addressing and making a positive contribution to many place-based objectives of PPW:

- People and Places: Achieving Well-being Through Placemaking (Chapter 2)
- Strategic and Spatial Choices (Chapter 3)
- Active and Social Places (Chapter 4)
- Productive and Enterprising Places (Chapter 5)
- Distinctive and Natural Places (Chapter 6)

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040

4.9 Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 was published in February 2021 and forms the national development framework, setting the direction for development in Wales to 2040.

4.10 The Flintshire Coast Regional Park could be an exemplar in terms of addressing and making a positive contribution to the following policies:

- Shaping Urban Growth and Regeneration – Strategic Placemaking (Policy 2)
- Resilient Ecological Networks and Green Infrastructure (Policy 9)
- Strategic Policies for Regional Planning (Policy 19)
- National Growth Area - Wrexham and Deeside (Policy 20)

4.11 Further information on legislation and policies is provided in the supporting paper ‘Policy Review and Assessment’.

5.0 Chapter Five - Local Wisdom

- 5.1 Stakeholder consultation using workshops and focused online interviews has provided useful information in terms of existing initiatives in the area, an update on progress with the Flintshire Coast Park Prospectus and a better understanding of key socio-economic and environmental priorities. The Chapter includes reference to the Review of the Wales Coast Path on its 10th Anniversary³.
- 5.2 Table 3 outlines a summary of comments and questions from stakeholders. The process of engagement has helped inform the Study, while stakeholders have also been able to share their excellent local knowledge and help consider the case for Regional Park designation.
- 5.3 The consultation exercise also provided useful information the Our Dee Estuary initiative supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This is reported on in Table 4.

Table 3: Summary of Stakeholder Comments in relation to potential for a Regional Park

Organisation	Respondent	Key comments
Welsh Government	Officers leading on Designated Landscapes & Outdoor Recreation	Need to be clear about what type of designation aiming for to ensure buy-in
		Currently no legislation available to accommodate a regional park in Wales
		Opportunity for a regional park to contribute to the 30X30 Natural Resources Defense Council commitment to protect nature and life on earth
		Alternatively, more informal arrangement could be pursued
		There are other potential non-standard designations; this could involve setting up a memorandum of understanding between local authorities; potential for a community interest company (CIC) or charity
Natural Resources Wales (NRW)	Locally based officers	Opportunity for a regional park to deliver against seven goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015)
		Options for a Regional Park footprint: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coast ▪ Coast & green corridors (eg. Wepre Park) ▪ Coast & hinterland
		Regional Park can convey history of the coast and celebrate existing ‘working coastline’

³The Wales Coast Path Review Group (2022) Review of the Wales Coast Path on its 10th Anniversary

Organisation	Respondent	Key comments
Dee Estuary Conservation Group	Chair	Regional Park would need a dedicated staff team, governance & funding
		Regional Park could deliver against the aspiration of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015)
		Supportive of a Regional Park footprint including coast and hinterland taking advantage of views from high ground across the Dee Estuary and potential of circular routes linking with the Wales Coast Path
Our Dee Estuary	Project Manager	What would be the tangible benefits of a Regional Park designation?
		Would there be constraints on development arising from a Regional Park designation?
		What would be the rationale for Regional Park boundaries?
		How would deprived communities benefit?
		Opportunities to connect with a Dee Estuary coastline path & supporting facilities
		Would increased visitor footfall have an impact on wildlife
Sustrans	Volunteer (active in north east Wales area)	A Regional Park could encourage walking and cycling between attractions
		Suggested that the Discovery Gateways from the Valleys Regional Park would be transferable to the Flintshire Coast and would be a good attractor and footfall generator
Ramblers	Representative	Opportunity for more promotion of public rights of way (PRoW), cycle routes and 'white tracks' from the hinterland to the coast
Flintshire County Council	Officer Group (Access & Natural Environment; Destination & Tourism; Enterprise & Levelling Up)	Saltney should be included in any Regional Park with its proximity to the River Dee and for it to maximise the potential of recent access improvements in the area. There would also be opportunity to draw from the attractions and footfall arising from Chester
		Opportunity for a Regional Park to promote the Flintshire Coast with co-ordinated approach to signs, interpretation and information
		Regional Park footprint should focus on the coast rather than the hinterland as wider area would dilute the brand
		Regional Park footprint should focus on public land and public rights of way (PRoW)
		Would there be a statutory reporting system for a Regional Park?

Table 3 (continued)

Organisation	Respondent	Key comments
Flintshire County Council	Environment and Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee (8th February, 2022)	Support for Flintshire Coast Regional Park Scoping Study
Private individual	Landowner at Llanerch-y-môr	Support for a hub being created at Llanerch-y-môr

Table 4: Our Dee Estuary update

Our Dee Estuary Update
Recently received 3 C’s funding from DEFRA for coastal partnership work
Potential for resurrection of the Dee Estuary Partnership (DEP)
Assuming regional park designation pursued, DEP could lead governance of the park
English Coast Path - Aspiration to connect with the Wales Coast Path (via a spur provided by WCP) at the country border (near Burton Wetlands)
Considering a West Kirby to Point of Ayr walking circuit with advice needed for transport, accommodation and subsistence

Summary of the Wales Coast Path on its 10th Anniversary (May 2022)

5.4 The Wales Coast Path Review Group (WCPRG) undertook a review of the Wales Coast Path, ten years on from its opening. Some of the report’s recommendations align with the themes and principles discussed in the earlier chapters and would support the establishment of a Flintshire Coast Regional Park or coast park alternative given the prominence of the Wales Coast Path’s. These include the following:

- Welsh Government should use the power of the Wales Coast Path as a catalyst for connecting people to nature more often and for longer, to help realise the wider benefits to health and wellbeing, and to promote a cultural change towards a deeper appreciation and enjoyment of nature and the outdoors.

- WCPRG could encourage the Wales Coast Path National Partnership Group to work with organisations to expand filming of the Path. This could be used as a promotional tool allowing potential visitors to experience the Path remotely and plan a visit more effectively.
- Consideration should be given to developing a dedicated Wales Coast Path business portal, bringing together businesses along both the whole and sections of the Coast Path to improve collaboration, provide advice and support, and identify further opportunities for business development and the creation of employment.

6.0 Why Designate?

6.1 The earlier chapters set the scene for some of the reasons ‘for’ and ‘against’ formal designation as a regional park. This chapter considers this in more detail.

Why Designate?

Lee Valley Regional Park – a positive experience for regeneration, nature and revenue generation

6.2 The Lee Valley Regional Park (LVRP) was established by bespoke legislation in 1966 and has been very successful in transforming post-industrial land along the River Lee into a place for leisure, recreation, sport and nature. It is now a mosaic of open spaces, heritage sites, country parks, farms, golf courses, lakes and riverside trails, campsites, marinas, angling and boating locations, attracting more than seven million visitors a year.

6.3 In terms of governance, the Act of Parliament required the creation of the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority run by 28 Board Members drawn from across London, Essex and Hertfordshire. In accordance with the legislation, a suite of planning documents was prepared (with updates) to direct the development of the LVRP. Despite the bespoke planning framework for LVRP, planning powers remain ceded to the relevant local planning authorities.

6.4 The Authority generates most of its income from commercial and business activities, maximising opportunities to lessen the demand on council taxpayers. Nevertheless, the LVRP benefits from a levy on council taxpayers in London, Essex and Hertfordshire – which equates to 80p per person per year. Lee Valley Regional Park Authority has a statutory remit to develop and preserve leisure, recreation, sport and nature and so the money raised through the levy is directed to assets such as its eight Green Flag winning open spaces, three Green Heritage Sites and its sport and leisure venues.

6.5 Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (LVRPA) buys goods, works and services from a range of suppliers within the external market. Contracts vary from small one-off purchases to large works or service contracts. These include: construction of building and infrastructure; environmental and restoration works to watercourses and waterbodies; landscape design, management and maintenance; and provision of health and safety services.

6.6 LVRP has a community access fund to support community groups and charities by offering free access to our venues and services to organisations that engage with hard-to-reach communities. It also has an Active Communities Grant Scheme for a range of projects including: engaging inactive and less active people; engaging groups underrepresented in sport and physical activity; and initiatives committed to demonstrating an impact on their participants.

- 6.7 LVRPA reaches out to volunteers and has a Volunteers Strategy (current version October 2021) setting out aims, responsibilities, legal considerations and policies and procedures. During 2020 over 1,200 volunteers contributed over 11,000 hours (around 60% less hours than in 2019, pre-pandemic). Volunteering was carried out across the LVRPA parklands and venues to support Fisheries, Rangers Service (livestock checkers, litter pickers, conservation and honorary wardens). LVRPA has held the Investing in Volunteers accreditation (national standard) for 15 years. Volunteering is available to individuals, corporate groups and clubs.
- 6.8 The LVRPA website has a launchpad to the public facing 'Visit Lee Valley' which successfully conveys the ethos and brand.

Lessons for the Flintshire Coast

- 6.9 LVRP is arguably a very successful model for a potential Flintshire Coast Regional Park to follow, particularly the established mosaic of spaces for leisure, recreation, sport and nature use set alongside urban uses and sites designated for nature conservation. This along the 26 mile length of the LVRP from rural Hertfordshire to London Docklands.
- 6.10 The governance structure underpinned by a bespoke planning framework would also provide leadership, direction and longer-term vision. However, planning powers can remain ceded to the local planning authority.

- 6.11 Most of the LVRP income comes from commercial and business activities with the remainder from a levy on council taxpayers.
- 6.12 The many benefits LVRP bring to local businesses, community groups and volunteers are clearly set out above.

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park – a positive experience for integrated land management and countryside recreation

- 6.13 Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park is the largest of the three Scottish regional parks. They cover large areas of countryside, parts of which are available for informal countryside recreation. The designation was created to enable the coordinated management of recreation across large area of land and other uses such as farming and forestry. Clyde Muirshiel has a network of visitor centres with provision for outdoor activities and support from a countryside ranger service and an outdoor activity team.
- 6.14 The Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park Authority Joint Committee is governed by a Minute of Agreement (MoA) agreed by Renfrewshire Council, Inverclyde Council and North Ayrshire Council. The Park covers 108 square miles, receives 700,000 visitors a year and has an annual budget of approximately £1,000,000 per year.

Lessons for the Flintshire Coast

- 6.15 The Park is a useful model for the Flintshire Coast were it to designate a larger area of land requiring coordinated management across several uses such as recreation, farming, nature conservation and multi-functional green infrastructure, with learning, understanding and enjoyment about the environment also a priority. Parts of Clyde Muirshiel border with the Firth of Clyde and there are many distinctive views from higher ground towards the Firth. This is another parallel with the Flintshire Coast and its links with the Dee Estuary.
- 6.16 Thus, the Clyde Muirshiel model is likely to be most applicable to Regional Park Option 3 – Dee Viewshed or Option 4 – Lower Dee Catchment (Welsh side) with their more extensive footprints.

Why Not Designate?

- 6.17 Research and stakeholder consultation shows that there are regional parks, partnerships or programmes which have been successful without reliance on a formal designation.

Valleys Regional Park – a positive experience for linking local people to landscape

- 6.18 These include the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) in South Wales which has successfully set up partnership with 13 local authorities, charities such as Groundwork received funding from the Welsh Government Taskforce and the VRP has its own policy reference (Policy 35) in the Future Wales: The National Plan 2040. One of the key initiatives of the VRP is the promotion of 12 Discovery Gateways to engage with residents, while also benefitting visitors. Working through the Discovery Gateways the dedicated team of VRP Guardians enable residents to connect with the nature on their doorstep whilst learning new skills in how to care for natural habitats and landscapes. VRP partners with other organisations in the Big Bocs Bwyd (BBB) initiative working with children in learning about food, the benefits of growing food and cooking food.

Lessons for the Flintshire Coast

- 6.19 The VRP is a good model for the Flintshire Coast in that its footprint covers a range of landscapes from protected

nature conservation areas, elevated rural areas, settlements, employment land and former industrial areas. The VRP is referenced in Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 and there would be opportunity for the Flintshire Coast to contribute to requirements and aspirations of Policy 20 National Growth Area - Wrexham and Deeside. The focussed engagement with residents and visitors at the VRP Discovery Gateways is also a good lesson for the Flintshire Coast.

The Living Levels Landscape Partnership, Gwent – linking local people to the coast

- 6.20 The Living Levels Landscape Partnership (LLLLP) has potential parallels with the Flintshire Coast in that it delivers a programme of work which will promote and reconnect people to the heritage, wildlife and natural beauty of the historic landscape of the Gwent Levels. It works with partners to seek to conserve and restore the important natural heritage features of the area, to develop a greater appreciation of the value of the landscape and to inspire people to learn about and participate in the heritage of the Gwent Levels.
- 6.21 LLLP has five members of staff and also reaches out through its interactive website and the online geographical information system (GIS) linked to citizen science. There is a regular e-newsletter, You Tube channel and social media channels that all promote the LLLP.

Summary

- 6.22 Lessons from the formal designation route show that with a statutory remit and robust governance structures, momentum and longevity can be established with possibilities for influencing policy and potentially more opportunity for investment, business involvement and revenue generation. Other factors that drive success in this model are vision, leadership, partnerships and a focus on core mission (e.g., recreation, visitor numbers and associated business, nature conservation).
- 6.23 Precedents using the non-standard designation approach have been able to achieve some of the aspects of designated regional parks, however with their more informal structures and procedures they appear to be more vulnerable to changes in partnership arrangements, policy and time-limited funding streams.

7.0 Potential Footprint

- 7.1 A key task of the Scoping Study is to consider a potential footprint for a Regional Park designation or coast park alternative. Consideration of the potential footprint has been influenced by earlier chapters discussing regional park precedents, the Flintshire Coast Park prospectus, policy and local wisdom.
- 7.2 Four options have been examined. Maps for each option are included on the following pages, and the footprint of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is provided for context.

Option 1: Coastal Focus

- 7.3 Option 1 is based on the Flintshire Coast Park prospectus, extending from Point of Ayr to Connah’s Quay, with a 500m inland buffer from the coastline. Based on stakeholder advice, it is recommended that the coastal focus should extend upstream to Saltney, which borders England and Cheshire West and Chester Council. The distance from Point of Ayr to Saltney is approximately 20 miles.
- 7.4 In recent years there have been improvements to the active travel network around Saltney, with good linkages west to the Flintshire coast and east towards Chester. Its inclusion in the footprint would add to the integrity of the visitor experience between Chester and Point of Ayr.

- 7.5 Stakeholders have suggested the inclusion of Llannerch-y-môr as a hub. It is characterised by activity generated by the Duke of Lancaster, its market and the Abakhan Fabric outlet. In addition, the Wales Coast Path follows the coastal inlet at the Duke of Lancaster.
- 7.6 Option 1 includes the six hubs from the Coast Park prospectus: Talacre, Greenfield Dock and Greenfield Valley, Bagillt Inlet and Bettisfield Hill, Flint Waterfront, Connah’s Quay Dock and Northern Gateway. Llannerch-y-môr and Saltney would become the seventh and eighth hubs respectively in a “Coastal Focus” footprint.
- 7.7 The benefit of this footprint is that it is already well-established in corporate priorities for the Council and NRW. There is a strong brand based on a “string of pearls” i.e. several hubs situated along the promoted Wales coastal path. There is a relatively limited number of private landowners and businesses, and there are established links with several of them. This means that there is likely to be relatively little resistance to a more formal designated status, and probably a good uptake of opportunities to join in with the Park.
- 7.8 The converse is that there are fewer businesses and few residents within the Coastal Focus, so there are limited opportunities to generate revenue, volunteering and community involvement in new projects.

Option 1: Coastal Focus



KEY

- Coastal focus
- Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Key Hubs



Option 2: Coast and GI focus

- 7.9 Option 2 would have the same coastal focus as Option 1, with additional connecting green infrastructure (GI) corridors including:
- Llannerch-y-môr
 - Greenfield Valley towards Holywell
 - Flint – working with the proposals of the Flint Green Infrastructure Strategy (2022)
 - Wepre Park
 - Link from Hawarden Bridge to the proposed English Coast Path near Burton Point
 - Saltney
- 7.10 The benefit of this option would be to draw footfall from the coast path into important settlements and GI assets; and vice-versa. The settlements and GI assets noted above still have visual and/or cultural connections with the coast, so the title of “Flintshire Coast Park” would not be anomalous.
- 7.11 The benefit of this option is that it is well-established in corporate priorities for the Council and NRW. It would bring the Coast Park closer to many existing communities, thus increasing opportunities for volunteering, sponsorship and business involvement. The focus of the Park would be on management of public greenspace, the civic realm and public

rights of way within the inland corridors, so there would be relatively little need for extra engagement with private landowners. This in turn means there would be less likelihood of resistance to the concept of a formal designation.



View from public rights of way, south of Rhewl-Mostyn, looking towards Dee Estuary and Wirral Peninsula

Option 2: Coastal and GI Focus



KEY

- Coastal and GI corridor focus
- Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Key Hubs
- Key GI corridor



Option 3: Dee Viewshed

- 7.12 Option 3 would include all the elements of Option 1 and 2 and would extend into the hinterland, where views from higher ground include the Dee Estuary.
- 7.13 The benefit of this option would be to promote the distinctive heritage, landscape and views of the hinterland. This is also firmly in line with NRW's aspirations for the area and would encompass some of the Flintshire Leisure Tour – Flintshire's Golden Circle initiative (Tour Taith) and land in the vicinity of Flintshire Castle.



View from public rights of way, south of Rhewl-Mostyn, looking towards Dee Estuary and Wirral Peninsula

- 7.14 Another potential benefit of a larger scale footprint would be to improve the perception and visibility of the Flintshire Coast to a much wider audience. There would be many opportunities to improve public rights of way and the active travel network to and from the coast.
- 7.15 This option also forms a good link between the Clwydian Range AONB and the Flintshire Coast. It includes high-quality non-designated landscapes and access linkages from the AONB to the Coast. In the context of NRW's ambition to extend the scope of land protection beyond the AONB, this option is clearly defensible in terms of landscape, ecological and recreational value.
- 7.16 An important factor in consideration of this footprint is that much of the additional land would be in private ownership, so there would be a need for consultation and active engagement with landowners and tenants. Whilst the nature of Park activity means that each landowner or tenant can opt in or out of land management or access improvement initiatives, nevertheless there would need to be a clear and thoughtful approach to engagement to build consensus and avoid unnecessary controversy.

Option 3: Visual Focus (Dee Viewshed)



KEY

- Dee viewshed
- Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Key Hubs
- Key views from higher ground
- Key GI corridor



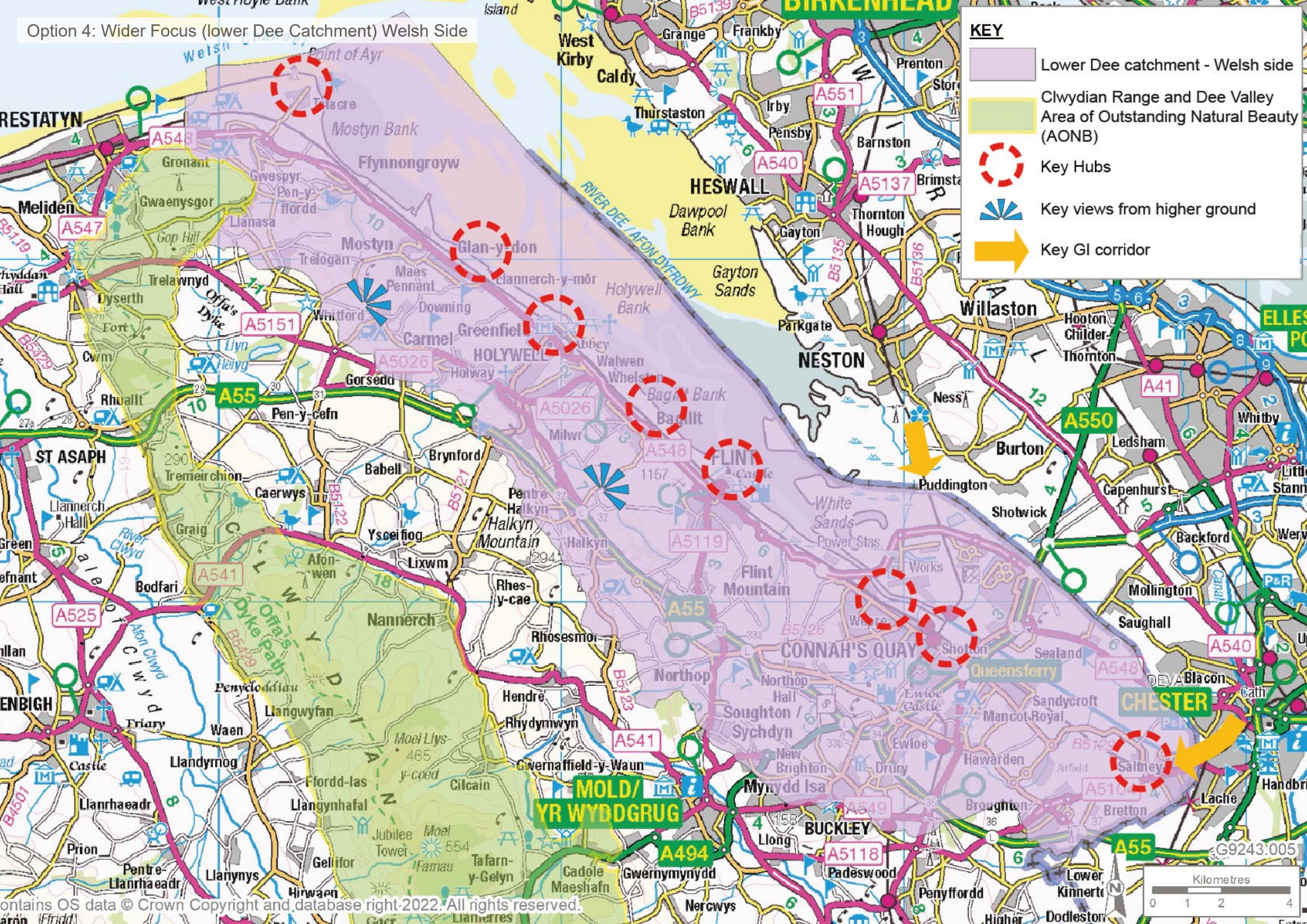
Option 4: Wider focus (lower Dee catchment) – Welsh side

- 7.17 Option 4 would include all the elements of Option 1, 2 and 3 and would extend to include the remaining areas of the Lower Dee catchment in Wales (mirroring the Our Dee Estuary initiative). In addition to the larger physical footprint, this option could build upon the momentum and networks established by the Our Dee Estuary initiative.
- 7.18 The benefits and disbenefits of Option 3 also apply to Option 4.
- 7.19 As the principal additional purpose of having a catchment-oriented footprint is to positively influence water quality and biodiversity at scale, the remit of the Park team would definitely need to include working with private landowners, tenant farmers and commoners to promote sustainable land management initiatives, and help source funding and training for that purpose. Whilst this would have significant resource requirements, it offers many more opportunities for partnerships with NRW, water companies and tourist businesses who would benefit from sustainable land and water management.
- 7.20 A longer-term possibility for Option 4 would be to extend the footprint of a regional park across the national border to reflect the whole Lower Dee catchment and the Our Dee Estuary initiative.



View from national border looking over Dee Marshes towards Flintshire

Option 4: Wider Focus (lower Dee Catchment) Welsh Side



KEY

- Lower Dee catchment - Welsh side
- Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Key Hubs
- Key views from higher ground
- Key GI corridor

8.0 Addressing Challenges

8.1 This chapter outlines some of the challenges that communities on the Flintshire coast are facing. It suggests how these challenges could be addressed by a regional park; or by a coast park alternative.

Socio-economic factors

8.2 Research undertaken on behalf of Flintshire County Council (FCC) to support a Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid to Government shows high levels of deprivation along the coast with a lack of investment, increasing anti-social behaviour and a housing stock suffering from low quality and poor mix of tenures.

8.3 There is also a disconnect between local residents and large institutions and employers such as Airbus, Toyota and Tata Steel. The coastal community has a skills deficit relative to the rest of Flintshire. This applies to both the over-50s and younger people (in full time education). There is a shortage of the sort of skills needed by local employers, and the skills deficit also restricts entrepreneurship in the area.

Infrastructure for businesses

8.4 There is a lack of investment in commercial premises resulting in buildings in poor condition also displaying a lack of energy efficiency. This risks premises being vacated by business occupiers, thus disrupting local supply chains. Low grade

premises also leads to negative perceptions of the area amongst businesses, residents, communities and visitors.

8.5 Disconnect between residents, their heritage and natural environment

8.6 Fisheries and dock management have traditionally been important to the Flintshire coast, however, there has been a decline and loss of skills associated with these traditional industries. Consultation also reveals that some residents consider local heritage and natural environment assets along the coast to be associated with industrial decline and contamination and so choose not to engage with the coastal landscape.

Visitor economy

8.7 There are many areas of high environmental quality which can be appreciated from the Wales Coast Path, together with many designated wildlife areas. Figures from Natural Resources Wales show that, in the 11 months to September 2013, 419,603 people used the Coast Path in Flintshire. Despite good footfall there is evidence of a lack of dwell time and spend by visitors in the Flintshire coastal towns.

8.8 Further to this, the 2020 STEAM⁴ monitoring figures for Flintshire estimate that the County attracted 2.93-million-day

⁴STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) is an evaluation model used by many Destinations Management Organisations.

visitors. Each visitor is estimated to spend on average £56 per head. In addition, there are 4.7 million people living within a 60-minute drive time, the ideal catchment for day visitors.

- 8.9 In essence, Flintshire has a large and relatively untapped market close to hand. The tourism sector businesses in Flintshire have made recommendations for tourism development along the coast, and these inform the coast park vision.

Public realm

- 8.10 Chapter 3.0 of this study highlights the aspiration to improve connections between the coast and hinterland. However, some of these linkages have yet to be improved, which can induce a fear of crime and a negative perception of parts of the coast. The Coastal Communities online consultation undertaken during early 2022 highlighted the attraction of the coastal environment, but noted that there were local spots avoided by visitors and locals due to poor facilities or neglect of management.

Civic pride

- 8.11 Consultation suggests that Flintshire's coastal communities are proud of their locale. However, this is perhaps more linked to the identity of individual places and communities, rather than a connection with the natural environment, heritage and traditional industries.

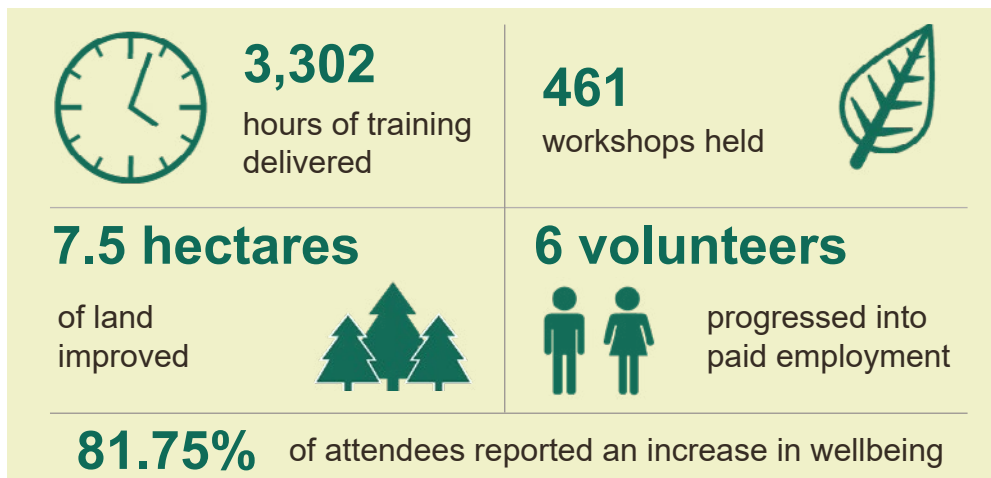
Addressing the Challenges

- 8.12 In summary, Flintshire Council's LUF Vision development work lists the following challenges faced by the Flintshire Coast. It is possible to use a regional / coast park to help address the challenges.

Local communities experiencing economic decline, disconnection and acute deprivation

- 8.13 This challenge requires an emphasis on skills, employability and creating a local entrepreneur culture. Investment in skills will drive greater productivity and employability, in turn attracting inward investors and community entrepreneurs.
- 8.14 The regional park precedents outlined in Chapter 2.0 show how local employment can be uplifted with interventions from rangers, outreach and engagement workers. This builds skills, self-esteem and awareness of environmental issues within the local community.
- 8.15 This focus on skills is demonstrated in the South Wales's Valley Regional Park (VRP). In the VRP Discovery Gateways, a dedicated team of Guardians enable residents to connect with the nature on their doorstep whilst learning new skills in how to care for natural habitats and landscapes.

- 8.16 VRP also partners with other organisations in the Big Bocs Bwyd (BBB) initiative, working with children in learning about food, and the benefits of growing and cooking food.
- 8.17 Data gathered from the VRP Guardians Scheme from May 2021-Jan 2022 advises that:



Lack of investment in commercial premises (town and industrial parks) along the coastline

8.18 Investing in the physical appearance and energy efficiency of commercial premises helps to secure existing jobs and supply chains. There is also increased potential for start-ups and incubators allowing them to establish and grow, in turn providing stepping stone employment for people with low skills - connecting pockets of deprivation with economic assets and jobs.

8.19 Much has already been achieved in terms of environmental remediation of degraded sections of the coastline. Ongoing improvements include opening views and improving sustainable transport links to the coast. This will contribute to the setting of commercial premises, attracting inward investment and helping retain skilled employers and employees.

8.20 The 2022 Coastal Communities consultation confirmed that the coastal location was generally an attractant for businesses and confirmed a market for food and activity-based micro-businesses associated with the coast.

Decline of traditional industries linked to the area’s identity and heritage (i.e., cockle fishing & processing/dock management)

8.21 The LUF Vision development work recommends that partners (Welsh Government, NRW and FCC) work together to promote local industries and infrastructure, including a thriving fishing industry. Awareness raising is needed amongst communities, businesses and stakeholders and strong links between schools, colleges and employers.

Built heritage across coastline and town centres is falling into disrepair and disappearing

8.22 The LUF Vision development proposes a celebration of the area’s heritage, traditional industries and natural assets through a modern, accessible and sustainable offer to residents and

visitors. The tourism offer is to promote increased visits, dwell time and spend, while operators of heritage assets can offer employment and training.

- 8.23 A regional park or coast park alternative would promote the coast as a place for leisure, recreation and heritage interest and the expectation is that footfall would increase as a result. Either designation could promote links to the town centres: resulting in increased visits, dwell time and spend; and the regeneration of built heritage such as the old colliery winding house at Bagillt.
- 8.24 Ynysangharad Park and National Lido in the Valley Regional Park (VRP) is an historic family attraction and is an outdoor pool attraction and industrial themed adventure play park – unique to Wales. The Grade II listed lido has been restored and updated. It has external and internal showers, heated changing facilities and three heated swimming pools, for families, dedicated swimmers and social swimmers of all ages and abilities. Lido Ponty features a state-of-the-art Visitors' Centre which tells the story of The National Lido of Wales. Restored features include the 1920's turnstiles and wooden cubicles.

Poor linkages between natural assets, areas of enterprise and services, and residential areas. Use of linkages (paths etc.) reduced due to fear of crime, negative perceptions of areas connected by linkages by residents and visitors.

- 8.25 Improved connectivity can increase residents' and tourist accessibility and visits to heritage sites, the natural environment and town centres.
- 8.26 This approach has been demonstrated by the Living Levels Landscape Partnership (LLLLP) in Gwent. It delivers a programme of work which will promote and reconnect people to the heritage, wildlife and natural beauty of the historic landscape of the Gwent Levels. It has a staff team that enable this, along with online engagement.

9.0 Next Steps

- 9.1 This chapter draws together the findings of the scoping study described in the preceding chapters and it recommends three stages in the setting up and establishment of a Regional Park or Coast Park alternative. These are:
- Transitional stage, which would involve: the establishing of a project team; articulating a vision; undertaking gateway projects; developing a spatial plan and defining a detailed boundary; and setting up an arm’s length body to provide a steer for the Regional Park or Coast Park alternative. This includes a short narrative on compliance with the Habitat Regulations Assessment.
 - Implementation stage, which would involve: management of individual projects and construction contracts; setting up procurement with the attendant financial controls and administrative systems.
 - Management stage, which would involve: development and sustaining of business, recreation, tourism and heritage initiatives.
- 9.2 In terms of the transitional stage five actions are proposed to get things going. A further three actions are recommended marking the start of the implementation stage. Actions for the management stage are outside the scope of this study.

Transitional Stage

ACTION 1 – Establish a Flintshire Coast Project Team

- 9.3 A transitional project team will be needed to ensure on-going decision-making and action between now and when a new system of governance with an ‘arm’s length body’ becomes effective. It is a priority therefore, that a dedicated Project Team is established at the earliest opportunity. This team should have strong leadership and dedicated resources including both professional staff and administrative support and a budget for park development and feasibility studies.
- 9.4 The team leader will need to be a confident public communicator with a passion for the coast and its communities and an ability to forge links with politicians, businesses, community leaders and funders. The ability to “broker” agreements to make progress even where there are differences of opinion and emphasis is critical.

ACTION 2 – Establish a Vision, Goals and Brand

- 9.5 A vision for the Flintshire Coast will need to be established and supported by what distinguishes the coast, what it does well and what is recognisably regional. The 2015 Coast Park Prospectus provides a basis for testing and updating a vision statement, taking soundings from the Coastal Communities Survey 2022 and from stakeholders on a Steering Group /

Board of Reference. Alongside a vision statement, a set of core goals can be developed. Once drafted, the vision statement can be publicised in a branded format, starting to establish a distinct identity for the Park.

ACTION 3 – Undertake Detailed Studies for Gateway Projects

- 9.6 This will bring more detail to the gateway projects (hubs) referred to in Chapter 7.0 along with the skills development and engagement proposed in Chapter 8.0. Outputs include feasibility study, costings, programme, funding sources, stakeholder mapping and a schedule of regulatory consents

ACTION 4 – Develop a Spatial Plan

- 9.7 Achieving delivery of the ‘Flintshire Coast’ concept will require collaboration and partnerships with a range of public and private sector organisations and should be directed towards achieving a co-ordinated network of projects and initiatives that support the over-arching vision. The preparation of a Spatial Plan is a fundamental next step in this process and we recommend that this is progressed following completion of the studies outlined above.

ACTION 5 – Define a Detailed Boundary for the Flintshire Coast

- 9.8 Chapter 7.0 of this report articulates the rationale for four potential footprint options and these will be subject to further Member and Officer consultations.
- 9.9 Once a preferred footprint has been selected, the following work should be undertaken:
- Consult key partners on the recommended ‘Project Area’, refine this as necessary to address any issues arising and seek to agree the Project Area as a working boundary for the Flintshire Coast.
 - Complete an audit of key proposals and initiatives within and adjacent to the Flintshire Coast to recommend ways in which the concept can be delivered by.
 - Led by the project team, determine the process by which the detailed boundary will be defined.
 - Develop criteria for identifying the detailed boundary.

Habitat Regulations Assessments (HRA)

- 9.10 As much of the coast is subject to international nature conservation designations, project-specific Habitats Regulations Assessments may need to be carried out for most developments, even those not immediately adjacent the designations. The exception is projects solely concerned with managing and enhancing the designated sites.

- 9.11 Coast Park projects which involve built facilities, car parks and access improvements may need to be screened for HRA, to ensure that avoidance and mitigation of adverse effects is considered from project inception. In most instances, simple siting and design tweaks can avoid adverse effects.
- 9.12 As the Coast Park plan is not yet a formal statutory plan, it does not require a “plan-wide” HRA. Nevertheless, it is advisable that long-term business plans and work programmes for the Coast Park note the Habitats Regulations and commit the Council to work with NRW to ensure any site-specific projects are subject to HRA screening and mitigation.
- 9.13 Should the Coast Park proceed to a formal designation as a regional park, it will require a plan-wide HRA. This need not be onerous as one aim of the Coast Park is to manage the Dee Estuary, but nevertheless, a plan-wide HRA will identify potential implementation risks and promote ecological good practice in project design
- 9.14 It is envisaged that the transitional stage will take in the region of two to three years to undertake. It would include the setting up of an arm’s length body from FCC to implement and then manage the Regional Park or Coast Park alternative. The three actions outlined on the following pages mark the start of the implementation stage.

Implementation Stage

ACTION 6 – Prepare a Business Plan and Funding Applications

- 9.15 To ensure the effective development and delivery of the Vision, the Flintshire Coast must have access to significant public funding over many years. In many cases, this funding should be used as seedcorn or for leverage or match. It is essential therefore, that there is ongoing dialogue and consultation with Welsh Government, key agencies and FCC to promote the initiative, and to secure additional public sector investment, business sponsorships and philanthropic contributions.

ACTION 7 - Undertake a Communications Campaign

- 9.16 The Scoping Study provides new impetus to the Flintshire Coast initiative and offers the potential to promote the benefits of the project to a wide range of audiences. However, the study is also by its own brief, a technical document, which is unsuited for presentation to a non-technical or lay audience. The project team should therefore, at an early stage, hold a major dissemination event aimed at capturing the attention of the Region’s major organisations. Key actions should include:
- Preparation of a presentational package to allow the conclusions of the feasibility study and the Flintshire Coast concept to be presented to key partners including:

Welsh Government, NRW, CADW, Our Dee Estuary, Dee Estuary Conservation Group, Sustrans, Ramblers and local businesses.

- Identifying several 'Project Champions' within key organisations; high profile individuals who are committed to the concept and capable of marketing this at the highest level.
- A media campaign to raise awareness of the project nationally and regionally. This should focus on the populist press including TV, radio and newspapers but should also target professional and technical journals.
- Consideration of a new name and logo for the initiative.
- Develop a Flintshire Coast website and social media channels to disseminate information and act as a point of contact for local communities.

ACTION 8 - Develop a Consultation and Engagement Programme

9.17 For the Flintshire Coast to be successful in achieving its objectives continued consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and users groups will be required. There will be a need in the early stages, to present the Vision and ideas emerging out of the Scoping Study and the recommendations from Action 7 above will assist this. It will be important in the early stages to gain the support of key partners and statutory

agencies and a programme of meetings and workshops should be developed to facilitate this. Key actions will include:

- Developing a consultation programme to review the outcomes of the Scoping Study with key partners.
- Identifying ways in which local communities can engage in the process of developing and delivering the Flintshire Coast initiative.
- Develop a programme with local schools and colleges to engage young people in the initiative.

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