

Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Newsletter 1



Welcome Friends

Dear Member

Welcome to our first Newsletter, which deals mostly with the way our AONB is managed and cared for by those enthusiastic members of staff whose job it is to look after this great area of hills and valleys. I hope you will find it interesting and informative.

Many thanks to all our contributors, and especially to Howard Davies, a great friend and lover of this part of Wales.

Subsequent Newsletters will concentrate on current issues in the AONB, events that might be of interest to our members, what the staff are doing, and indeed what we are doing. I would very much like your suggestions for topics we might cover in the future, or indeed any feedback on the way you would like to see our fledgling society evolve.



At the time of writing we have 105 members, which is a very good start since our launch in mid-July. The six Trustees are all as enthusiastic for this new society as I am, and we promise that we will do our best to make you as enthusiastic as we are !

Kindest regards,
Mike Skuse
Chair.



Welcome to the family

Howard Davies

It is with very great pleasure that I have been asked to write something in this, the first Newsletter to be received by members of the Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley . Those that know me will attest to my clear passion for this area. Not only is it one of the most important landscapes in the UK, being recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), but it is my home and an area I have been familiar with for the last 26 years.

My current role as Chief Executive of the National Association for AONBs gives me a unique oversight of all the UK's 46 AONBs, and while it would be unseemly of me to express any preferences, I have no intention of moving anywhere else. This says a great deal. Our landscape is important and it's more than just the view. It is the backdrop to our lives; the tapestry upon which we live our lives. It is where our beliefs and values come together in place; and this is played out in the way land is managed, the character of villages, the design of buildings, and the way communities function and interact. It is so much more than the view.

In 1991 I started work as the senior warden for the Clwydian Range AONB. I spent eleven very happy years supporting farmers, land owners, and community groups in their efforts to look after their landscape. It not only gave me an in-depth appreciation of the area, but a clear insight into how the land is

cared for and the passion those involved bring to the task. The future of these special places does not just rest in the hands of policymakers but in the hands of those whose endeavours have helped form the landscape over generations. In essence, we all have a collective responsibility to help create the places we want, and we need to work with others to make it happen.

This is why groups such as yours are so important. Your coming together can help create a critical mass to effect change; whether that is by lending weight to important decisions, supporting the vital work of the local authorities, raising much needed funds for special projects, or just letting others know how special the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB is.

I am privileged to have worked in the Clwydian Range. This experience was fundamental to my understanding and appreciation of landscape in general. Whilst I now wear many hats, my experience and passion for landscape as the meeting ground between people and place is universal and is apparent in my contribution to discussion in all arenas; likewise is my support for the work that you are doing. Thank you for forming Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley. Going forwards your work, and the work of similar groups elsewhere, will be more important than ever.



Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, in their aim of “Discovering and Enjoying” the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, have determined that if they organise a walk, a talk or any event, it should have a definite theme; a theme that is clearly associated with some important item of heritage or landscape of our beautiful and important AONB area.

Following our launch in July 2015 we joined with our partners, Ramblers Cymru, Vale of Clwyd and Clwydian branches, and Let’s Walk Cymru’s Walkabout Flintshire Health Walks scheme and, of course, with Denbighshire County Council Countryside Services to offer over 10 events in 2015.

We have visited the Eglwyseg Rocks Escarpment, Castell Dinas Bran and Pontcysyllte in the South, Golden Grove Historic House, Penycloddiau Hillfort, Moel Hiraddug and Graig Fawr in the North and Maeshafn lead-mines and limestone quarries, the Bryn Alyn limestone pavement and Tomen y Rhodwydd’s Motte & Bailey somewhere in the middle. The themes have been both of heritage and landscape significance. So what of our third aim of “Protecting”? Well we began to meet that by joining a litter-pick at Loggerheads.

So what’s left to do in and close by our area? Well, how about Llangollen Railway, castles at Chirk, Rhuddlan, Caergwrlle, historic houses and gardens of Plas Newydd, Brynbella, etc, the industrial heritage of quarrying for roadstone, limestone, sandstone and slate and mining for coal, lead and shale for lamp-oil. There are ancient churches of Llanarmon yn Ial, Cilcain, St Mael & St Sulien in Corwen, etc. (who were St Mael and St. Sulien?) and other religious links both inside and just outside our area at St Asaph Cathedral, Valle Crucis, Basingwerk to name just a few. There are also the Industrial Revolution constructions, the Leete at Loggerheads, the Llangollen canal and its aqueducts and tunnels and railways throughout the area. Time and space prevent a full catalogue!



So what’s left to do?

Everything, come and join us!

Neville Howell, Secretary



Major Heritage Grant to the Dee Valley

The Dee Valley and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, as the Friends well know, is an outstandingly beautiful

landscape with a rich heritage, which has been highly celebrated by writers, poets and artists. The Heritage Lottery Fund has recently approved funding for a new Landscape Partnership Scheme in the area, under the banner of Our Picturesque Landscape.

The project area includes the iconic Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site, Eglwyseg Escarpment, Castell Dinas Bran and the surrounding landscape along the Dee Valley to Corwen. Visitors have drawn inspiration from this beautiful valley since the 18th century and it continues to draw tourists in search of the sublime. This landscape is under pressure with high numbers of visitors drawn to what are often our most fragile sites. The communities on its doorstep, born from the industrial endeavours that shaped it, are now less connected to the benefits the landscape offers.

The Our Picturesque Landscape Project will protect and restore the natural and historic heritage features through conservation and access management, provide new access, reinstate the iconic and defining views of the picturesque movement, and engage communities in its appreciation and management while reinterpreting this rich landscape for a new generation.

The Friends have been involved in the working group led by the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Team who submitted the successful application.

Denbighshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council, Canal River Trust, Cadw, Natural Resources Wales, the Aqueducts and the Friends are all key project partners. The Scheme is now entering a 15 month development phase which will undertake detailed plans for the project. We will keep our members informed of any opportunities for people to engage with this exciting new project. Watch this space!

Helen Mrowiec, Senior Recreation Officer with the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB





Planning in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

One of the jobs of the AONB is to comment on planning and development proposals within and around the AONB which might impact on the area. The wrong development in the wrong location has the potential to despoil our beautiful landscape, which is why we are so keen to protect the AONB and its setting from inappropriate development and to encourage well designed schemes which fit well into the landscape.

Conserving the natural beauty of AONB's is enshrined in UK legislation and national and local planning policy, but contrary to what some commentators think the AONB is not anti-development. The AONB does have the capacity to absorb some development which is needed to provide housing for local people, support economic prosperity and to meet human aspirations to improve one's property. Indeed, most planning applications are granted by the planning authorities with no in principle objection from the AONB. What we want is the right development in the right place which is well designed and landscaped to fit in with the rural surroundings and doesn't harm our beautiful landscape.

The AONB is consulted on over 300 planning and development proposals a year, mostly by the three local planning authorities which cover the AONB – Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham. Many developers and landowners also

seek our informal views on their proposals before submitting a planning application, and often we are able to influence the design and appearance to ensure a better fit with the landscape. Getting the right scale of development and appropriate materials such as natural slate for roofs can often make a real difference as to whether a development fits well into its setting or not. Incorporating simple landscaping such as new native hedges and hedgerow trees or restoring and extending natural local stone boundary walls can also enhance the AONB.

When considering development proposals it is important that the AONB is an independent voice from that of the local planning authority – our role is quite specific and focussed on looking at proposals from a landscape conservation and enhancement perspective. The value of such independence is highlighted in the recent Welsh Government commissioned Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales, which also recommends that AONB's should be a statutory consultee on planning applications affecting their area. Planning is often a thankless task – you quickly learn that can't please everyone – and getting the balance right between conserving and protecting our precious landscape whilst accommodating development is not always easy.



This shouldn't deter us from trying though, and the AONB must continue to look carefully at planning and development proposals which may impact on this nationally treasured landscape.

Tony Hughes, AONB Planning Officer



How We Manage the AONB

Howard Sutcliffe AONB Officer

In 2011 the AONB doubled in size to 390 square kilometres, and became the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, far more complex in terms of population, with Llangollen and Corwen both within the new boundary. It also acquired another Local Authority (Wrexham) and our very own World Heritage Site.

Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham Local Authorities have delegated their duties for the management of the AONB to a **Joint Committee**, a high level strategic group, composed of six Cabinet members from the three counties – two from each. The key role of this committee is “**the conservation and enhancement of the area’s natural beauty.**” It is small enough to make decisions and big enough to generate real debate. Some of the AONB’s iconic features straddle county boundaries – like the Offa’s Dyke National Trail, Moel Famau, and the Llangollen Canal World Heritage Site – so all three Local Authorities are charged, through this committee, with looking after them. Most importantly, it has responsibility for finance.

If the Joint Committee is to be seen as ‘good practice’ for the strategic management of the AONB, it needs to be complimented by a second group acting at a more local level, this group is known as the **AONB Partnership.**

The Partnership provides the mechanism for the delivery of the AONB Management Plan. It provides the Joint Committee with advice by bringing key interests together to consider and advise on various aspects of the AONB including major consultations and planning applications. The Partnership is made up of 25 members, 9 from the Local Authorities and 16 'laymen', chosen on merit.

Henceforth, the AONB will also hold an Annual AONB Forum. Each Forum will have a topical theme. The first Forum took place in November 2015 and had an archaeological theme. It was attended by 50 people.

Finally, there is a separate annual meeting for Local County Councillors and Community Councils which have all or part of their Wards in the AONB.



The structure is now in place for an efficient and forward-looking AONB, with plenty of people enthusiastically engaged in furthering our aims to "conserve and enhance" this very special place.

Howard Sutcliffe, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Officer



Did you see some unique Trig Points that marked the 30th Anniversary of the Clwydian Range being designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Registered Charity Number 1163812
Recommend a friend to join the Friends
to Discover, Enjoy and Project the Clwydian Range
and Dee Valley

Look out for the new website coming soon

www.friends.cymru



Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy
Clwydian Range and Dee Valley
Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Friends wish to thank the Clwydian Range
and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural
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support.

