

LLŶN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 18/11/20

Present: Councillor Gareth Williams (Gwynedd Council) (Chairman)

Members: Councillors Anwen Davies, Aled Wyn Jones, Angela Russell, John Brynmor Hughes (Gwynedd Council) and Molly Lovatt (Natural Resources Wales), Noel Davey (Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales), Jina Gwyrfai (Llanaelhaearn Community Council), Morgan Jones-Parry (Dwyfor and Arfon Access Forum), John Gosling (Abersoch and Llŷn Tourism Partnership) and Andrew Davidson (Gwynedd Archaeological Trust), T. Victor Jones (Llanbedrog Community Council), Wenda Williams (Aberdaron Community Council) and Gruffydd Williams (Nefyn Town Council).

Officers: Bleddyn P. Jones (LLŷn AONB Officer), Elin Wyn Hughes (Llŷn AONB Projects Officer), Annes Siôn (Democratic Team Leader) and Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democratic Services Officer).

Others present:

Dani Robertson (Dark Sky Officer, Dark Skies Partnership) for Item 10.

1. CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Gareth Williams as Chair of this Joint Committee for the year 2020/21.

2. VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor T. Victor Jones as Vice-chair of this Joint Committee for the year 2020/21.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the following:
Eirian Allport (Clynnog Fawr Community Council), Gillian Walker (Cyfeillion Llŷn), Siân Parri (Tudweiliog Community Council) and Brett Garner (Llŷn Anglers Association).

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

5. URGENT ITEMS

An urgent matter was raised for the Joint Committee to discuss, namely the impact of the local housing crisis on AONB areas. A member noted that they had not been able to make contact in good time to include this on the agenda, but there was a need for the Joint Committee to consider the housing crisis in the area. The member noted there was a need for planning applications within AONB areas to be submitted before the Joint Committee.

Another member noted that the planning office needed to be more sensitive to the needs of the AONB areas.

In response, the Llŷn AONB Officer noted that the planning department consulted with the AONB office on applications and with Natural Resources Wales. However, it was agreed that the Llŷn AONB Officer would send a letter to the planning department reporting on the concerns raised.

6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this Joint Committee as a true record.

7. CORONAVIRUS

Submitted - the report of the Llŷn AONB Officer on the latest period and the impact on the AONB areas. The Joint Committee was reminded of the initial lockdown period and concerns in the local area about visitors. There was mention of the increase in house sales within the area and how this had raised concerns locally, which was already discussed.

As a result of the situation, the Llŷn AONB Officer noted that events and training had ended for the time being to coincide with national restrictions. He expanded that the Llŷn AONB website had been updated and made easier to use - including mobile phones.

Members were given an opportunity to make observations and ask questions, the following main points were noted by members:

- Overall, it was agreed that it was a difficult time but there was concern regarding the signs that had been used against residents or visitors.
- Concerns were noted regarding signs that had been against tourists who had come to the area during lockdown emphasising the importance of these people to the local economy.
- Observations were made on the housing crisis including a recognition that it was the members' duty to act as it was the Joint Committee's responsibility to protect the area. Nefyn Council was thanked for taking the lead on the matter and members of the Joint Committee were encouraged to campaign more.
- Welcomed seeing the updated website, however it was suggested that some elements should be returned to the website including the management plan.
- A member said that the area's wildlife had been thriving during the lockdown period. It was noted there was a need to work with contractors who were responsible for cutting hedges so that they were not cut too early in the season to allow time for wild flowers to thrive.
- Local efforts to bring communities together were commended.

In response to some of the above observations, the Officers noted:

- The problem of increased house sales in AONB areas was happening nationally throughout Britain. Consequently, the matter was being raised on a higher level within Councils and Welsh Government. In terms of the AONB Joint Committee it was noted that there was certainly a possibility of drawing attention to the matter and providing a statement, however, the Joint Committee did not have any further powers.
- They would send the Joint Committee's observations to Welsh Government to highlight the community's feelings and that some ill-feeling had occurred when some individuals had broken the rules.

Submitted- a proposal to the Joint Committee which reflected the same proposal that had been tabled at the Full Council; propose that the Llŷn AONB Joint Committee should call on Welsh Government to change the Planning Act in order that it was compulsory to have planning permission to convert a dwelling-house into a holiday home / holiday unit, and adapted the policy framework to allow thresholds to be set regarding the maximum numbers of holiday homes in any area.

The proposal was passed with 10 members in favour, 1 against and 1 abstention.

RESOLVED to write to Welsh Government in relation to the proposal as noted above.

8. UPDATE ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND

The Llŷn AONB Projects Officer submitted a report on the work that had taken place to administrate the fund including a summary of the expenditure for the 2019/20 financial year. She referred to the annual report which explained how the successful projects complied with the guidelines set out by Welsh Government.

It was noted that a significant amount of £100,000 had been earmarked for 2020/21 and there was now £6,000 left in the fund. It was added that the Officers were not aware of the amount that had been allocated for the next financial year.

Members were given an opportunity to make observations and ask questions, the following main points were noted by members:

- The officers were thanked for their work in securing grants for the fund
- An observation was made regarding flower planting and it was asked whether it was possible for the AONB officers to arrange a similar initiative themselves in order to save the time of community groups in applying for funding.

In response, the Llŷn AONB Projects Officer stated that the purpose of this type of fund was to promote and encourage community spirit. In asking for applications from community groups, it gave residents an opportunity to convene and collaborate in the interests of their communities.

RESOLVED to accept the information.

9. LLŶN AONB UNIT PROJECTS

Submitted - the report of the Llŷn AONB Officer on the projects that had been approved by the Joint Committee. It was reiterated that it had not been possible to continue with every project as planned due to the lockdown period. It was noted that although it had not been possible to complete some aspects, it had been possible to implement several direct AONB projects including;

- Dealing with the Giant Hogweed
- Commissioning new recycling bins
- Assisting with the History Points QR project
- Facilitating reigniting the initiative to restore and maintain Capel Newydd, Nanhoron
- Dark Skies designation (more information in Item 10)

An overview was also provided of the projects that were being delivered with capital funding from Welsh Government. It was reiterated that there was a theme for the funding namely de-carbonisation and sustainable tourism and bids had been submitted under this theme.

Members were given an opportunity to make observations and ask questions, the following main points were noted by members:

- A member noted that there were other public conveniences in the area that needed investment and it was asked whether the AONB could consider this for the future.
- A question was asked regarding access to Capel Newydd and where the key would be kept for visitors.
- It was reported that people and tourists in the Abersoch area appreciated the new recycling bins.
- A question was raised regarding an environmental issue with the materials used for the project in Machroes as they were using concrete.
- A member made a comment on the plants that were being treated to keep control and to avoid any environmental damage.

In response, the Llŷn AONB Project Officer noted that the Capel Newydd building was being restored and there was currently no access to it, however the location of the key would be advertised when the chapel was ready to reopen. In relation to the materials used at Machroes, it was noted that there was concrete there already, and they would add to this for the repairs work.

RESOLVED to accept the information.

10. DARK SKY DESIGNATION

The Llŷn AONB Officer provided an update on the Unit's request to secure a Dark Sky designation for the Llŷn AONB area and other areas. He noted that he had mentioned securing this status for the local area in the past and by now it was possible to do it in collaboration with the Dark Sky Partnership. This was reiterated and it was noted that Snowdonia National Park had already obtained the International Dark Sky status and the Joint Committee's permission was requested to proceed with an application to designate the AONB a Dark Sky Park.

Dani Robertson, the Dark Sky Officer from the Dark Skies Partnership provided a report to share further information with the members regarding the meaning of the designation and what it meant to the area. It was noted that the Llŷn AONB area had a high proportion of dark sky spots and through collaboration, there would be an opportunity to educate local people on how to contribute to maintaining this.

The following points were made:

- It was noted that there would be no requirement to switch off lights, however there would be an opportunity to advise on the temperatures and effective use of lighting.
- The benefits of dark sky were mentioned, including people's health, the environment, economy and tourism.
- Awareness was raised about light pollution and how unique it was to have an area with a dark sky.
- Reference was made to the term Astro-tourism, with a suggestion that a dark skies designation could expand tourism beyond the usual season.

Members were given an opportunity to make observations and ask questions, the following main points were noted by members:

- The officer was thanked for her presentation and for explaining exactly what was meant by the dark skies status. It was asked if it would be possible to share the presentation with the Members.
- A member asked for an explanation of the geographical scope of the designation, as some areas in Llŷn did emit more light than others.
- Concerns were raised regarding the duties of community councils in enforcing residents to switch off their lights.
- Another concern raised was that many people required a particular type of lighting for security reasons noting that there would be no support for changing the community's ways for the benefit of prospective tourists.
- A request was made for more time to consider the recommendation to consult with community councils for everyone to understand the purpose of the application for a dark skies designation.

In response, the Officer noted that it would be possible for individual communities to apply for the status for their areas if they were outside the proposed boundary. It was reiterated that this type of designation would give status to the area and would also increase its profile.

In response to the above concerns, the Committee was assured that community councils would not be required to advise or enforce residents to switch off their lights. It was also noted that it would be possible to give a virtual presentation on Dark Sky matters to relevant Community Councils. The Officer expressed that the proposal would advise residents on the correct management of lighting, rather than force them to switch it off.

It was not possible to decide on the recommendation as the meeting was not quorate.

The meeting commenced at 4.30pm and concluded at 6.40pm.

CHAIR