



**Bryniau Clwyd a
Dyffryn Dyfrdwy**
Clwydian Range
and Dee Valley

Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2015 – 2020



September 2014

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
1 Situation analysis.....	3
1.1 Key features and assets of the AONB	3
1.2 Tourism facilities and services.....	5
1.3 Tourism organisation and delivery	12
1.4 Tourism performance	15
1.5 Feedback from tourism businesses	17
1.6 Key issues from the evidence gathering and consultation	19
1.7 SWOT analysis.....	22
2 Strategy	23
2.1 Policy context	23
2.2 Principles and direction for sustainable tourism in the AONB	26
2.3 Vision	28
2.4 Target markets	28
2.5 Objectives	29
3 Action	31
3.1 MARKETING AND INFORMATION.....	31
3.2 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT – ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES	35
3.3 BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT	39
3.4 VISITOR AND PLACE MANAGEMENT.....	42
4 Delivery.....	46
4.1 Delivery structure	46
4.2 Implementing the action plan.....	48
4.3 Sources of funding	51
4.4 Indicators and monitoring	52
Appendix 1: Consultees	54



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covers a five year period from 2015 to 2020. It has been based on extensive consultation and assessment, through meetings, workshops, surveys and analysis of available evidence. Its purpose is to provide a direction for tourism in the protected area together with a framework for coordinating action by all concerned. In particular, the strategy seeks to pursue forms of tourism that are appropriate to the protected area and which “take full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities¹”.

It is intended that responsibility for implementing the strategy and action plan will rest with the AONB. Actions to develop the partnership and strengthen its effectiveness are proposed, including establishing a Tourism and Recreation Delivery Group under new governance arrangements planned for the AONB. This group will play a key role in bringing together those involved with tourism and recreation, including representatives of the three partner County Councils, tourism businesses associated with the two main areas that make up the AONB, the World Heritage Site and Cadwyn Clwyd.

This Strategy builds upon experience gained from successful delivery of the previous Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for the Clwydian Range AONB 2009-14. It reflects the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and current policies in Wales on sustainable development, the environment and tourism. It takes into account the Clwydian Range AONB Management Plan 2009-14, together with the Interim Statement on the Extension Area 2012. The new AONB Management Plan, currently in preparation, will take full account of this Strategy.

The Strategy has been shaped by the following approach:

- Managing, supporting and promoting the extended AONB, with its combination of exceptional countryside and heritage, as an iconic attraction for North East Wales.
- Improving and making more consistent the quality of all aspects of the visitor experience, to match the quality of the area’s inherent assets.
- Giving priority to gaining more income from tourism throughout the year, so improving the performance and viability of tourism businesses.
- Capitalising upon recent investment in extensive facilities for walking, mountain biking and other outdoor activities, through strengthened promotion and links to businesses.
- Helping tourism businesses to embrace the opportunities and responsibilities of being in a protected area, understanding more about the AONB, improving their management of resources and informing their guests about the area.
- Integrating development of sustainable tourism in the AONB with marketing activity for North East Wales and destination management activity in the three counties.
- Making more of the World Heritage Site, and its management and promotion in conjunction with the AONB, through an integrated approach.
- Linking northern and southern parts of the AONB through joint initiatives and information, while recognising their different starting points and stakeholder structures.
- Ensuring that responsible access to the AONB and the range of experiences that it offers is made available to all visitors, including those with special needs.
- Helping visitors to understand more about the area’s environment and heritage and encouraging support for its conservation.

¹Making Tourism More Sustainable – A Guide for Policy Makers, UNEP and UNWTO, 2005

This approach is captured in a vision which will guide tourism delivery over the next five years, as follows:

In 2020 The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB is:

An area that stands out as an exceptional place to visit in Wales for its countryside experiences and heritage interest, not only for day trips but also for short breaks and holidays. Tourism businesses are performing well and delivering jobs for local people. They are working together to deliver a quality visitor experience, supported by well managed facilities, amenities and services. Negative impacts on the environment are minimised and there is positive interaction between visitors and local communities. There is a good understanding of the area's special qualities and of the benefits brought by tourism.

Four functional objectives capture the essence of the vision and direction, and build upon the objectives of the previous sustainable tourism strategy.

1 MARKETING AND INFORMATION

To raise awareness of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley and all that it has to offer to visitors, encouraging more and longer stays year round.

Actions include: developing and disseminating brand values; improving AONB coverage in NE Wales presence; developing and maintaining a high quality web presence; developing external coverage; maintain and actively distributing key AONB print; creative PR; strengthening ability of tourism businesses to engage with information delivery; strengthening delivery of AONB information at key gateways; and improved signage on major routes.

2 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT – ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES

To develop and enhance year round visitor experiences and promotable offers based on appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of the area's special countryside and heritage assets.

Actions include: capitalising on strengths for walking and cycling; pursuing opportunities to strengthen riding product; addressing water-based recreation issues and opportunities; working with operators to strengthen as centre for outdoor activities; making more of events providing AONB experience; promoting local produce; making more of local crafts; increasing contribution of natural and cultural heritage; improving range of year round attractions.

3 BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

To encourage and assist tourism-related enterprises to develop and improve their performance, facilities, sustainability and relationship to the AONB.

Actions include: establishing structures for business engagement and strengthening communications; ensuring access to business support; encouraging investment and enterprise initiatives; strengthening guidance on development control; encouraging businesses to raise quality standards; linking businesses with the AONB through knowledge programmes; encouraging and recognising good sustainability practice; investigating schemes to raise support for conservation.

4 VISITOR AND PLACE MANAGEMENT

To improve, manage and monitor visitor flows and environments for tourism, spreading benefits and addressing local impacts.

Actions include: preparing a visitor management plan; improving management and facilities at key sites; improving visitor environment in Llangollen and Corwen; maintaining basic visitor services; retaining landscape attractiveness; promoting use of public transport; strengthening links with gateway towns; improving visitor data; monitoring tourism impacts.

The strategy and action plan will be a dynamic process, effectively monitored, leading to a renewal of the strategy in 2020.

Introduction

In 2007 a Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for the Clwydian Range AONB was prepared, to run up to 2013 and beyond. It formed the basis for the award to the AONB of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and has been actively used by the AONB team and its partners to guide their tourism related work in the area. The strategy gave recognition to the value of tourism to the economy, environment and communities of the AONB and its wider area of influence.

This previous strategy and action plan resulted in a number of initiatives, including:

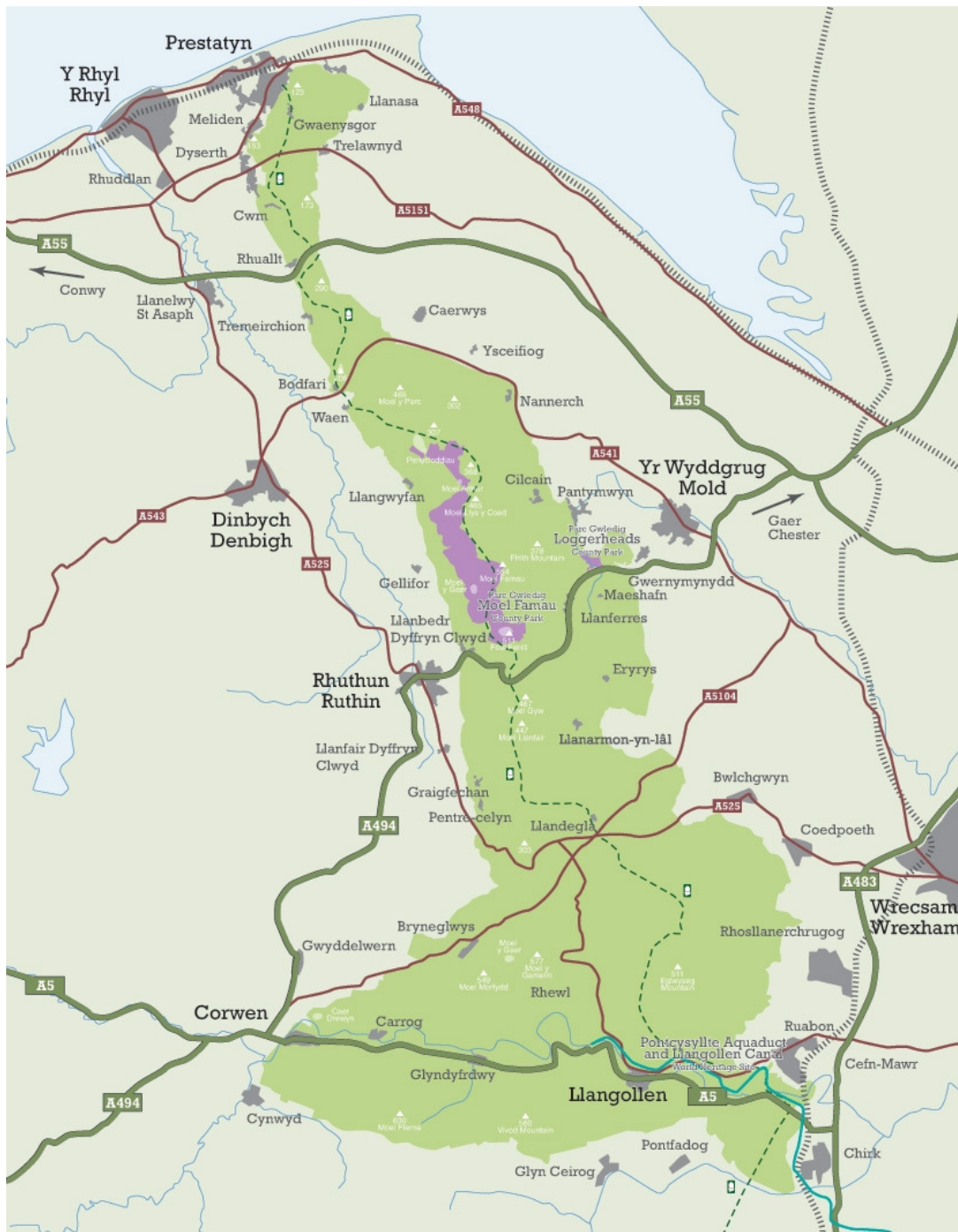
- The successful evolving of the Loggerheads Business Group into the Clwydian Range Tourism Group, bringing together businesses across the Clwydian Range and surrounding areas.
- Strengthening the profile and awareness of the AONB, through work on the brand, web presence, information print, signage and marketing linkages.
- Improved access opportunities, including car-parking, site improvements, transport schemes, identified walking trails, and various cycling initiatives, amongst other activities
- Support for tourism businesses and their links to the AONB, such as engagement in environmental management and work with networks of food-related businesses and activity operators
- Interpretation and communication initiatives, including completion of the Heather and Hillforts landscape partnership scheme, work on 'sense of place', local and site-specific interpretation and events.

In 2011 the AONB was extended to cover the Dee Valley, resulting in an AONB that is over twice its original size and containing many more and different tourism assets and associated issues and opportunities.

This new sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the extended AONB will run from 2015-2020. Its preparation has involved:

- Assessment of the strategic context, including current policies and plans
- Assessment of tourism assets, performance and activity in the extended AONB
- An on-line survey of tourism business, resulting in 66 completed responses from a range of enterprise across the AONB and in the immediately surrounding area
- Four stakeholder workshops, in Llanasa, Loggerheads, Froncysyllte and Corwen, attended by some 70 participants
- Further direct consultation
- The production of an interim report
- A final workshop with key stakeholders, held in Pwllglas on June 9th 2014
- Assimilation of key points made during and after the workshop.

The strategy and action plan is in four parts: situation analysis; strategic direction; action plan; and implementation.



1 Situation analysis

This chapter contains the evidence behind the sustainable tourism strategy and action plan. It sets out the key characteristics of the AONB that provide a basis for tourism and its management, followed by an analysis of tourism facilities and services. Evidence is presented on the performance of the tourism sector in the area, together with specific feedback from tourism businesses. Finally, the results of the consultation are summarised, leading to an overall analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

1.1 Key features and assets of the AONB

In 2009 the then Clwydian Range AONB covered 158 km². Following the extension to the Dee Valley the area more than doubled, resulting in a total size of 390 km². The extension led to a considerable addition and diversification of natural and historic features and assets leading to much greater potential tourism interest and opportunity. Key features of the AONB as a whole, which form the primary basis for the tourism offer, are outlined briefly below. This takes account of the 'special features' of the AONB as identified in its Management Plan and is also informed by the State of the AONB Report published in May 2014 and by consultation with stakeholders.

Natural environment

The designation as an AONB rightly identifies this area as one of the most beautiful in the UK, providing a special asset for tourism in North East Wales. Following the extension, the AONB now includes not only the fine upland ridge of the Clwydian Range, but also the exceptional scenic landscapes of the Vale of Llangollen and the Dee Valley, together with the northern slopes of the Berwyn Mountains.

The special features of the natural environment of the AONB include: limestone grassland; limestone outcrops, pavements, caves and screes; heather moorland and rolling ridges; broad leaved woodland; and river valleys with pastures and wetlands. Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Special Areas of Conservation make up 20.6% and 18.2% of the AONB, respectively.

The combined strengths that this offers to tourism include:

- Varied landscapes – opportunities to experience a wide variety of very beautiful countryside within a small area
- Striking and extensive views – within, to and from the AONB
- A wide range of habitats and wildlife – with related opportunities for events and interpretation.

The impact of tourism on the AONB's natural environment has been relatively limited. However, there has been some degree of erosion and pressure on habitats from over-use in a few locations at certain times. There is also concern about certain forms of activity, including off-road 4x4 vehicles. This underlines the need for sound management and effective communication.

Historic environment

Overall, the AONB contains 641 Listed Buildings and 94 Scheduled Monuments. The historic heritage of the area and the individual features and sites add strongly to its visitor appeal. This aspect has been significantly strengthened by the extension to include the Dee Valley, which has brought a large number of individual sites and attractions into the AONB. The main elements, all of which provide specific opportunities as well as management issues for tourism, include:

- The string of hill forts and other archaeological sites, especially along the Range but also in the south.
- The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct & Canal World Heritage Site, including a line of individual features and sites along the canal
- A range of historical properties and sites, including Chirk Castle, Castell Dinas Brân, Valle Crucis Abbey and a number of smaller historic sites, including those associated with the area's agricultural, ecclesiastical, borderland, artistic and industrial heritage, some open to the public and some not.
- Numerous historical landscape features, including walls, old road signs, vernacular architecture, etc.

Access and recreation

The fact that this is a historic gateway to Wales, crossed by a number of access corridors, is recognised as one of the special features of the AONB. These corridors, including main road routes (such as the A5, A55 and A494), upland passes (including the Horseshoe Pass) and the rail routes, have varied historical significance as well as being highly important for tourism.

The Offa's Dyke Path National Trail is a key feature of the AONB, running its entire length from south to north. The AONB is also well served by an extensive network of rights of way, which have been actively maintained, identified and promoted for various kinds of access, with some promoted as named trails. The River Dee provides a major facility for recreation. Specific access resources and provision of outdoor recreation services are referred to in Section 1.2.



Culture and people

The Welsh language is quite strong in the area and can be heard spoken throughout the AONB. The proportion of the residents with full Welsh language skills has increased in recent years to around 30%, which is considerably higher than the national average. The association with Eisteddfodau, with the pinnacle being the International Eisteddfod in Llangollen, underpins this aspect of cultural identity.

Historical associations with key individuals and groups include Corwen's link to Owain Glyndwr and the artistic patronage of the Ladies of Llangollen.

The AONB contains many villages and small rural communities, mainly with an agricultural tradition but some with links to quarrying and other industries. The level of facilities for tourism within them is often quite limited. The extension to the Dee Valley has meant that the AONB now includes two towns within its boundaries, Llangollen and Corwen, with a long history of engagement with tourism. However, the link with surrounding towns, such as Mold, Ruthin, Denbigh and Prestatyn, located just outside the designated area, remains an important feature of the AONB.

A few local communities have reported pressure and congestion, notably from traffic and car parking at certain times.

Socio-economic context

The population of the AONB in 2011 was 18,690. Profile data reveals the following main socio-economic characteristics:

- An ageing population, with percentages of older people above the national and regional average;
- The proportion of economically active people, and of self-employment, is above the national average.
- A recent increase in unemployment levels, reflecting the national picture;
- Varying levels of social deprivation – low in some areas and greatest around Llangollen and Rhosllanerchrugog.

1.2 Tourism facilities and services

Accommodation

Precise data on the amount of accommodation actually within the AONB boundary is not available. Some indication of the balance of types of accommodation can be obtained from STEAM² data for rural Denbighshire. In 2012 this recorded a total of 118 serviced and 116 non-serviced accommodation establishments. The total bedstock is estimated at 9,632 bedspaces, broken down as shown below.



² Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor

Accommodation in rural Denbighshire 2012

Accommodation Category	Establishments	Beds/sleeping spaces
Serviced accommodation		
50+ room hotels	1	104
11-50 room hotels	19	885
<10 room hotels/others	98	780
<i>Serviced total</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>1769</i>
Self-catering	77	750
Static caravans/chalets	11	912
Touring caravans/camping	28	2457
Not-for-hire static		3744
<i>Non-serviced total</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>7863</i>
Total accommodation	234	9632

Most of the accommodation businesses are small scale – bed and breakfast/guest houses and enterprises letting one or more self-catering units. There are a few larger hotels and caravan/camping sites.

More detailed consideration shows that accommodation is not evenly distributed across the AONB. Serviced accommodation in the Clwydian Range is most likely to be in the form of bed and breakfast establishments or guest accommodation while the Dee Valley has a number of larger establishments, especially in the area around Llangollen. Little is known about the nature and distribution of self-catering accommodation.

Of 20 hotels and guesthouses with over five rooms which are known to be in the AONB, 14 are in Llangollen. Six hotels have over 25 rooms. Three of the four largest hotels changed hands around 2012 as a result of Llangollen Hotel Group going into administration. Some hotels have been investing in improvements but others have not.

A number of mid-sized touring caravan and camping sites are to be found around the area, sometimes including the provision of static letting units. Dedicated group accommodation is somewhat limited. A small number of establishments are diversifying into glamping in various forms, offering wigwams, yurts, hot tub safari tents and camping pods alongside mainstream accommodation.

Participation in the national quality grading schemes has declined and most of hotels are not now participating. A number of smaller establishments have achieved 4* or 5* Guest Accommodation standard. Two holiday/touring parks on the edge of the AONB are also graded 5*. However, overall, the inconsistency of accommodation quality remains an issue.

Accommodation in towns surrounding the AONB is also important. Ruthin, Denbigh, Mold, Prestatyn and Chirk are seen as gateway towns to the AONB, with some hotels and other accommodation both within and outside the towns, including along the A55 corridor.

Some accommodation is promoted specifically through Offa's Dyke Association to users of Offa's Dyke Path National Trail. This tends to be small scale, clustered with significant gaps between overnights, and not always in easy reach of the route.

Visitor attractions, including countryside and heritage sites

The diversity of visitor attractions within the AONB has increased with the inclusion of the Dee Valley. Attractions in the northern part of the AONB are largely based on exploration and understanding of the landscape, with the majority managed by Denbighshire and Flintshire Countryside Services and/or Natural Resources Wales. The Dee Valley includes a number of commercial attractions, heritage sites, including some within the World Heritage Site, and a number of less formal sites.

Key managed public access sites in the Clwydian Range include:

- **Loggerheads Country Park**, which has a visitor centre (Clwydian Range Centre), extensive facilities, including Caffi Florence, and various themed trails. Various investment and improvements have been made to the facilities and interpretation. Parking capacity is not always sufficient.
- **Moel Famau Country Park**, including the highest summit in the Clwydian Range and the recently restored landmark of the Jubilee Tower, three hill forts and various trails. There is extensive car parking, with some facilities.
- **Coed Moel Famau**, with its routes and facilities (including the Hawk's Nest play trails) is managed by Natural Resources Wales, with elements managed in partnership with Denbighshire Countryside Service.

A number of other important sites provide access to woodland and moorland, with a range of routes and heritage and wildlife interest. These include **Coed Llangwyfan**, **Moel Findeg**, and **Coed Nercwys**. **Coed Llandegla** includes the sizeable mountain bike facility run by UPM Tillhill and One Planet Adventure.

Other access sites in the Clwydian Range include Bishops Wood, Coed Bell, Graig Fawr (National Trust) and a number of sites managed by the North Wales Wildlife Trust.

The southern part of the AONB also includes some important access sites, a number of which are related to heritage features:

- **Castell Dinas Brân**, above Llangollen, is one of the most dramatic fortified locations in Britain, with panoramic views. The walk to the castle has been improved by AONB staff and volunteers.
- **Caer Drewyn**, near Corwen, is one of the best-preserved Iron Age hillforts in Wales.
- **Moel Fferna** in the North Berwyn Mountains, the highest place in the entire AONB at 630m, is a remote site only accessible by foot.



Two Country Parks managed by Wrexham Borough Council lie on the edge of the AONB:

- **Ty Mawr Country Park** on the River Dee beneath Cefn Viaduct has attractions and facilities together with riverside walks and picnic places.
- **Minera Country Park** at the head of the Clwydog Valley includes countryside surrounding Minera Mountain and has visible evidence of lead mines.

The southern part of the AONB includes a number of outstanding heritage attractions.

Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, built by Thomas Telford in 1805 is a masterpiece of pioneering engineering and the tallest navigable canal boat crossing in the world. It was inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2009, along with 11 miles of canal stretching from Telford's earlier aqueduct at Chirk to the Horseshoe Falls at Llangollen.

This is a complex site, presenting significant further tourism opportunities but a large number of management challenges. Current access, parking, access and visitor facilities are quite limited. The main focus is **Trevor Basin**, which is a base for public boat trips across the aqueduct, as well as boat hire for cruising the Llangollen Canal in either direction, and has a small World Heritage Site interpretation centre. Work is being undertaken to improve access and interpretation at some other locations within the World Heritage Site, such as the project being delivered by the AONB at Llantysilio Green above the Horseshoe Falls, also supported by DCC and Cadw.

Llangollen Wharf is a base for seasonal horsedrawn trips and motorised boat trips and for day boat self-drive hire. There is a tea shop and gift shop.

Llangollen Railway is the only standard gauge heritage railway in North Wales and has run 7 ½ miles from Llangollen to Carrog. A 2 ½ mile extension to Corwen is nearing completion, although opening is delayed from its original date in 2014. The standard weekday summer timetable includes three return journeys a day, with more at weekends and special events.

Chirk Castle dates from 1310 and has been continuously inhabited for the last 700 years. It commands views over nine counties and has a fine parkland. It is managed by the National Trust and open all year.

The Dee Valley also contains a number of other important heritage sites.

- **Plas Newydd** is run as a museum by Denbighshire County Council and has gardens and walks. For nearly 50 years it was the home of the Ladies of Llangollen, and now has an exhibition that recounts their relationship with the house, society and culture. It is closed in winter.
- **Valle Crucis Abbey** is the best-preserved medieval monastery in North Wales. It is a Cadw property and is closed in winter.
- **Rug Chapel and Llangar Old Parish Church** are two small and atmospheric religious sites on the south western corner of the AONB. Both are Cadw properties and are closed in winter.
- **St Collen's Church, Llangollen** is one of a number of examples in the area of double-naved churches decorated with ornate wooden carving.

There are a small number of commercial visitor attractions in the AONB. These include the **Llangollen Motor and Motor Cycle Museum** (closed in winter), the **Original Butterfly Man** and **Glassbobbery**, both on the A5 corridor.

A number of commercial retail outlets are also significant attractors of visitors from within and outside the area. Four which are particularly strategically located and which provide a range of visitor facilities, including catering and events, include:

- The **Rhug Estate**, on the A5 at Corwen – selling produce from its own estate, the local area and across Wales
- **Afon-wen Craft and Antique Centre**, on the A541
- **Jacksons Garden Centre**, on the A5151, off the A55.
- Pendorosa on the Horseshoe Pass

A range of attractions outside the AONB complement the offer within it. Of particular note is the extensive number of historic heritage attractions, including St Asaph Cathedral, castles in Rhuddlan, Ruthin, Flint and Denbigh, Nant Clwyd House, St Winifreds Well, Greenfield Valley, Wepre Park, and the Gaol in Ruthin. Other attractions with significant visitor volumes include Tweedmill Shopping Outlet and Clwyd Theatr Cymru in Mold.

Walking

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB is crossed by an extensive network of public rights of way and permissive routes, which are very popular with walkers.

There are number of named walking trails, including:

- Offa's Dyke Path National Trail. The final quarter (73km) from Chirk to Prestatyn passes right through the AONB. This is the most popular section of the whole trail. Recent work has been completed on its interpretation. The opening of the Wales Coast Path in 2012 increases its significance, as part of a round Wales boundary walk. The 'Walking with Offa' project has funded various initiatives to add value and linkages to the Offa's Dyke path.
- Two named and waymarked routes run between Llangollen and Corwen: the Dee Valley Way and the more challenging North Berwyn Way – both 24km.
- Corwen is being developed as a walking hub with links to Bala (Taith Tegid) and Llyn Brenig (the Brenig Way) as well as the above mentioned routes.
- Other long distance routes, such as the Pilgrims Way from Holywell to Bardsey Island, are increasing in profile but have not been officially adopted.

The AONB is well served by promoted circular routes and trails. One of its main assets is that it can cater for walkers of all abilities, allowing those who are unused to strenuous or challenging walks to experience countryside views. A number of books and leaflets provide descriptions of walks, including those produced by the AONB, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham, NRW and others. The Community Miles project has worked with local communities to identify and promote their own circular walks.

Corwen, Llangollen and Prestatyn and Meliden are all Walkers are Welcome towns, each with its own walking festival.

Cycling

The AONB is a significant destination for mountain biking. Provision and promotion has expanded in recent years, partly supported by the North Wales Cycling Centre of Excellence initiative. The area now caters for a full spectrum of cycling ability, with a number of routes at all levels.

Coed Llandegla has developed into a nationally renowned mountain bike hub, with good quality and popular facilities and over 44km of purpose build mountain bike trails, bringing in over 150,000 visitors per annum.

The original Ride the Clwyds marketing initiative has expanded its profile as Ride North Wales, within which the Clwydian Range is strongly featured, including Coed Llandegla and a range of routes across the area from 8-80km. Further work is being undertaken to improve the information and show the relationship of the trails to various visitor facilities. Information on cycling routes is available from www.ridenorthwales.co.uk.

The long distance cycle route NCN5 skirts the top of the AONB, with the North Wales Coast Route traffic free from Prestatyn eastwards. There are also on road and limited traffic free routes back towards the north eastern corner of the AONB (Dyserth, St Asaph, Rhuddlan). Work has been undertaken to improve access and use of the Llangollen Canal towpath for cyclists and others, as part of a traffic free cycle route (NCN 84,85) opened by Sustans from Chirk to Llantysilio Green, with links to mainline railway stations at Chirk and Ruabon.

There is some concern about pressure from mountain biking, for example around the hill forts. Problems exist with the illegal use of certain routes. This relates to access by horse riders and for motor sport as well as cycling.

Horse riding

Over 183km of bridleway in Denbighshire, combined with the byways that are also open to horse riders, add up to over 200km of trails available to ride on horseback. The bridleway network is more extensive within the AONB than elsewhere in Denbighshire and Flintshire, however coverage is still patchy. Some work has been undertaken to open up bridleways and create permissive links. It is important to obtain a clear picture of the resource and identify gaps and opportunities.

The Sea Horse Ride, promoted by Ride-UK as part of the National Bridleroute Network, runs for 53 miles from Glyndyfrdwy on the A5 between Llangollen and Corwen to Talacre near Holywell, passing through the AONB. The route involves some riding on road.

Outdoor Activities

A range of different outdoor activities are available across the AONB, with opportunities in the north and south.

A cluster of outdoor activity operators based in Llangollen are able to offer a variety of experiences based in and around the Dee Valley. Activities available include a number of water-based activities (open canoeing, kayaking, paddleboarding, whitewater rafting, tubing, gorge walking) taking advantage of the range of conditions on the River Dee and Llangollen Canal, up-stream and down-stream of Llangollen. Climbing and abseiling can also be offered in the immediate area. Good access to Llyn Tegid and Snowdonia increases the range of opportunities on offer. Other activities such as paragliding, paintballing, high ropes, bushcraft and archery, are available on an ad-hoc basis in and around the AONB.

Operators have come together in the Dee Valley Outdoor Providers Group, with support from the AONB and with established links to Snowdonia Active and North

Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group. Dee Valley Active is the promotional face of the group, which has branded the Dee Valley as 'North Wales Most Active Valley'. In November 2013, Festival of Llangollen Outdoor Sports (FLO) was staged to showcase the Dee Valley, offering visitors taster sessions in activities such as mountain biking and kayaking.

The AONB is working with the operators to improve their knowledge of the local environment and heritage, for management reasons and to enable them to add value to the experience they offer. This leads to a qualification and badge.

The AONB is also working with the Welsh Dee Partnership, a coming together of angling and canoeing interests on the River Dee. The Partnership has agreed a range of access arrangements on the river and with AONB support have recently appointed an officer to help co-ordinate management.

Fishing is an asset for tourism in the area, with a variety of opportunities presented by fisheries based on rivers and lakes within the AONB and the surrounding area. Golf is also an important component of the tourism offer. Several golf clubs surround the AONB, all of which welcome visitors.

Events

The AONB hosts a number of events that are promoted to visitors. The six day International Music Eisteddfod in Llangollen is probably the most well known outside the area. There are at least three walking festivals, two food festivals and a number of outdoor activity/endurance events.

Programmes of interpretative events, such as guided walks, talks, and conservation and other participatory activities are put together and promoted in different parts of the AONB. They are published online and in Denbighshire Countryside Service's 'Out and About', Flintshire County Council's Countryside Events programme and Wrexham Parks, Countryside and Rights of Way Service events leaflet.

Llangollen Pavilion is a significant events venue which is home to a programme of organised events and exhibitions. Potential has been identified for a new pavilion in Corwen but plans have not been finalised.

Helpa Gelf is an open studios event taking place across North Wales every weekend in September. Up to 30 artists taking part are located around the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB.

Food & drink

Clwydian Range Food Trail was launched in 2012. Thirteen producers and retail outlets are listed on the trail, which offers opportunities to taste and purchase produce which includes handmade bread, pies and pastries, meat from traditional Welsh breeds, cheese, yogurt and cider. Members are selected for the quality of the food they produce, and their commitment to working with high quality local food suppliers. The trail starts at Caffi Florence, Loggerheads. While a majority of outlets lie outside the boundary of the AONB, the route offers views of the Clwydian Range and visits the gateway towns of Denbigh and Ruthin. The trail is essentially now more like a food group/network and members have grown to 20.

The opportunity to benefit from a clear association between sheep farming and the landscape of the Clwydian Range is currently being pursued, with a project working with local producers to take Clwydian Range branded lamb to market.

Transport for visitors

Bus services link the main towns within and surrounding the AONB. The area can also be reached by rail, with stations on the edge of the AONB at Chirk, Ruabon, Wrexham and Prestatyn. A frequent bus service connects Ruabon Station to Llangollen. However, public transport availability varies considerably, especially away from the main routes.

The Clwydian Ranger bus service was set up to link the main places of visitor interest in the Range in the summer months. However, it was not well used and was unviable and so the service was withdrawn. A more flexible service, the Llangollen Lift, based on taxis, has been piloted to link key locations in and around Llangollen.



1.3 Tourism organisation and delivery

Destination management and tourism structures

Primary responsibility for delivering the previous AONB sustainable tourism strategy and action plan has rested with the **AONB team**, within **Denbighshire Countryside Service**. They will continue to play a key role in destination management and tourism within the AONB moving forward. The team currently has no dedicated tourism officer as such, but relevant functions have been undertaken by the staff members responsible for visitor services, communication and various aspects of management.

Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham Councils have officers responsible for tourism and continue to deliver a range of services that are important in destination management. In recent years all three counties have established **Destination Partnerships** that involve representatives of the private sector and other interests and play an important coordination function. They also have wider tourism forums, which may meet annually or more frequently. The AONB is represented within these structures.

Within the AONB there are a number of bodies and initiatives that bring together tourism interests, including:

- **Clwydian Range Tourism Group (CRTG)**. An association of private sector businesses with 110 nominal members and an active core of around 30.
- **Flintshire Tourism Association (FTA)**. Around 60 members, some in the AONB. FTA works closely with CRTG – they share events and have some members in common.

- **Llangollen Chamber of Trade and Tourism.** Around 50 members, many of which are directly or indirectly involved in tourism.
- **Wrexham Business Club.** Developed from World Heritage Site Business Club, and includes some businesses in Denbighshire.
- **Outdoor Providers Group.** Around 15 activity operators working together as Dee Valley Active, in association with the AONB.
- **Corwen Partnership – Corwen Tourist Association.** A coming together of stakeholder interests in and around the town of Corwen, including a group addressing tourism.
- **Dee Valley Business Action Group.** An umbrella body for organisations in the Dee Valley.

The above list is not necessarily comprehensive. There are other existing or new initiatives that bring together stakeholder interests, including those covering areas partly outside the AONB, such as an emerging initiative for the Edeyrnion area linking from Corwen down the Dee valley towards and across the Berwyn Mountains. The Clwydian Range Tourism Group has worked particularly closely with the AONB team on implementing the previous strategy and action plan for the (then) Clwydian Range AONB. Its overall aim is “to develop sustainable tourism businesses in the Clwydian Range”. It has been pursuing various initiatives to support its members in information, marketing, training and sustainability. The Group is looking at identifying a number of business clusters to work at a more local level.

Other key bodies supporting tourism in the area include:

- **Cadwyn Clwyd**, which has funded a significant number of tourism projects under the previous RDP and will be responsible for the new Programme.
- **World Heritage Site** (Board, Steering Group and Communications Sub-Committee), which bring together key bodies from Wrexham and Denbighshire, including AONB and the Canal and River Trust
- **North Wales Tourism**, an organisation with private sector tourism business members throughout North East Wales and which also delivers various services.
- **Visit Wales** – providing a range of support and services, including regional development and coordination provided to date by Tourism Partnership North Wales.
- **Natural Resources Wales** – providing partnership support and recreation sites.

Marketing and information

The AONB as such does not take a leading role in destination marketing. The approach has been to seek a high profile and accurate presentation of the AONB within the promotional activity undertaken by others.

Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham are now promoted together as North East Wales – Altogether Brilliant (previously the North Wales Borderlands) as one of the Visit Wales marketing areas. While the three counties continue aspects of destination marketing, the main promotional activity is now for North East Wales. Greater use of the North East Wales brand is being pursued.

North East Wales has a website www.northeastwales.co.uk and a destination brochure (downloadable as a pdf). The AONB is given a reasonable profile in both. However, there is some mixing of geographic and thematic treatments which can be confusing and there is a need for more clarity and consistency to the AONB

treatment. The three counties also have their own websites, which make some reference to the AONB.

The AONB has a corporate website www.clwydianrangeanddeevalleyaonb.org.uk. This contains some visitor information on walking, cycling, horse riding, towns, villages, transport and places of interest. Information on where to stay is provided by a link to www.visitclwydianrange.co.uk website. The latter is managed by the Clwydian Range Tourism Group, with a design, colour palate and feel that is similar to the AONB official site. It contains more details on all aspects of the visitor experience and information, as well as carrying accommodation information, for the Clwydian Range and the surrounding area. As yet, the website is not mobile friendly.

A number of other websites carry information on the area, including attractions and visitor facilities. Llangollen Chamber of Trade and Tourism maintains the site www.new.llangollen.org.uk, covering the Dee Valley. Visitor information for the World Heritage Site is contained within www.pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk. The AONB has a Facebook page which is actively managed. A high proportion of the content relates to tourism, with posts that are relevant to visitors as well as residents and local tourism businesses. Much of the coverage is on events.

Three main pieces of print serve an information, orientation and, to some extent, a promotional purpose for the AONB:

- A large scale fold out map of the AONB, with information on the main sites and features
- An introductory leaflet with pictures and text
- A magazine 'Capturing the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley' with thematic articles.

A significant amount of additional visitor information relating to the AONB is also produced, covering individual locations, walks, cycling routes, food and other themes and activities, for example, Information on cycling routes is available from www.ridenorthwales.co.uk. In recent years, more information and interpretative material has been produced in the form of film, made available on CDs, as apps and as clips that can also be appended to websites. This includes some of the output on Heather and Hillforts and on cycling trails, for example.

A number of initiatives have been taken to assist tourism business and other stakeholders in their portrayal of the AONB and the provision of information. A Sense of Place Toolkit has been prepared for the Clwydian Range, with images and information to use.

The AONB has been working with other bodies on marketing and information. An example is the 'Our Land' initiative, which is covering all the protected areas in North Wales and carries information on businesses which take a responsible approach to the local environment and how this is put over to guests.

There is one fully serviced and networked Tourist Information Centre, in Llangollen, which carries a range of information about the AONB. It is a relatively busy TIC. In the year to April 2014 it handled 119, 947 enquiries, of which 103,535 were face to face. Main TICs in the surrounding area include those in Mold, Wrexham and Rhyl. A more limited service exists in Ruthin and there are certain other points providing visitor information. The AONB Visitor Centre at Loggerheads is an important outlet for information.

The boundaries of the AONB are identified by marker signs in many locations and there has been a programme to extend this. 'White on brown' tourist signs exist across the area but, as in many destinations, this is neither a fully comprehensive or maintained system.

1.4 Tourism performance

Economic value

A recent estimate³ has put the total number of visitors to the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB at 717,000 with an associated revenue from visitor spending of £39.4m. 715 people are estimated to be employed in tourism. These estimates, specifically commissioned by the AONB as part of its Management Plan review process, are based on apportioning STEAM⁴ data for Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham according to the proportion of tourism sector activity that falls within the AONB based on the best fit of Census Output Areas to the AONB boundary. It is considered to be a best estimate of a tight definition of the economic value of tourism within the AONB boundary.

The State of the AONB Report (2014) indicates that tourism accounts for 6% of employment in the area, compared with agriculture and forestry at 4.9%.

An estimate can also be made of the economic value of tourism across a wider area under the influence of the AONB. The most recent STEAM⁵ data is available not only for the whole of Denbighshire, but also shown separately for rural Denbighshire and coastal Denbighshire. Rural Denbighshire can be considered to provide a proxy for the area of influence of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB. It includes some populous and popular parts of rural Denbighshire which lie outside the AONB, which also compensate to an extent for those parts of Flintshire CC and Wrexham CBC which lie within the AONB.

Total expenditure in the tourism sector in rural Denbighshire is estimated at £131.81m; this amounts to 42% of expenditure of £314.20m in Denbighshire as a whole. Coastal Denbighshire accounts for the remaining 58%.

For comparison, tourism expenditure in Wrexham and Flintshire is rather more limited than in Denbighshire. STEAM data estimates total tourism expenditure in 2012 as £92.67m for Wrexham and £200.89m for Flintshire

Tourism performance in rural Denbighshire shows a general upward trend in recent years, as shown in the figure below. Poor weather in summer 2012 is likely to account for the dip in performance in that year.

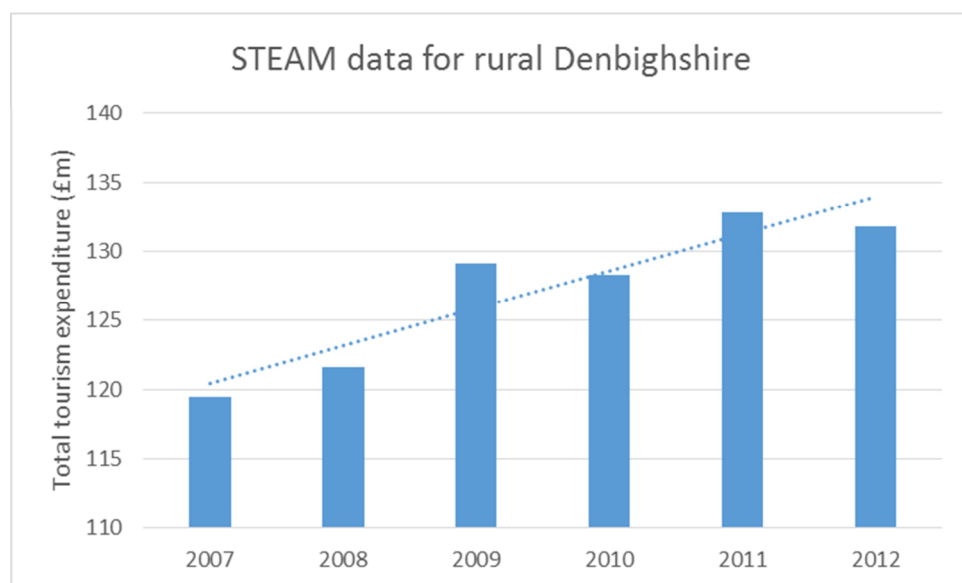
Visitors to rural Denbighshire are overwhelmingly day visitors, accounting for 84% of 2.4m visitors, a slightly higher proportion than for coastal Denbighshire (78%). Overnight visitors to rural Denbighshire are slightly more likely to stay in non-serviced accommodation than serviced accommodation (181.5 cf 135.4 thousand visitors). However, the contribution of the two sectors is rather more balanced than in coastal Denbighshire, where those staying in non-serviced accommodation outnumber those in serviced accommodation by a factor of 2.7:1.

³ State of the AONB Report for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, LUC, May 2014

⁴ Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor 2012

⁵ Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor 2012

Tourism in rural Denbighshire is estimated to account for 2,400 FTE jobs.



Visitor volumes

An indication of the volume of visitors to the area, and any change over time, is given by records of visits to attractions. These are shown in the table below.

Attraction	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	
Loggerheads Country Park	164,536	165,392				
Moel Famau Country Park (including Coed Moel Famau)	140,000	140,000				
Chirk Castle	133,268	129,775	117,108	94,353	94,647	NT
Llangollen Wharf	128,791	-				
Ty Mawr Country Park Visitor Centre		73,592	71,965		72,249	
Llangollen Railway	70,000	-				
Glassbobbery	13,815	-				
Valle Crucis Abbey	8,632	9,335	10,333	9,676	7,984	cadw
Plas Newydd			9,319	11,281	9,026	
Llangollen Motor Museum	4,448	5,365	4,711	5,845	5,257	
Rug Chapel	3,318	3,628	3,989	4,353	3,599	cadw
Minera Country Park and Iron Works			2,220	1,640	1,533	

Source: Visits to Tourist Attractions in Wales 2012, 2011, 2010

Four attractions record over 100,000 visitors a year. The very highest volumes of visitors are received by the two country parks, managed by Denbighshire County Council with free entry. However, visitor numbers at Chirk Castle, a paid for attraction managed by the National Trust, have climbed steadily over the past 5 years. Limited data available for Llangollen Wharf suggests visitor numbers of a similar order.

Ty Mawr Country Park, managed by Wrexham CBC, has been achieving 70,000+ visitors annually. These numbers are matched by Llangollen Railway, a paid-for visit.

Other attractions which have made numbers available are all much smaller, typically under 10k visitors a year. With numbers fluctuating from one year to another, there is no discernible picture of overall growth.

Pedestrian counter data is available from four points along the stretch of Offa's Dyke Path National Trail which passes through the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB: Prestatyn, Penycloddiau, Moel Arthur and Llandegla. Amongst these, Moel Arthur records the highest number of annual users (22,368 in 2012) followed closely by Penycloddiau. The popularity of this northern part of the Trail is demonstrated by the fact that, along the entire length of the Trail, similar numbers are recorded only at the Devil's Pulpit above Tintern. Annual background use of the Trail by committed and long distance walkers is believed to run at 3-4,000.

Visitor profile

A limited amount of profile information is available on visitors to the northern part of the AONB, from small surveys conducted at four of the visitor sites (Loggerheads in 2009/10; Moel Famau in 2013, Nercwys in 2012 and Llangwyfan in 2012). These showed that:

- A large majority were day visitors from home (over 80% in each of the sites)
- Between 70% and 82% had visited the site previously
- Almost one half of visitors were couples, with around one quarter being families, and the rest mainly on their own
- A very large majority were walkers
- Average age was 45-55.

The survey of businesses conducted for this strategy throws more light by recording the operators' perceptions of their guests. Most were accommodation operators so this primarily relates to staying visitors. Some key results were as follows:

- For many establishments, the length of stay of their guests is quite short, mainly 1-3 nights.
- Stays of one week or longer are not uncommon, notably amongst self-catering operators
- Older couples (aged 45+) are seen as the main market (average 38%) but families with children (26%) and younger couples (22%) are also important.
- Activities considered to be most important to their guests were (in order): taking short walks (under 2 hours); visiting attractions; driving around the area; and taking longer walks (over 2 hrs). The latter was considered to be more important than visiting towns and villages.

The need for better data on visitors, from more robust and systematic surveys, is apparent.

1.5 Feedback from tourism businesses

The survey of tourism businesses undertaken in 2014 to inform this strategy covered a relatively wide range of types of business. Around half were small scale accommodation operators, but responses were also received from hotels, pubs, attractions, activity operators and retail businesses. Key findings are set out in the paragraphs that follow.

Visitor volumes have been relatively static in the past three years, but over half the businesses reported some growth.

Positive results may partly reflect the actions taken by the individual businesses. Over three quarters had made some investments and changes. Most were quite limited improvements and refurbishment, although some had added facilities and a handful had increased accommodation capacity. Improvements to on-line marketing and links to agents were also mentioned.

Despite this relative growth, over half the respondents reported that attracting more business was essential in order to keep the enterprise going, with a further thirty percent indicating that this would be necessary in order to achieve a reasonable profit. This relative fragility is not uncommon amongst small tourism businesses, but appears to be rather more prevalent here than in some other destinations.

More business was sought mainly in the early spring (especially March) and late autumn (October and November) but almost a quarter of respondents were seeking more custom even in August. Many also wanted more business in mid-winter.

Almost half the enterprises were planning to make improvements or to develop or extend their businesses. Where details were disclosed, this often included investment in further accommodation (notably self-catering units) as well as additional facilities and improvements.

Perceived barriers to improved performance and growth were quite varied. Financial issues stood out, with lack of capital most frequently identified as a significant barrier, closely followed by high operating costs. Market weakness (not enough tourists) was also seen as important. Attitude to regulations, including planning restrictions, was mixed, being important for some businesses but not so for others. Staff availability was generally not an important issue.

The tourism businesses displayed quite a positive response to environmental issues. Over two thirds expressed an interest in a range of actions they may take, including energy saving, waste reduction, use of local produce, generating renewable energy and supporting local environmental projects. Many were already taking action in these fields, but with a further 20-30% planning to do so in future, suggesting that there is scope for further assistance and encouragement. The one area where businesses appeared to be slightly more sceptical is in supporting visitors in the use of public transport, with under a half interested in this. Only a small number of businesses had environmental accreditation or were working towards it, but around a half of the respondents indicated that they were, or more commonly 'maybe', interested in pursuing this.

The enterprises were asked about the level of importance for their business of a long list of issues and actions across the AONB as a destination that might affect its success. The top ten included the following, in order:

1. providing basic visitor services (e.g. car parking and toilets);
2. attracting more staying visitors to the AONB;
3. conserving the area's historic heritage;
4. conserving the area's landscape and wildlife;
5. attracting visitors at less busy times of year;
6. raising awareness of the area as an AONB;
7. information on where to go/what to do - pre-arrival;
8. provision of countryside access for walkers;
9. helping businesses improve their knowledge of the AONB to pass on to guests;

10. information on where to go/what to do - post-arrival.

While the need to attract more visitors and to provide basic services stood out, it is particularly noteworthy that similar numbers (over 80%) considered that conservation of the area's landscape and heritage was "very important" to their business success

The survey also asked businesses to assess the performance of the area in taking the actions identified in the long list. While conservation and interpretation activities and the provision of access tended to be rated highly, marketing and the provision of services scored less well.

Looking at the size of the gap between 'importance' and 'performance' the following actions stand out as being in need of most attention:

- attracting visitors at less busy times of year
- providing basic visitor services (e.g. car parking and toilets);
- attracting more staying visitors to the AONB;
- information on where to go/what to do - pre-arrival
- helping businesses improve their knowledge of the AONB to pass on to guests;
- information on where to go/what to do - post-arrival;
- developing the webpages/websites on the AONB;
- managing traffic;
- encouraging visitors to support conservation;
- raising awareness of the area as an AONB;
- spreading visitor spending across the area;
- provision and promotion of local events.

Information was obtained on the level of interest in getting more involved with other businesses in the marketing and management of the AONB. Many businesses (42%) said that they were already involved, but of these one third were interested in becoming more so. A further 40% said they were not involved at present but would be interested. The remainder (17%) were not interested. This is a positive result, suggesting that there is potential to achieve more business engagement.

1.6 Key issues from the evidence gathering and consultation

A wide range of issues, challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism in the AONB have been raised and identified from a number of sources, including background material and policies, a series of stakeholder workshops, the business survey, direct consultation and written comments received. The main points arising are summarised below.

- The importance of tourism to the economy of North East Wales is recognised by policy positions in each of three counties. It is seen as providing ongoing opportunities for growth and regeneration. This applies both to rural, coastal and urban areas.
- There is a move towards more emphasis on enabling sustainable development in rural and protected areas in Wales. While this may point to more opportunities for development, concern about environmental impact and the need to demonstrate that projects are in line with sustainability principles and good practice must be recognised.

- Addressing poverty and providing employment is seen as an increasingly important priority for the area (also reflecting priorities more generally in Wales, including with respect to rural development).
- There are concerns that tourism itself remains a relatively low wage and seasonal activity, with a need to improve the value obtained for the local economy.
- There is an increasing call for partnership working between the public and private sectors and all tourism stakeholders. This has been reflected in the establishment of new structures. The challenge is to ensure coordination and avoid confusion. There is also a need to increase participation and strengthen outreach.
- Resources for implementation of action are becoming more limited. This applies both to financial resources and to human capacity. There is also an issue of time availability, notably amongst those called upon to engage on a voluntary basis.
- While the fundamental requirement to conserve the area's natural beauty and heritage is recognised, there is a strong need to increase the returns from tourism, leading to less fragile businesses and enhancing opportunities for employment. This requires an increase in visitor numbers as well as in length of stay and spending.
- There is a need to increase the level of business throughout the year. This will require more opportunities for visitors outside the summer months, with less seasonal closing.
- There is a general feeling that the area is still not well enough known, given its assets, compared with other destinations in Wales and in particular is a poor relation to Snowdonia in terms of awareness. It should be placed more clearly 'on the map'. This is linked to a need for stronger promotion and marketing, but also to issues of name, brand and visibility.
- There is an ongoing perceived opportunity to influence and gain more benefit from transit traffic on through routes. There is a call for still better signage throughout the area.
- While progress has been made with web presence, there are opportunities to strengthen this, with more rationalisation of websites and greater promotion and linkage of the main ones. Mobile technology and broadband issues need to be addressed. Social media can be used more effectively to raise awareness, strengthen loyalty and facilitate cross-promotion.
- Although the main focus of action should be on promotion and strengthening economic returns, the need to manage visitor flows and activities is recognised. There is a concern about traffic pressure at certain times. There is a need to address the impact of particular types of recreation on other users, and on the environment, including mountain biking and use of motorbikes and 4by4 vehicles off-road.
- The economy and appearance of the towns is a concern, with many feeling quite run down, with closed shops and fragile businesses. This applies particularly to Llangollen, but also to some of the towns surrounding the AONB. The need for

rural tourism to benefit the towns and not just the countryside sites is recognised, particularly as this is where there may be most relative poverty.

- The need to pursue opportunities for engaging young people more fully in tourism, as a source of employment, is underlined.
- There is concern about the negative impact of development on the area and views from it, including the effect of wind farms. On the other hand the application of planning control is also criticised, with a call for better guidance and dialogue in relation to individual tourism projects.
- A number of businesses are seeking advice and support, including some financial assistance where possible, to help them improve marketing and other aspects of performance, including environmental management and sustainability.
- There is a general feeling that the tourism sector could use the assets of the AONB more effectively. This requires increasing their awareness and understanding of the local area. There is also a need to raise visitors' understanding and appreciation, with businesses also playing a part in this.
- There is an ongoing need to raise the quality of accommodation, while still retaining a range of types of offer available to people on all budgets. Likewise, there should be a further improvement in availability and accessibility of good quality catering using local produce, building on recent trends. Promoting local produce should extend beyond food, to include craft skills.
- Concern about the provision and upkeep of visitor facilities, especially toilets and the need to keep them open, is widespread across the area.
- Excellent work to develop a wide range of walking and mountain biking/cycling opportunities is recognised. The main need now is to gain more economic benefit from this resource, increasing spend and length of stay and improving links to businesses. There is also considerable potential to coordinate, improve and promote the wide range of other outdoor activities as a key asset of the area, meeting increasing market interest.
- Not enough is being made of events, including some of the larger activity-based events and the number of walking festivals.
- The presence of the canal and aqueduct and its designation as a World Heritage Site is seen as a major opportunity that has not been effectively grasped. A number of management issues associated with the site should be addressed, while also raising its visibility. Pursuing opportunities to improve linkage and spread visitors throughout the site should be seen as a priority.
- Linkages should also be strengthened elsewhere in the AONB, and externally, including between the northern and southern part, to the coast, to Chester and Wrexham and along the Dee Valley including to the upper and lower Dee.
- Overall, financial and human resource constraints are recognised as an increasing challenge, affecting private sector businesses as well as local authorities and AONB management.

- There is a need and an opportunity to encourage and facilitate businesses to work together more. This can build on the recent strong initiatives in the northern part of the AONB. The need to strengthen structures and linkages in the southern part is a particular priority.
- While the advent of this revised and extended sustainable tourism strategy is welcomed, there is a strong call for more effective coordination between plans, initiatives and agencies, avoiding confusion and focussing effort.

1.7 SWOT analysis

The strengths and weaknesses of the AONB as a destination for sustainable tourism and the opportunities and threats it faces are presented in the following table.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The beauty and variety of the landscapes. • Exceptional heritage features in the landscape • Easy access to hills with extensive views • Proximity to population centres/ markets • High quality country parks and access sites • Number and variety of identified walking routes • Offa's Dyke Path National Trail • Centre for mountain biking at all levels • Centre for water-based and other activity tourism • Facilities in Llangollen and surrounding towns • AONB and WHS designations • Welsh language and culture • Proximity to coast and beaches • Road and rail access 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divided and fragmented area spanning three counties • Limited awareness and low profile of the area, including as AONB • Limited accommodation and catering base in parts of the area • Poor quality of some accommodation and catering • Tired and outdated appearance of Llangollen and other towns • Insufficient car parking capacity in places • Poor visitor management in places • Incomplete and uncoordinated signage • Limited public transport connectivity in places • Weak data on visitors and tourism performance
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated marketing for N E Wales – Altogether Brilliant • New groups demonstrating benefits of working together • Expressed interest of businesses in further engagement with AONB • Further round of Rural Development Programme (Cadwyn Clwyd) • Importance of the health agenda • Growth of activities market, seeking alternative accessible destinations • Policy positions supportive of rural tourism and sustainable development • International and national profile of World Heritage Sites • Extension of Llangollen Heritage Railway • New funding opportunities, e.g. HLF Picturesque Project 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing dominance of Snowdonia and other destinations overshadowing this area • Poor reputation of some neighbouring areas e.g. Rhyl • Dependency on external funding, with RDP eventually ending • Financial cuts • Less attention to achieving quality standards, possibly as a result of decline in participation in quality grading • Failure to make necessary investments, including in basic facilities • Lack of coordination of initiatives • Increasing negative impact on environment and communities

2 Strategy

This chapter sets out the strategy for sustainable tourism. It starts by presenting the current policy context as of 2014 so ensuring that this strategy for the AONB is clearly related to the policies and strategies pertaining to tourism, rural development and protected areas nationally and locally. Next, it identifies the strategic direction for sustainable tourism in the AONB over the next five years, followed by a vision, proposed target markets and a set of overarching objectives.

2.1 Policy context

National

Tourism in Wales is driven by **Partnership for Growth: The Welsh Government Strategy for Tourism 2013-2020**. Its target is for 10% growth in real tourism earnings in Wales during this period. The goal is for “Tourism to grow in a sustainable way and to make an increasing contribution to the economic, social and environmental well-being of Wales”.

The strategy is built round five pillars: promoting the brand; product development; people development; profitable performance; and place building.

The strategy points to five areas of competitive advantage for Wales, of which two are particularly relevant here:

- Natural Environment – “We need to take full account of the major asset represented by Wales’s natural environment and consider how to use its characteristics for growing tourism sustainably”.
- Activities and Adventure – “Our mountains, coastline, beaches, rivers and lakes provide an unrivalled backdrop to support a wide range of activities including walking, sailing, caving, kayaking, mountaineering, coasteering, fishing, horse riding, cycling, mountain biking and golf. Properly packaged and promoted the adventure and activity product will provide strong reasons for new and repeat visits”.

Visit Wales has recognised the importance of the family of protected areas in Wales, including the three National Parks and five AONBs, as key tourism assets and as focal locations for the promotion of sustainable tourism. In recent years it has made dedicated funding available for sustainable tourism initiatives linking the protected areas.

In 2013 the Welsh Government prepared a draft **Policy Statement for Protected Landscapes**. This used the extension of the new designation of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley as evidence of its recognition that “distinctive landscapes, the biodiversity, cultural heritage and historic environments they contain, remain vital and vibrant elements of the environmental, economic and social fabric of Wales”. It sees these areas as providing a focus for partnership and innovation. Aspects of the statement that are particularly relevant to this strategy include:

- Recognising sustainable development as the central organising principle for AONBs
- Using the areas’ designation to guide positive management of change to facilitate appropriate developments whilst maintaining the integrity of landscape quality

- Boosting sustainability and growth of existing businesses – recognising the contribution of tourism in this
- Providing high quality visitor experiences, maximising stay and spend
- Providing opportunities for all, both with respect to outdoor experiences for visitors but also in education, employment and training
- Using careful forward planning and management, with the provision of relevant information and facilities, to enable the areas to cater for a wide range of activities
- Working in partnership and beyond boundaries.

The **Rural Development Programme for Wales**, and the way it is implemented in the region, provides an important context and an opportunity for funding. The **Wales RDP 2014-20 Final Proposals** sets out national priorities. Two of the three objectives of the RDP are: to promote strong, sustainable rural economic growth; and to improve the environment. Cross-cutting themes of the RDP include sustainable development, equal opportunities and tackling poverty, by providing support for community-led rural development projects. It also calls for a more integrated approach to natural resource management. The LEADER and local development element of the RDP is most relevant to tourism. Priorities identified for non-agricultural diversification include: cooperation between businesses, work on supply chains, supporting pre-commercial development, adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources, and exploiting digital technology. The RDP in North East Wales will be taken forward through three linked **Local Development Strategies**, produced for the three county areas. These will need to reflect regional and local opportunities, such as those outlined in this strategy and action plan, as well as the national priorities.

Regional and county

The **North Wales Tourism Strategy 2010 – 15** underlines the importance of the natural and cultural assets of the region. It recognises that these are not always matched by quality of visitor facilities and services, which are sometimes outdated. Its four themes are: projecting our distinctive strengths; investing in product excellence; providing an outstanding experience; and working together in partnership. Target markets include short breaks, family holidays and activity-related tourism. Strategic priorities for North East Wales are identified. These include making the most of main centres and attractions, including Llangollen and the canal corridor, as well as building on the countryside access and outdoor activity opportunities. Reference is made to strengthening the presentation of coherent sub-areas, such as the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley.

The 'place building' pillar of the Wales Strategy for Tourism focuses on destination management. The North Wales Tourism Strategy called for Destination Management Plans for Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham.

The **Denbighshire's Economic and Community Ambition Strategy 2013-23** sets a policy framework for Denbighshire with specific aspirations to strengthen tourism's contribution to the economy and growth. It is reflected in the draft **Denbighshire Destination Management Plan**, which will set the parameters for tourism in the county to 2017. As a large proportion of the AONB is in Denbighshire, harmonizing with this plan is particularly important. The priorities identified in the draft plan include:

- Creating an effective model to ensure a coordinated approach to destination management. Tourism groups are encouraged to engage with the Destination Denbighshire Partnership and Forum.

- Ensuring Town and Area Plans connect with the DMP. Specific reference is made to this strategy/plan for the AONB. Actions envisaged at an area level focus on visitor facilities, services, environment and information.
- Making destination management relevant to businesses. This includes links to various business and investment support services.
- Auditing the tourism product, including baseline data. A set of tourism data collection, surveys and monitoring is proposed.
- Promoting Denbighshire through the NE Wales brand. This includes brand awareness and roll out.
- Coordinating the approach to events.

The **Flintshire Destination Management Plan 2013-15** is in line with the objectives of the Flintshire Regeneration Strategy 2009-20. The DMP is a practical plan, with five themes:

- Improving availability and coordination of visitor information. This also refers to promoting the NE Wales brand.
- Increasing the quality and range of accommodation and attractions. The management and promotion of the AONB is referred to specifically here, as being equivalent to an iconic attraction. Actions also include advice and support for businesses.
- Increasing the scale and diversity of the activities sector. Again, this refers specifically to the AONB. There is a focus on promoting the walking offer.
- Increasing the scale and economic impact of events. Actions include coordination and marketing.
- Data development, including proposed annual visitor and operator surveys.

The **Wrexham Destination Management Plan 2012-17** follows the Economic Prosperity Strategy 2011-16 which identified tourism as an important sector for Wrexham. The DMP identifies six broad projects: investment in key hubs; events strategy for Wrexham town; visitor accommodation development; a sense of place; visitor management; and partnership and performance. Of these, the first is perhaps of most relevance, placing a very strong emphasis on the World Heritage Site and its facilities and management, and also on Chirk. The DMP points to the need to coordinate with the surrounding area. It recognises the opportunity provided by the extended AONB and sees potential for linked initiatives outside the area, for example with the Ceiriog valley. The need for coordinating on visitor management (including spreading visitor spending) signing, branding and business networking is recognised.

AONB and local

The primary purpose of the designation of AONBs is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. In pursuing this purpose, the cultural dimension of the landscape is fully recognised. It is also a requirement of AONBs that the needs of the local economy and communities are taken into account, through the pursuit of sustainable development.

The **Clwydian Range AONB Management Plan 2009-14** and its addendum, the **Interim Statement on the Extension Area (October 2012)**, reflect the above purpose and requirements. Together they set out policies which apply to the whole AONB. Policy areas cover landscape quality and special character, the natural and historic environment, access and recreation, and culture and people. Tourism falls in the final policy area, within a policy “To promote the sustainable use and enjoyment of the landscape of the AONB in a way that contributes to local prosperity and social inclusiveness” (PCP4). This includes a specific action “To deliver the Sustainable

Tourism Strategy for the AONB". There is also an action to support the development of the sustainable tourism forum. A new AONB Management Plan is being prepared. It will be important that the sustainable tourism strategy is in line with all aspects of the Management Plan, not just those directly related to tourism.

The current Management Plan contains an action to maintain the **Sustainable Tourism Charter**⁶ status for the AONB (and to move towards Charter Part 2 accreditation). The Charter requirements should be seen as part of the context for this strategy and action plan. These include having a permanent forum, or equivalent arrangement, between the protected area body, local authorities, conservation and community bodies and representatives of the tourism industry. The area's sustainable tourism strategy and action plan needs to reflect the 12 Charter Principles (see box). Charter Part 2 concerns recognition of individual businesses that adhere to sustainability principles.

EUROPARC Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas – 12 Principles

1. To increase awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas.
2. To improve the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, taking account of the needs of the environment, local residents, businesses and visitors.
3. To involve all those implicated by tourism in and around the protected area in its development and management.
4. To prepare and implement a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the protected area.
5. To protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and to protect it from excessive tourism development.
6. To provide all visitors with a high quality experience in all aspects of their visit.
7. To communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area.
8. To encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area.
9. To increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism.
10. To ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents.
11. To increase benefits from tourism to the local economy.
12. To monitor and influence visitor flows to reduce negative impacts.

There are a number of directly relevant policies and plans that relate to specific parts of the AONB. Each contains an analysis, direction and a set of actions concerning visitor management and tourism development. They include:

- **The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct & Canal World Heritage Site (WHS) Management Plan 2007 – 2012**, together with other associated plans
- **The WHS Tourism Development Plan, 2011**
- **The WHS Strategy for Llangollen, 2011**
- **The Dee Valley Sustainable Tourism Project, Action Plan 2012.**

2.2 Principles and direction for sustainable tourism in the AONB

A number of principles should shape the strategy for sustainable tourism in the AONB from 2015 to 2020 and form the basis for the objectives and actions. These

⁶ The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, awarded by EUROPARC to the Clwydian Range AONB in 2009.

reflect the purposes of an AONB as well as the specific context of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, informed by the evidence gathering and analysis.

- **The strategy and action plan seeks to pursue *sustainable* tourism in the AONB, which is defined as: "*Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities*"⁷.**
- **Experience with actions resulting from the previous Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for the Clwydian Range AONB should be reflected and built upon in the new strategy and action plan for the extended area.**
- **The extended AONB, with its combination of exceptional countryside and heritage assets, should be managed, supported and promoted as an iconic attraction for North East Wales, generating benefits not only for the local area but the whole sub-region.**
- **The quality of all aspects of the visitor experience should be improved and made more consistent, to match the quality of the area's inherent assets.**
- **Priority should be given to gaining more income from tourism throughout the year, so improving the performance and viability of tourism businesses, potential for investment and the provision of new and better jobs, achieved through increased visitor volumes, length of stay and spending.**
- **The development of extensive facilities for walking, mountain biking and other outdoor activities in recent years should now be capitalised upon to deliver greater economic benefit through strengthening promotion and links to businesses.**
- **Tourism businesses in the area should be helped to embrace the opportunities and responsibilities of being in a protected area, understanding more about the AONB, improving their management of resources and informing their guests about the area.**
- **The development of sustainable tourism in the AONB should be fully integrated with marketing activity for North East Wales and destination management activity in the three counties, supported by effective coordination and avoiding duplication of effort.**
- **More should be made of the World Heritage Site and its management and promotion in conjunction with the AONB, through an integrated approach.**
- **The northern and southern parts of the AONB should be more effectively linked, through joint initiatives and information, while recognising their different starting points and stakeholder structures.**
- **Responsible access to the AONB and the range of experiences that it offers should be available to all visitors, including those with special needs.**
- **Visitors should be helped to understand more about the area's environment and heritage and encouraged to support its conservation. Particular**

⁷ *Making Tourism More Sustainable - A Guide for Policy Makers*, UNEP and UNWTO, 2005

attention should be paid to encouraging future generations to respect and care for the landscape, through information and experiences for young people, schools and families.

2.3 Vision

A leading area for sustainable tourism in Wales

In 2020 The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB is:

An area that stands out as an exceptional place to visit in Wales for its countryside experiences and heritage interest, not only for day trips but also for short breaks and holidays. Tourism businesses are performing well and delivering jobs for local people. They are working together to deliver a quality visitor experience, supported by well managed facilities, amenities and services. Negative impacts on the environment are minimised and there is positive interaction between visitors and local communities. There is a good understanding of the area's special qualities and of the benefits brought by tourism.



2.4 Target markets

Primary markets

The following markets are seen as a primary focus for activity owing to their potential response to the area's key assets and strengths and to the benefit that they can bring. Each of these markets may contain individuals, couples, families or groups of different sizes.

- Domestic short breaks and holidays, primarily couples but also appealing to families.
- Walking holidays of three nights up to one week
- Mountain bikers seeking a range of routes (from gentle to extreme), staying overnight
- Multi-activity breaks
- Wildlife, conservation and heritage enthusiasts
- Event participants and spectators
- Overseas visitors, partly attracted by the World Heritage Site but exploring further afield.

Secondary markets

The following markets are already coming to the area and provide an opportunity to deliver more local benefit:

- Day visitors (general and special interest/activity) – with opportunities to increase length of stay, spending and repeat visits
- Transit traffic on through routes, encouraged to stop and return

2.5 Objectives

The following four functional objectives provide the framework for actions to be pursued over the next five years. They capture the essence of the principles and direction presented above and also reflect and build upon the objectives of the previous sustainable tourism strategy for the Clwydian Range. The relationship of each objective to the EUROPARC Charter Principles is identified.

1 To raise awareness of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley and all that it has to offer to visitors, encouraging more and longer stays year round.

Relates to Charter Principles 1, 7, 11

This objective reflects the clear finding from the consultation that many businesses need to receive more visitors, particularly at certain times of year. This is also important in terms of strengthening income and the provision of employment. The considerable assets of the area are not well known. There is a need for more effective marketing and information, taking account of the target markets, which also enables the special qualities and sensitivities of the area to be put across.

2 To develop and enhance year round visitor experiences and promotable offers based on appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of the area's special countryside and heritage assets.

Relates to Charter Principles 6, 7, 8, 11

This is about playing to the area's strengths, especially in outdoor activities and a rich and varied heritage. The objective is not only about using these opportunities to gain more income from tourism but equally about enhancing enjoyment and understanding in their own right.

3 To encourage and assist tourism-related enterprises to develop and improve their performance, facilities, sustainability and relationship to the AONB.

Relates to Charter Principles 3, 5, 6, 9, 11

This objective recognises the fundamental importance of individual businesses in delivering jobs and other economic benefits to the area and in affecting the visitor experience and wider impacts of tourism. It is about engaging with more businesses more effectively.

4 To improve, manage and monitor visitor flows and environments for tourism, spreading benefits and addressing local impacts.

Relates to Charter Principles 2, 5, 9, 10, 12

The extended AONB is relatively complex, with major sites and tourism centres as well as less visited areas. It requires an integrated approach to visitor management across the area and appropriate environmental improvement and provision of services, while also taking into account the interests of local communities.



3 Action

This chapter takes the four objectives in turn and indicates areas for action under each. The objectives correspond to four functional areas: marketing and information; product development – activities and experiences; business engagement; and visitor and place management. These form the headings of the four sections of this chapter.

3.1 MARKETING AND INFORMATION

Objective 1:

To raise awareness of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley and all that it has to offer to visitors, encouraging more and longer stays year round

Action areas under this objective relate to a combination of image development, promotion and information delivery, with an emphasis on integrating with the marketing of North East Wales and involving a wide range of local stakeholders in a variety of communication processes.

1a Develop AONB-wide brand images and messages and promote their use

Work has been done on spreading the use of the logo for the extended AONB. Attention now needs to be given to clarifying and putting across the essence of the whole AONB brand. This can build on the approach adopted in developing the Sense of Place toolkit for the Clwydian Range. A key to this is to involve tourism stakeholders from the outset to ensure that the results are relevant and meaningful to them. It is important that the brand now relates to the whole AONB in an integrated way, avoiding 'north' and 'south' components. Themes and images should reflect all the seasons, fostering year-round interest.

Actions include:

- Holding workshops in the southern part of the AONB to match what has been done in the north
- Identifying and developing a new single set of brand values, images and messages for the whole AONB
- Agreeing on the relationship between the AONB and the World Heritage Site brand and how to put this across
- Developing a practical set of images, text and video clips, which stakeholders can use in their own material and websites, together with criteria and guidelines on their use.
- Undertaking a communications exercise to stimulate take up.
- Identifying a set of key (top 10) experiences across the AONB that relate closely to the brand essence.

1b Improve coverage of the AONB in material and campaigns for NE Wales

Destination marketing is now focussed on the North East Wales Altogether Brilliant campaign covering Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham. It is very important that the AONB maintains a strong relationship with the three county Destination

Partnerships and the coordinated marketing structures for NE Wales supported by Visit Wales.

Actions include:

- Agreeing on positioning, text and images for the AONB within NE Wales web and print material and promotions
- Ensuring prominent and effective web-linkages between the AONB and NE Wales websites
- Clarifying and reviewing how NE Wales (brand and promotion) is referred to in AONB material
- Agreeing on specific promotional activity to relate AONB products and experiences to identified target markets, especially relating to walking, cycling, other outdoor activities, and cultural and natural heritage
- Participating in relevant travel trade and media promotions and fam trips.
- Ensuring that year-round AONB events are included in NE Wales promotion.

1c Develop and maintain a high quality, visitor facing website for the whole AONB

There is a need for a single comprehensive website for visitors seeking to find out about the AONB, where to go, what to do and where to stay. The current AONB plus CRTG website needs to be integrated and developed as one site for the whole area.

Actions include:

- Establishing a working group to oversee the development and funding of the revised website
- Addressing data capture and maintenance processes to ensure the site is kept up to date, including relevant sharing of databases with other sites
- Ensuring that the site is designed to provide good access on mobile devices
- Reviewing content for product and messages that fit in with the objectives and target markets of this strategy
- Strengthening links to the individual websites of the WHS and key attractions such as Loggerheads
- Pursuing overall search engine optimisation.

1d Develop coverage in appropriate external websites, guidebooks and other media

Increasingly, marketing exposure and access to information on destinations is achieved through websites, print and other material developed by a range of bodies including commercial agents and publishers. An existing example is the 'Our Land' campaign, which provides exposure within an on-line travel agent's site for the AONB and selected accommodation that meet certain criteria.

Actions include:

- Gaining further exposure for the AONB and individual products in media that are appropriate to the AONB's brand
- Developing links with travel operators and media that specifically promote sustainable tourism
- Working with train companies and other transport operators on promoting the area and access to and within it
- Providing material and images for the above to use.

1e Maintain and actively distribute key AONB print

Despite the growth in use of online information, research has shown that print remains a very important medium for visitors during their stay in a destination⁸. It can play a key role in informing visitors on what there is to see in all parts of the AONB and in spreading their visits and spend.

Actions include:

- Seeking feedback on the use of print and keeping abreast of its distribution
- Maintaining and actively distributing an overall map-based information foldout guide to the AONB as a whole
- Providing a further suite of information print (also downloadable and linked to other digital material if appropriate) to cover the main themes of the AONB
- Addressing the interpretative content of information material
- Improving the usability of information material, especially of maps showing roads and access routes
- Ensuring that storage and distribution is costed into all print production.

1f Extend the circulation and take-up of news and stories about the AONB and related events using social media and other techniques

News and stories can be used actively to achieve strategic aims, including the promoting of specific tourism experiences, events etc. at particular times of year, including motivating overnight stays. This is an area where the AONB can achieve a lot by working closely with local communities and businesses, making use of appropriate media.

Actions include:

- Ensuring good coverage of tourism-related information on the AONB's Facebook page
- Encouraging exchange of information and conversations about AONB themes, through Twitter and other communications media
- Promoting access to AONB social media by local residents, businesses and potential repeat visitors to the area
- Encouraging businesses and community groups to develop their own social media activity as a vehicle for spreading awareness of the AONB, related events etc.

1g Strengthen the ability of tourism businesses to promote the AONB and inform their guests

Tourism businesses are often best placed to deliver effective information to visitors, both before and after their arrival in the area. Working with networks of tourism businesses is partly covered under Objective 3 later. Specific actions relating to visitor information include:

- Running training courses for tourism businesses on the special qualities and needs of the AONB, welcome/customer care and visitor information
- Identifying businesses that have received training
- Providing businesses with access to a suite of images, video and print for them to use in their own websites, guest packs etc.

⁸ Information Needs Research, Visit Wales, October 2013

- Providing AONB news feeds to tourism businesses, which they can then link to their own websites.

1h Strengthen delivery of information about the AONB at key gateways and other strategic sites

A key to the strategic use of information to influence visits is to make sure it is provided prominently in places where it can intercept large volumes of visitors. Tourist Information Centres still have a strong role to play, but a number have closed and the future of the network is uncertain. Llangollen TIC is the only one actually within the AONB but is well located in the centre of town. There is an increasing need to work in partnership with commercial outlets.

Action includes:

- Strengthening the coverage of the AONB within Llangollen TIC, through enhancing displays, regular contact with information staff, feeding news and material to them, etc.
- Maintaining AONB information coverage in surrounding TICs and in identified key outlets in the market towns
- Establishing a linked network of key AONB information outlets on major through routes, including working in partnership with a selected number of commercial retail operators in strategic locations
- Ensuring that all the main visitor attractions and key sites carry AONB information.

1i Further strengthen signage on major routes

A considerable amount of work has been done on providing AONB threshold signs and directional signing but there are still gaps and opportunities to improve the coverage. This is particularly important in raising awareness of the area and encouraging and influencing future visitors.

Actions include:

- Completing the threshold signing for the extended AONB
- Providing more directional signs off major routes
- Working with communities to identify their association with the AONB through signage
- Providing an AONB sign/board on the selected railway stations.



3.2 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT – ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES

Objective 2:

To develop and enhance year round visitor experiences and promotable offers based on appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of the area's special countryside and heritage assets

Action areas under this objective focus on making more of the excellent opportunities for all kinds of outdoor activity, as well as broadening and deepening the experience of the area's distinctive local produce and natural and cultural heritage.

2a Further develop and capitalise on the area's strength as a base for walking

A significant percentage of rural holidaymakers in Wales engage in walking. The AONB has a strong walking product, with a network of linear trails and short walks. The Offa's Dyke Path traverses the whole length of the AONB and this is a particularly scenic stretch of this National Trail, with public transport access at either end. There are also a number of other named routes. There are opportunities to build on and extend the 'Walking with Offa' project which provided funding for a range of product development and marketing activity for participating protected areas on the England-Wales border. The challenge is now to gain more economic benefit from this significant resource.

Actions include:

- Maintaining a programme of prioritised route maintenance, including improving accessibility of certain routes for all types of user
- Working with local communities to further identify, maintain and promote routes local to them, including links to local accommodation, food etc.
- Working with walking holiday operators, accommodation businesses and other services to develop and market a specific, year round, Offa's Dyke walking break between Chirk and Prestatyn
- Considering opportunities for applying the above approach to other trails
- Encouraging tourism businesses to comply with Walkers Welcome standards and to present their own walking offers to guests, year round
- Supporting and linking the number of walking festivals in the area, including ensuring a good seasonal spread
- Providing information and training for volunteers who guide walks in the AONB.

2b Further develop and capitalise on the cycling tourism product

Considerable efforts have been made in recent years to develop and promote the mountain biking product in and around the AONB. The area features strongly in the Ride North Wales campaign. Coed Llandegla has one of the most active mountain biking operations in Wales. There is a considerable opportunity now to broaden and gain more benefit from cycling as an activity for visitors and a generator of tourism income.

Actions include:

- Undertake further work on trail development and standards, especially in the southern part of the AONB
- Strengthen and promote the spectrum of cycling opportunities, including on-road and more gentle off-road cycling routes
- Identify tourism facilities and services on maps and information provided to cyclists
- Promote updated Cyclists Welcome standards to tourism businesses and help them to be more aware of market needs/opportunities and to share knowledge
- Encourage strong links between Llandegla and the wider area and businesses
- Work with operators and user groups to promote codes of conduct, report on abuses and reduce pressure on sensitive areas and use of illegal routes

2c Pursue opportunities to strengthen the horse riding product

Provision for horse riding as a tourism resource is not so well developed in the AONB, but opportunities exist to establish a more visible product and offer.

Actions include:

- Researching existing horse riding routes, including gaps and needs
- Improving key sections and linkages, as required
- Identifying, and working with, accommodation and other service providers interested and able to provide for horse riders
- Piloting a promotion of one or more routes.

2d Address water based recreation issues and opportunities

The area is well off for lake and river fishing. Opportunities to link and promote provision more actively were identified in the previous strategy but not pursued. The River Dee provides a major resource for kayaking and rafting. The combination of different recreation uses and opportunities requires careful management.

Action includes:

- Encouraging engagement in, and support for, the Welsh Dee Partnership management initiative
- Pursuing a new initiative to link and promote fishing throughout the area.

2e Work with activity operators on the coordination, management and promotion of the area as a centre for outdoor activities

Organised outdoor activities are a strong feature of the AONB, especially in the Dee Valley where operators providing a range of water and land based activities aspire to secure the area as a leading centre for outdoor activities in Wales. Potential exists to build on this, both locally and through extension into other parts of the AONB, with a focus on quality and environmental responsibility.

Action includes:

- Encouraging and supporting the Dee Valley Active group of operators to strengthen and build on their network, including links to other parts of the area
- Maintaining and expanding the Dee Valley operators training and badge scheme, replicating it elsewhere with other activities and providers
- Supporting the promotion of the area as a national centre of outdoor activity, including use of the quality/badge as a draw

- Establishing more family friendly opportunities within the spectrum of activities,
- Promoting arrangements for casual bookings.

2f Make more of events, year round, that provide an experience of the AONB

Events are important in providing visitors and local people together with an experience of the AONB and adding to the reasons for making visits to the different locations in the area at certain times. They can play a role in strengthening understanding of the area, enhancing distinctiveness and addressing seasonality of demand. The Out and About guide has proved to be a useful information vehicle but more could be done to coordinate the timetabling of events and disseminate information about them.

Action includes:

- Providing advice and assistance to event organisers in developing and promoting events, working with volunteers, and interpreting AONB themes
- Establishing a coordinated database of events, in conjunction with Destination Partnerships, that can be readily accessed by event planners and potential visitors
- Encouraging a more diverse range of events, reflecting different aspects of the AONB
- Encouraging more events at less busy times of year.
- Strengthening the promotion of the events programme.

2g Further develop promotion of local produce to visitors and businesses

The quality and availability of local produce is increasingly important to tourists in rural areas. Positive initiatives have been taken in the AONB through the advent of the Clwydian Range Food Trail and work with local farmers and producers to begin to brand certain products with the AONB. More could be done to link this more closely with the tourism offer.

Action includes:

- Strengthening information on local produce and promotion to visitors
- Helping the Food Trail network to develop closer links with tourism businesses, including promotional events and information sharing
- Extending participation in the Food Trail network, especially in the south of the AONB.
- Raising the profile of a number of selected products closely associated with the AONB, building on initial work with AONB branded lamb.

2h Make more of local crafts within the tourism experience

Visibility of local crafts is relatively limited at the moment. More work should be done to promote local artists and craft makers, to add a further distinctive element to the visitor experience and support local jobs.

Action includes:

- Auditing the local arts and crafts sector to establish the range of products available, including retail items and potential to visit producers and sellers in situ and at events
- Encouraging communication and participation in networks

- Strengthening visibility of local crafts in sales outlets, including at the main visitor sites.
- Providing information to tourism businesses on items they can use or sell.

2i Strengthen access to, and interpretation of, natural and cultural heritage sites and themes

A key element of the visitor experience of the AONB should be the opportunity to enjoy and appreciate the area's special landscape qualities and its natural and cultural heritage. This should also engender an understanding of why they are important and an interest in, and support for, their conservation and management. Some of this relates to the management of the WHS and other key sites, which is referred to later under Objective 4. However, the AONB also contains a range of smaller sites and heritage attributes that provide opportunities for enhanced visitor access and interpretation, enriching the offer and experience for a range of different types of visitor. The significant legacy of the Heather and Hillforts project and potential successor landscape projects, and work on the Sense of Place toolkit, provide particular opportunities to build upon.

Action includes:

- Identifying and working on further sites and themes for enhanced access and development, including ancient monuments, ecclesiastical sites, industrial heritage and wildlife sites, amongst others, including in less visited areas.
- Encouraging and supporting heritage related events (see also 2f)
- Reviewing, rationalising and improving interpretation panels
- Encouraging innovative and personal interpretation approaches, including work with volunteers
- Working with educational groups to promote understanding of the AONB and its heritage and conservation needs.
- Working with local communities on interpretation of heritage and relating this to visitors
- Encouraging heritage related short break offers.

2j Strengthen the range of visitor attractions available throughout the year

The number and range of specific visitor attractions within the AONB is quite limited although there are many more in the surrounding area. A majority of attractions are not open all year, reducing the appeal of the area for off-season visits. Wet-weather options are also limited.

Action includes:

- Encouraging investment in new attractions appropriate to the AONB
- Encouraging attractions to extend their opening times
- Strengthening links between the AONB and attractions in the surrounding area.



3.3 BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Objective 3

To encourage and assist tourism-related enterprises to develop and improve their performance, facilities, sustainability and relationship to the AONB

Action areas under this objective are concerned with structures and communication processes with tourism businesses, providing business advice and support, encouraging appropriate investment, and linking businesses more strongly to the aims and activities of the AONB.

3a Establish and support effective structures for business engagement and networking

Tourism business networks and associations are very important in promoting successful tourism and influencing its direction. The Clwydian Range Tourism Group has achieved a lot, working closely with the AONB. The absence of a similar body in the south of the area needs to be addressed. It is also important to appreciate that local groups of this kind have limited resources of money and time and rely heavily on voluntary effort, underlining the need to support them where possible while also being concerned about their long term viability. Further reference to these structural issues is made in the final chapter of this document.

Action includes:

- Establishing a tourism group in the Dee Valley area to work closely with the AONB, taking account of existing bodies there
- Establishing effective liaison and coordination between tourism groups across the AONB, including joint initiatives
- Ensuring coordination with the county Destination Partnerships, avoiding duplication of effort
- Promoting membership of groups amongst all types of tourism-related businesses
- Working with groups to agree, support and seek funding for their activities.

3b Strengthen communications with and between businesses and other stakeholders

It is important to maintain communication with all tourism businesses and others with a stake in tourism irrespective of their membership of groups. This is about continuing to understand their performance and needs as well as putting across messages about issues and opportunities concerning sustainable tourism in the AONB and encouraging engagement. The business survey found that 40% of respondents were not involved in management and marketing of the AONB at present but would be interested. A third of those already involved were interested in becoming more so.

Actions include:

- Maintaining an annual AONB tourism forum, and following up on matters arising from this.
- Maintaining a database of businesses and stakeholders to receive newsletters and other communication, including use of social media

- Obtaining systematic feedback from businesses, including repeating a business survey every two years.

3c Ensure good access to business advice, support and training

Skills and experience of existing and incoming small tourism businesses, with respect to marketing and other aspects of business operations and development, is often quite limited. Others have reported the value to them of advice received in the past, for example through the popular Flintshire mentoring scheme. This is primarily a matter for the county-based Destination Partnerships and county agencies such as the Denbighshire Enterprise Partnerships.

Actions include:

- Keeping abreast of training and advisory needs of tourism businesses in and around the AONB
- Working with others to establish, maintain and promote relevant support structures and initiatives
- Ensuring all businesses are aware of what support is available

3d Encourage and support investment and enterprise initiatives

There is an ongoing need for more investment in the quality and range of tourism facilities. Particular opportunities to address include: upgrading of accommodation, including hotels in Llangollen and elsewhere; providing a wider range of types of serviced and self-catering accommodation, including for families, activity groups etc.; improving the food offer, including good quality cafés and restaurants outlets in well visited locations; facilities and equipment for outdoor activities; and development of packages. Businesses surveyed have identified lack of access to finance as a primary barrier to investment.

Actions include:

- Identifying specific investment opportunities, notably at key sites, supporting feasibility assessments, promoting to business interests and considering partnership approaches
- Providing and raising awareness of relevant finance, e.g. through the TISS scheme and other sources
- Helping communities and other groups to pursue engagement in tourism related initiatives, including tourism related social enterprises

3e Review planning/development control policies and processes, with strengthened guidance and dialogue

Some businesses have identified planning permission as a barrier to development. While it is critical that the landscape quality of the AONB is not marred by inappropriate development, it is important to make sure that planning policies with respect to tourism are regularly reassessed and clarified. Opportunities to favour well designed development in appropriate locations should be considered. It is very important that potential developers have a chance to discuss and amend their proposals at an early stage and that dialogue should be constructive.

Actions include:

- Reviewing planning policies with respect to tourism development in and around the AONB, through consultation with stakeholders

- Clearly communicating policies, including any relevant design guidance
- Clarifying with planners an agreed process of early dialogue on potential planning applications.

3f Encourage business to reach, maintain and promote high quality standards

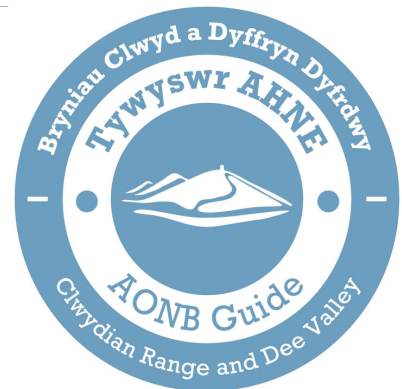
A key to success in any destination is the delivery of a consistent quality by tourism businesses. The proportion of businesses in the area within the official tourism quality grading schemes has fallen. This is a UK wide issue, partly caused by the rise in consumer generated assessment.

Actions include:

- Keeping abreast of, and promoting, any new initiatives to identify and promote quality standards
- Encouraging tourism groups to require and promote quality standards amongst their members.

3g Pursue knowledge programmes and other potential initiatives to link businesses with the AONB

This is all about how tourism businesses associate with the AONB, their knowledge of it and their commitment to its conservation and management. A number of destinations now run schemes whereby businesses receive relevant training about the destination and are assisted to meet certain criteria which then entitle them to recognition and benefits. These are sometimes called ‘ambassador’ schemes. There are a number of ways in which this kind of approach might be pursued further in the AONB. It also has a bearing on Part 2 of the EUROPARC Charter, which relates to businesses. Wrexham already has a Tourism Ambassador Scheme and any initiative in the AONB would need to take account of this.



Actions include:

- Running AONB events, open days and familiarisation visits for businesses and staff, paying special attention to linking north with south
- Providing training and assistance in the passing on of information on the AONB to guests (as under 1g above)
- Offering more detailed training and qualification on management, conservation and interpretation, building on the scheme for Dee Valley activity providers (see 2e above)
- Considering how to badge and recognise trained businesses and individuals.

3h Encourage and recognise good sustainability practice amongst businesses

All tourism businesses should pursue good practice in relation to energy, water and waste management, purchasing policies and relationships with the local environment and community. This is particularly appropriate for those in and around AONB's. The business survey indicated that many businesses are addressing these issues, with a significant number more planning to do so. While the focus should be on action rather than certification, around half the businesses indicated that they may be

interested in recognition through certification. Again, this has a bearing on Part 2 of the EUROPARC Charter.

Actions include:

- Continuing to promote advice and support to business on environmental management and sustainability issues
- Reviewing and re-energising the take up of the Green Tourism Business Scheme or other certification programmes amongst tourism businesses.
- Pursuing ways to identify, promote and benefit businesses that reach identified environmental/ sustainability standards
- Rewarding and publicising especially good practice or innovation.

3i Investigate appropriate schemes for raising support for conservation from businesses and their guests

A number of protected areas run schemes for raising income from tourism businesses and/or from visitors (usually via businesses as intermediaries) to support management and conservation activity in the local area. Usually this is via small voluntary donations raised in various ways. So far this has not been pursued in the AONB but may provide an opportunity here if it is deemed to be practical.

Actions include:

- Undertaking a review of schemes in other protected areas to determine what has worked and the resulting benefits
- Considering possible application in and around the AONB in consultation with tourism stakeholders.



3.4 VISITOR AND PLACE MANAGEMENT

Objective 4

To improve, manage and monitor visitor flows and environments for tourism, spreading benefits and addressing local impacts.

Action areas under this objective cover visitor management planning across the whole area, initiatives within the World Heritage Site and other key sites, enhancement of towns and villages, landscape issues, visitor transport and improvement of data collection and monitoring.

4a Prepare a visitor management plan for the World Heritage Site and AONB

The WHS is a complex linear site with a number of nodes and features. Visitor numbers have grown significantly in recent years. Issues of visitor management

(including tourism impact and potential) are not yet being fully addressed through systematic and coordinated action. The Management Plan 2007 and Tourism Development Plan 2010 set a direction for the different elements of the site. Recent community consultation on concerns and needs has also taken place. A practical visitor management plan is now needed that focuses directly on practical actions, especially with respect to access, car parking, signage, information and visitor facilities across the whole site.

At the same time, the rest of the AONB would also benefit from a visitor management plan, with which the above WHS plan would be closely related. This would consider issues of gateways, visitor flows, nodes and dispersal and address issues of capacity, future growth and required facilities. It should also be concerned with identifying any areas where there are particular problems from visitor pressure, erosion, disturbance to habitats etc. which may require management solutions.

Actions include:

- Agreeing on the above two plans, their scope, focused objectives and phasing
- Bringing together all available evidence, building on previous work and avoiding duplication
- Commissioning work to gap fill and gather further evidence as required, including stakeholder engagement
- Drawing up the plans, with specific actions, responsibilities and timetabling.

4b Improve reception, facilities, information, visitor flow and experiences along the WHS corridor

Actions in the WHS would be informed by the above plan. This action area anticipates implementation through a set of projects and initiatives related to individual locations, linkages, and community and business engagement.

Actions include:

- Developing reception, interpretation and servicing facilities at Trevor basin and neighbouring sites
- Integrating the attractions and facilities at Chirk as a nodal point with significant visitor interest
- Improving and more actively promoting a range of physical linkages and access opportunities along the whole site, by foot, cycle, boat, and public transport.
- Continuing to address car and coach parking provision and management
- Improving signing, visitor information and interpretation in a comprehensive way throughout the site
- Assisting local communities to engage in activities to gain benefit from tourism, including facility provision, events etc.
- Encouraging more engagement by businesses in providing facilities, services, information and packages related to the WHS
- Addressing car park charging and other admission, ticketing and pricing issues
- Working with group organisers and tour operators on visitor management, marketing, information, and community and business relations.

4c Improve visitor management and facilities at other key sites

This should take account of visitor management planning and prioritisation across the AONB, identifying future roles, capacity and needs of different sites.

Actions include:

- Addressing current and futures the needs of Loggerheads and Moel Famau as well known gateways and focal points for the Clwydian Range, including capacity and car parking issues, visitor centre, interpretation and information, route maintenance and visitor facilities
- Raising the profile and facilities of Minera Country Park and neighbouring sites in Wrexham, on the edge of the AONB, to become more significant key sites
- Ongoing management and improvement at a range of other sites according to need and planned future roles, with coordination between relevant owners and agencies.
- Pursuing potential to open up other heritage and access sites across the AONB (see also 2i above).

4d Improve the visitor environment and management in Llangollen, Corwen and AONB villages

Llangollen is a major and traditional centre of tourism in the AONB. Although investment is occurring in the town, including by some of the tourism businesses, this is not consistent and aspects of the town appear quite run down. The need to improve the appeal to a higher spending market and to address provision and management of car parking and the public realm, highlighted in the Llangollen WHS Strategy in 2011, has only partly been met. The town of Corwen is an important centre on the A5 and is now receiving a higher visitor profile than in the recent past with the forthcoming extension of the Llangollen Railway to the outskirts of the town. The villages across the AONB vary significantly in their relationship to tourism depending on location and the time of year, with some concerns about pressure of visitor traffic as well as potential to benefit from growth in visitor income.

Actions include:

- Supporting initiatives to improve the visitor environment and facilities in Llangollen and to encourage future investment
- Making the most of the railway extension to Corwen, through visitor routing, information, and improvements to services and facilities
- Working with, and supporting, individual village communities in understanding and addressing tourism issues and opportunities, including provision of information and facilities.

4e Maintain car and coach parks, toilets and other visitor facilities across the area

While these topics should be addressed as part of the above two action areas, they are identified also separately here as issues to be addressed across the AONB. This is partly because they were identified as of major concern to tourism businesses and generally in consultation.

Actions include

- Prioritising the on-going provision of public toilets in areas frequented by visitors, while seeking alternative funding and management solutions if necessary
- Monitoring and managing litter levels and waste collection
- Improving the provision and management of car and coach parking where necessary
- Generally maintaining the public realm.

4f Retain the attractiveness of AONB landscapes and views as the primary basis for the area's tourism

Tellingly, tourism businesses strongly underlined the importance to them of the conservation of the highly attractive landscapes of the AONB as the basis for their prosperity. The consultation revealed a level of concern about the possibility of future developments, notably of windfarms, damaging landscapes within the AONB and views from it.

Actions include:

- Recognising the importance for tourism of the landscape conservation work of the AONB and others
- Taking tourism into account in any assessment of significant development proposals within, or in sight of, the AONB.

4g Work with operators and businesses to promote use of public transport

Encouraging a higher percentage of AONB visitors to use public transport to reach and travel in the area is important in terms of enabling access and enhancing visitor experiences, as well as reducing congestion and other local environmental impacts and reducing carbon emissions. Dedicated provision of public transport for visitors has proved somewhat difficult. The Clwydian Ranger bus service closed owing to insufficient use, but the initial results from the Llangollen Lift initiative have been promising. While not all parts of the AONB have scheduled bus services, there is more provision than is often recognised by the tourism sector and this can be built upon.

Action includes:

- Ensuring timetabling of bus services coordinates with trains, and providing information on the connections
- Expanding and promoting the Llangollen Lift
- Encouraging expansion of bus services and use by visitors, where these are deemed viable
- Supporting promotional activity in partnership with train and bus operators
- Encouraging and assisting tourism businesses to provide information to guests about public transport options and to promote and facilitate their use.

4h Strengthen links between the AONB and gateway towns

It is important to associate the tourism offer of the AONB with that of the surrounding towns (notably Prestatyn, Denbigh, Ruthin, Mold and Wrexham) in order to promote a rounded visitor offer, add interest, and secure more local economic benefit.

Actions include:

- Promoting information about the AONB in the market towns, and vice versa (see 1h above)
- Engaging businesses in and round the towns in the implementation of this strategy and action plan
- Supporting and raising awareness of attractions, shopping, leisure facilities and events (including both one-off and regular events such as markets) in the towns.
- Encouraging the towns to relate to outdoor activities provided in and around the AONB, including making more of those designated as 'Walkers are Welcome' towns.

4i Improve and maintain data on visitors

Having better knowledge of visitors to the AONB is important for the successful delivery of actions in this plan, monitoring outcomes, reporting on benefits and designing future actions. Currently, data capture is haphazard and findings from visitor surveys are outdated and limited in scope. It is very important that improved work in this field is fully coordinated with actions by the three counties across NE Wales.

Actions include

- Instigating more systematic capture and recording of visitor numbers and profiles at the main sites, attractions and events
- Undertaking a well-structured visitor survey for the AONB and WHS at least every two years, and actively disseminating the results to all tourism stakeholders
- Developing closer contact with local colleges on tourism research.

4j Monitor and assess tourism's economic, social and environmental impacts

While awareness of tourism's impact in the area, as outlined in Chapter 1 of this document, is not unreasonable it could be strengthened by a more systematic approach. Again, it is very important to work with the three counties on this, and also use the experience of Visit Wales.

Actions include:

- Reviewing the use of the STEAM model and alternative approaches to economic impact assessment in the area.
- Regularly collecting data on performance from businesses (see 3b above)
- Maintaining systematic checks on the state of sensitive environments where there is also visitor pressure, and reporting on and reacting to any change
- Keeping abreast of local community reactions to tourism



4 Delivery

This final chapter addresses the delivery of the strategy and action plan. It considers the structures required, the implementation programme, funding sources, and monitoring.

4.1 Delivery structure

Responsible body

A body needs to be identified that will have responsibility for overseeing sustainable tourism in the AONB including the delivery of this strategy and action plan. This will include coordinating and monitoring the implementation of actions which will be carried out by a range of stakeholder organisations. The EUROPARC Charter requires that such a body exists and includes representatives of the protected area (AONB) and also local authorities and community interests, the tourism industry and conservation interests.

It is proposed that this requirement is met through the governance structure for the AONB, which is currently being revised. The new Joint Committee of the AONB will have delegated authority from the three County Councils. An AONB Partnership will include the key delivery partners for the AONB Management Plan. A number of Delivery Groups will be established under this structure, to address key topics. It is proposed that one of these Delivery Groups will cover tourism and recreation. This would become the multi-stakeholder group that takes responsibility for this strategy and action plan.

This will need to be a well-balanced group with different stakeholder interests. As a minimum, these would need to include:

- Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham Councils
- The AONB team
- Cadwyn Clwyd
- Main private sector associations (CRTG and a body from the Dee Valley)
- World Heritage Site
- Possibly one or two heritage or conservation bodies

The group will need to meet regularly to undertake the necessary functions required to oversee the strategy and action plan.

A wider Sustainable Tourism Forum for the AONB, as an open meeting for a large number of different stakeholders, would continue to meet at least once a year, building on current practice.

Key relationships

The development of the above structure will need to address a number of key relationship issues to ensure its effectiveness and avoid duplication with other structures. These particularly relate to relationships with the following:

- The World Heritage Site. Integration with the governance of the WHS is currently being reviewed, allowing for greater partnership working with the AONB.
- Local tourism associations. The Clwydian Range Tourism Group (CRTG) will continue to focus on the northern part of the AONB. A similar body, committed to sustainable tourism, is needed as a lead private sector partner to deliver engagement of tourism businesses in the Dee Valley area. This would then be encouraged to work closely with the CRTG. It may be possible to develop this from existing structures and activities in the area.
- Destination Partnerships for the three counties. Delivery structures for this strategy will need to engage closely with the three Destination Partnerships for Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham, and vice versa as a two way process.

- Local government departments. A range of departments and functions of the three Councils are implicated by this strategy and action plan, including those responsible for tourism, countryside and environment, economic development, planning, highways and transport, arts, culture, sport and leisure.
- Visit Wales. Visit Wales provides the marketing context for the promotion of NE Wales, supports product quality and improvement, and encourages and supports destination management. From 2014 local destinations will feed into a Regional Forum for North Wales which replaces the former Tourism Partnership.

The role of the AONB team

The AONB team will have a central role to play in the delivery process. This will include facilitating the work of the overall responsible body – the Delivery Group referred to above. The team will also lead on, and/or engage in, many of the actions.

It is important that the AONB team has the necessary human and financial resources to play this role. This will require officer time dedicated to sustainable tourism and the delivery of this strategy and action plan.

4.2 Implementing the action plan

The action plan will be delivered over a five year period between 2015 and 2020.

The five year action plan is summarised in the table that follows. This indicates:

- The level of priority of the action – high priority shown by a star (*).
- The year or years in which it might fall – indicating when main concentration of effort should happen.
- An indication of the level of financial resources that may be required for each step as follows:
 - Low (L) Under £10,000
 - Medium (M) £10,000– £50,000
 - High (H) Over £50,000
- Key agencies to implement the action.

Key to abbreviations used in the table

AONB	Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB
ATW	Arriva Trains Wales
BW	Business Wales
CBs	Conservation bodies
CC	Cadwyn Clwyd
CCs	Community Councils
CRFT	Clwydian Range Food Trail
CRT	Canal & River Trust
CRTG	Clwydian Range Tourism Group
DPs	Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham Destination Partnerships
DVA	Dee Valley Active group
LAs	Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham Councils
LTAs	Local Tourism Associations (in addition to CRTG)
NEW	North East Wales marketing group
NWT	North Wales Tourism
ODP	Offa's Dyke Path National Trail

PS	Private sector
TICs	Tourist Information Centres
VW	Visit Wales (including NW Regional Forum)
WDP	Welsh Dee Partnership
WHS	Pontcysyllte Aqueduct & Canal World Heritage Site

	Action	Priority	Year	Financial Implication	Key Agencies
1	MARKETING AND INFORMATION				
1a	Develop AONB-wide brand images and messages and promote their use	*	1-2	M	AONB, CRTG/LTAs, WHS, CC
1b	Improve coverage of the AONB in material and campaigns for NE Wales	*	1	L	NEW, LAs/DPs, AONB, VW
1c	Develop and maintain a high quality, visitor facing website for the whole AONB, compatible with mobile devices.	*	1-2	M/H	AONB, CRTG/LTAs, CC
1d	Develop coverage in appropriate external websites, guidebooks and other media		1-5	L	AONB, CRTG/LTAs, DPs, VW
1e	Maintain and actively distribute key AONB print		1-5	M	AONB, TICs, CC
1f	Extend circulation and take-up of news/stories about AONB and related events using social media and other techniques		1-5	L	AONB, CRTG/LTAs
1g	Strengthen the ability of tourism businesses to promote the AONB and inform their guests	*	1-2	L/M	AONB, CRTG/LTAs, PS
1h	Strengthen delivery of information about the AONB at key gateways and other strategic sites		1-5	L/M	AONB, LAs/DPs, TICs, NWT, WHS, CC
1i	Further strengthen signage on major routes		1-2	M/H	LAs, AONB, WHS, CC
2	PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT – ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES				
2a	Further develop and capitalise on the area's strength as a base for walking	*	1-3	M/H	AONB, LAs, PS, NRW, CCs, NEW, VW, ODP, CC
2b	Further develop and capitalise on the cycling tourism product	*	1-3	M/H	AONB, LAs, PS, NRW, Sustrans, NEW, VW, CC
2c	Pursue opportunities to strengthen the horse riding product		1-3	M	AONB, LAs, NRW, PS, CC
2d	Address water based recreation issues and opportunities		1-5	L/M	AONB, WDP, NRW
2e	Work with activity operators on the coordination, management and promotion of the area as a centre for outdoor activities	*	1-5	M	AONB, DVA, CRTG/LTAs, PS, NEW, VW, CC
2f	Make more of events, year round, that provide an experience of the AONB	*	1-5	L/M	AONB, CRTG/LTAs, TICs, CCs, CC
2g	Further develop promotion of local produce to visitors and businesses	*	1-2	L/M	AONB, CRFT, DPs, CRTG/LTAs, PS, CC
2h	Make more of local crafts within the tourism experience		2-3	L	AONB, PS, DPs, CC

	Action	Priority	Year	Financial Implication	Key Agencies
2i	Strengthen access to, and interpretation of, natural and cultural heritage sites and themes	*	1-5	M/H	AONB, NRW, Cadw, CBs, CCs, CC
2j	Strengthen the range of visitor attractions available throughout the year		1-5	L-H	PS, DPs, CBs, Cadw, CC
3	BUSINESSES ENGAGEMENT				
3a	Establish and support effective structures for business engagement and networking	*	1	L/M	AONB, CRTG/LTAs, DPs, VW, CC
3b	Strengthen communications with and between businesses and other stakeholders	*	1-5	L	AONB, DPs, VW, CRTG/LTAs, NWT
3c	Ensure good access to business advice, support and training		1-5	L/M	DPs, CRTG/LTAs, VW, BW, NWT, CC
3d	Encourage and support investment and enterprise initiatives	*	1-5	M-H	AONB, LAs, PS, CCs, NRW, WHS, CC, VW, BW
3e	Review planning/development control policies and processes, with strengthened guidance and dialogue		2-3	L	LAs, AONB, DPs
3f	Encourage business to reach, maintain and promote high quality standards	*	1-5	L/M	DPs, CRTG/LTAs, VW, CC, PS, DVA
3g	Pursue knowledge programmes and other potential initiatives to link businesses with the AONB	*	1-2	L/M	AONB, CRTG/LTAs, DVA, CC
3h	Encourage and recognise good sustainability practice amongst businesses	*	1-5	L/M	CRTG/LTAs, AONB, DPs, LAs, DVA
3i	Investigate appropriate schemes for raising support for conservation from businesses and their guests		2-3	L/M	AONB, VW, NRW, CC, CRTG/LTAs
4	VISITOR AND PLACE MANAGEMENT				
4a	Prepare a visitor management plan for the World Heritage Site and AONB	*	1	M/H	WHS, AONB, LAs, CRT, NRW, CBs, CC
4b	Improve reception, facilities, information, visitor flow and experiences along the WHS corridor	*	1-3	M-H	WHS, CRT, LAs, AONB, PS, CCs, CC
4c	Improve visitor management and facilities at other key sites		1-3	M-H	AONB, NRW, LAs, Cadw, CBs, PS, CC
4d	Improve the visitor environment and management in Llangollen, Corwen and AONB villages	*	1-3	M-H	LAs, CCs, PS, CC AONB, CRTG/LTAs,
4e	Maintain car and coach parks, toilets and other visitor facilities across the area	*	1-5	M-H	LAs, AONB, NRW, CCs, CC
4f	Retain the attractiveness of AONB landscapes and views as the primary basis for the area's tourism	*	1-5	L	LAs, AONB, NRW
4g	Work with operators and businesses to promote use of public transport		1-5	L/M	AONB, CRTG/LTAs, ATW, PS, CC
4h	Strengthen links between the AONB and gateway towns		1-5	L/M	AONB, LAs, DPs, TICs, CC
4i	Improve and maintain data on visitors	*	1-2	L/M	AONB, LAs, DPs, CC VW, NRW, CBs, PS,
4j	Monitor and assess tourism's economic, social and environmental impacts		1-5	L/M	AONB, LAs, DPs, CC VW, NRW, CBs, PS

Specific actions are identified in the text in Chapter 3 under each action area.

Annual action plans should be prepared, based on this five year strategy and action plan. Actions undertaken should be recorded and reported to stakeholder structures referred to above.

4.3 Sources of funding

A range of funding sources are potentially available to support the action plan. These include the following:

Local authority and AONB budgets

Some of the actions relate directly to the management and development functions of the three local authorities and the AONB. However the impact of cuts in government spending on available funding is recognised.

Private sector businesses

Individual businesses can contribute through participation in certain activities. This includes small tourism businesses as well as more significant companies such as transport operators.

Conservation and resource management bodies

A number of stakeholder bodies that have conservation or land and resource management remits, such as the National Trust or Canal and River Trust, are also potential partners and participants in activities.

Rural Development Programme for Wales

The RDP, with its focus on sustainable management of natural resources and balanced development of the rural economy and communities, is a highly relevant source of funding. There is considerable opportunity to relate this sustainable tourism strategy and action plan to the development of proposals for the new RDP 2014-2020, which is administered in this area by Cadwyn Clwyd.

Heritage Lottery Fund

The HLF provides funds for projects that sustain and transform heritage (natural and cultural). A number of activities related to the previous tourism strategy were supported through the Heather and Hillforts project that was HLF funded. A successor landscape partnership project for the AONB is currently under consideration.

Tourism Investment Support Scheme

The Wales Government TISS provides grants to new and existing Welsh tourism businesses looking to upgrade the quality of facilities and increase capacity where there is a gap in the market. It is particularly relevant to accommodation, catering, attractions and activity businesses which look to improve the quality and local distinctiveness of their operations.

AONB Sustainable Development Fund

The SDF is a small, discretionary fund administered by the AONB which provides grants for innovative, sustainable environment projects involving local communities in the AONB.

Welsh Government/Visit Wales Partnership for Growth funding

Welsh Government funding, administered by Visit Wales, has been provided for tourism initiatives in destinations which relate to certain priority themes. Recently, this has supported initiatives to promote sustainable tourism in groups of protected areas working together, as a one-off scheme. Future priorities and availability is as yet unknown.

Welsh Government business/growth funds

A number of funding programmes are available at any one time to support business and growth. An example is the Wales Economic Growth Fund and funds relating to jobs and skills.

Other EU funding

Further EU funds, in addition to the RDP and funding for government programmes, may also be available to support activities during the plan period.

4.4 Indicators and monitoring

Monitoring of the strategy and action plan should take two forms.

First, progress on the implementation of actions should be checked and reported on regularly. This should be a core agenda item in the meetings of the Delivery Group. A simple annual report should be prepared on progress made, which may coincide with the annual Sustainable Tourism Forum.

Secondly, monitoring should be undertaken on the performance of tourism and its sustainability over the period 2015-20. This should make use of evidence emerging from some of the actions set out in the plan concerning surveys, feedback and coordination of data gathering – see action areas 3b, 4i and 4j.

A set of indicators is required for use in this monitoring. Possibilities include:

Volume and spread of tourism

- Number of trips, nights and spend for overnight and day visitors to the AONB or proxy areas such as rural Denbighshire
- Annual attendance at events
- Visits and enquiries to Tourist Information Centres
- Number of users (vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists) at main locations.
- Accommodation bedstock
- Number of tourism development projects receiving planning permission.

Visitor satisfaction (from visitor surveys)

- Percentage of visitors satisfied in general and with types of facility/service.
- Percentage of repeat visitors.

Tourism enterprise performance (from data records and business survey)

- Accommodation occupancy
- Number of visits to attractions and main sites (monthly as indicator of seasonality).
- Enterprise performance, compared to previous year(s).
- Percentage of enterprises with quality certification.
- Number of tourism enterprises in membership of local tourist associations
- Percentage of enterprises reporting business gained from AONB website and other activities.

Environmental impact

- Levels of litter at key sites
- Percentage of visitors arriving by public transport
- Percentage of visitors travelling in the area without using a car
- Number of enterprises taking identified environmental management measures
- Number of enterprises in Green Tourism Business Scheme or equivalent environmental certification.



Appendix 1: Consultees

The following individuals attended one or more of the workshops or were consulted directly. This list does not include all respondents to the business survey.

Paola Albertazzi	Glan Llyn
Jackie Allen	Chirk
Francis Bailey	Chairman Prestatyn and District Environment Association
Shelly Barratt	Coya Marketing
Kevin Baxter	Ruthin Castle
Janine Beggan	World Heritage Site
Lynne Bellis	Travelynne Cymru Tourist Guide
Joe Bickerton	Wrexham County Borough Council
Carlton and Beth Boyce	Geufron Hall Boutique Bed And Breakfast
Carolyn Brindle	Housing and Community Development, DCC
Jane Brunning	Denbighshire County Council
Peter Carol	ProAdventure Ltd
Ashley Charlwood	Mentrau Bach
Jenny Christian	Tremeirchion Cwm & Vale CC
Sam Collins	Whitewell Holiday Cottages
Mari Dafydd Jones	Denbighshire County Council
David Davies	Llangollen Chamber of Trade and Tourism
Dewi Davies	Tourism Partnership North Wales
Rob Dingle	Offa's Dyke Path National Trail
James and Julie Dolan	Druid Inn
Fiona Dolben	Denbighshire County Council
Sophia Drew	Kings Hall Prestatyn (Neuadd Y Brenin)
Mair Evans	Llansanffraid Glyn Ceiriog Community Council
Joyce Evans	Llangollen Rural Community Council
Terry Evans	Wrexham County Borough Council
David Evans	Flintshire County Council
Gareth Evans	Cadwyn Clwyd
Jane Evans	Llawrbetws Caravan Park
Roger Farnham	Valle Crucis Abbey
Jane Forkings Russell	The Black Lion Inn
Christopher Frost	Manarhous Llangollen
Jon Hignett	National Trust (Chirk)
Frank Hill	Abseil UK
Linda Hughes	Llansanffraid Glyn Ceiriog Community Council
Ceri Hughes	Cadwyn Clwyd
Pat Jeffares	Llangollen Rural Community Council
Marilyn Jeffery	
Julie Jeffreys	Llansanffraid Glyn Ceiriog Community Council
Celia Jenkins	Bryn Howel Stables
Sian Jones	Bwlch Cottage
Dee Jones	Valeside BandB
Nerys and John Jones	Gaer Hyfryd Caravan Club Site
Norman Jones	Denbighshire.gov.uk
Sarah Jones	Dee Valley Heritage Tours
Glyn Jones	Llangollen Rural Community Council
Sue Kempster	Llangollen Rural Community Council
Nicola Lewis-Smith	Canal and River Trust
Julie Masters	Talent

Peter McDermott	Denbighshire County Council
Paul Mitchell	Natural Resources Wales
Kate and Jeff Morgan	Morgans Bed and Breakfast
Elfed Morris	Llangollen Rural Community Council
Helen Mrowiec	Denbighshire County Council
Elizabeth Musgrave	Gwenoldy Cottage
Mary Norton	Cerrigydrudion Cottages
Steve Nott	Woodbank Cottage
Josh O'Brien	Llangollen Outdoors & White Water Tubing UK Ltd
Seamus O'Keeffe	The Chainbridge Hotel
John Palmer	
Iona Pierce	Llangynhafal Community Council
Jenny Potter	North Wales Pilgrims Way
Esther Roberts	North Wales Tourism & Wales Tourism Alliance
Falmai Roberts	Llaeth y Llan Cyf/Village Dairy
Linda Roberts	Llanbedr DC, Community Council
Sian Roberts	South Denbighshire Community Partnership
Geraint Roberts	Llangollen Rural Community Council
Joanne Robinson	Caramel Stud Carriages
David Shiel	Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB
Wendy Sigsworth	Midlist Farm B&B
Mike Smart	TREKsmart
Jo Smith	Hope Mountain BandB
Gareth Smith	Bathafarn Hall Caravan Park
Ros Stockdale	Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB
Andrew Sully	Llangollen Parish Church
Howard Sutcliffe	Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB
Carolyn Thomas	AONB/Cadwyn Clwyd
Ian Thorpe	Gwenoldy Cottage
Claire Walsh	MIT Recruitment
Vanessa Warrington	Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB
Rod Waterfield	Woodland Skills
Val Watts	
Lizzy Webster	Biodiversity Officer, Denbighshire Countryside Service
Mike Whitley	Natural Resources Wales
Ron Williams	Ramblers Association Denbighshire Committee
Alyson Winn	Llangollen Rural Community Council
Clare Witter Holland	Lleweni Parc
Stephanie Woodward	VisitWales
Mair Wynne-Eyton	Tower