



AONB Designation

SECTION ONE

AONB DESIGNATION

1. AONB DESIGNATION

The Clwydian Range was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in July 1985.

1.1 Purpose of the Designation

AONBs together with National Parks recognise our finest landscapes and set a framework for their protection and enhancement.

The primary statutory purpose of designating a tract of Countryside as an AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. The concept of 'natural beauty' includes the protection of flora, fauna and geological as well as landscape features. However, it is very important that the cultural dimension of the landscape, including the historical, spiritual and inspirational elements, as well as the physical human shaping of the land are fully recognised. In Wales the added dimensions of the language provides an essential element of cultural richness that must be recognised too. These should all be integrated into the management of AONBs.



In pursuing the primary purpose of designation account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries. The economic and social need of local communities and, in particular, the promotion of sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment is vital. The contribution that the environment makes to quality of life and the economic advantage it creates is significant. This implies the need for an integrated approach to the management of the AONBs and the achievement of conservation through appropriate social and economic development.

In contrast to National Parks, AONBs have never been given a statutory recreation purpose. However, as scenically attractive areas, they have always been popular with visitors, and it has long been recognised that demand should be met so long as it is consistent with the conservation of the area and with the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

In Wales, the statutory requirement for the Welsh Assembly Government to pursue Sustainable Development serves to give heightened importance to the interaction between the conservation of AONBs and the needs of recreation and tourism, the local economy and local communities.





1.2 History of the Designation

The impetus to explore the idea of designated landscape increased after World War II with the recognition that, as a part of post-war reconstruction, there was a need to set aside landscapes both as a means of protection against unwanted development and as places of recreation for the general public.

In his report to the Ministry of Town and County Planning in 1945, entitled 'National Parks in England and Wales', John Dower identified not only areas with the potential for National Park statutes, but also areas... "deserving and requiring the special concern of local and central planning authorities". The difference between these areas and those identified as potential National Parks lay in the character, not in the quality of the landscape. The succeeding 'National Parks and Access of the Countryside Act 1949' provided for the designation of both National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty by the National Parks Commission.

Since then there have been 41 AONBs so designated in England and Wales, with four being wholly in Wales and one, the Wye Valley, straddling the border between the countries.

2 THE CLWYDIAN RANGE AONB 1983 – 2003

2.1 The Statement of Intent (1983)

In 1983, the then local authorities for the proposed Clwydian Range AONB published a joint Statement of Intent that aimed:

- a) to bring together all existing policies for the AONB;
- b) to provide a framework for the development of future planning and management policies for the Clwydian Range.



2.2 The Joint Advisory Committee

The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for the Clwydian Range was established when the AONB was designated in 1985. Its role is to advise the constituent authorities and agencies on the achievement of the AONB objectives. This is not a passive role. It is for the JAC to provide the impetus, the motive force and the leadership in coordinating the effective management of this nationally designated area. (see appendix for detailed aims and full list of members).

The JAC has a powerful resource in the range and depth of political and professional expertise and experience. It represents the local authorities, landowners, farmers, conservation and recreation interests. It is supported by an Officer's Working Group of relevant officers from the constituent local authorities, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Dept. Welsh Assembly Government.

2.3 The Clwydian Range Management Plan (1989) and the Interim Strategy (1996)

These two documents set out broad objectives and guidelines for the AONB. The 1996 Interim Strategy was primarily an update of the 1989 plan, both being designed 'to balance the needs of the various users of the Clwydian Range.... and those concerned with protecting and improving the wildlife and environment in general', and to translate policies into specific objectives and proposals for action. It also provided a framework for decision-making, resolving conflicts and for guiding the planning and management of the AONB.

2.4 The Clwydian Range Management Strategy, 2000

The Clwydian Range Management Strategy, 2000, started to recognise the vast range of issues that the AONB Committee became involved in. It hoped to balance the needs of all users of the range, from residents and those who earn a livelihood to visitors who enjoy the wide open spaces in the landscape.

2.5 The Need for a New Management Plan

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000 recognises the range of influences that shape the landscape and the need for an integrated approach to its protection and management. It provides an opportunity to build a framework around which this protection can be achieved through committed partnerships with the agencies, communities and individuals with an influence on the landscape and provides a statutory purpose for these partnerships. In this respect it has further strengthened the AONB designation.

While the Clwydian Range Management Strategy 2000 sought to protect the landscape through balancing the needs of all stakeholders the new plan will seek consensus in prioritising needs within which the sustainable enrichment of the landscape is paramount.

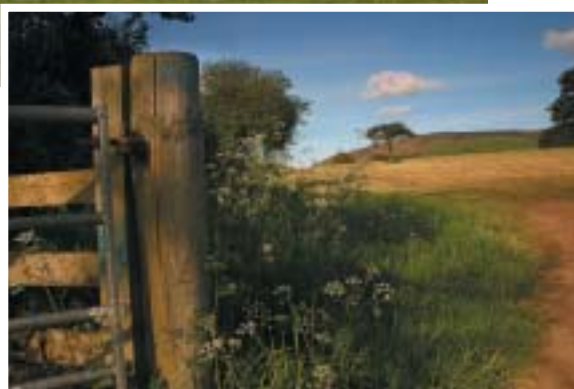
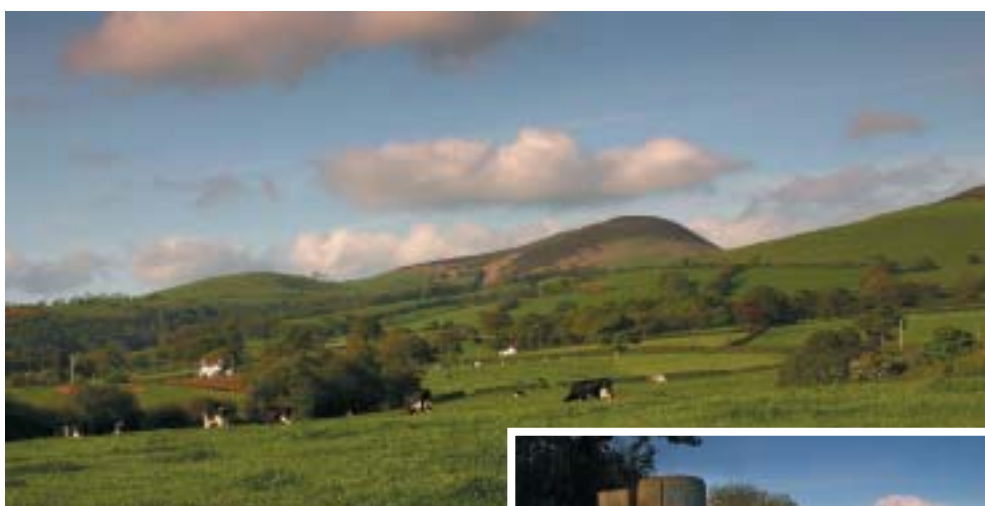
Specifically it requires the following:

- * The preparation of a management plan for the AONB, within which specific policies for the AONBs are presented;
- * That all public bodies demonstrate their commitment to AONB purpose in their plans and activities.

In addition it stresses that the designation of an AONB:

- * Gives formal statutory recognition to these nationally important landscapes;
- * Requires special land use planning policies to apply; and encourages an integrated approach to land management.

The 2000 Management strategy, whilst not a statutory document, is a useful forerunner for the new management plan. However the scope of the new plan is wider, including extensive stakeholder consultation, and focusing on mechanisms that will conserve and enhance the special features of the AONB to ensure its unique character is retained.





SETTING THE MANAGEMENT PLAN IN CONTEXT

Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act requires any Minister of the Crown, public body, or any statutory undertaker or any other person holding public office “to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.” This clause embraces all government departments as well as local authorities and privatised utility companies. Many have already formulated policy towards AONBs. Other policies and legislation, whilst not specifically mentioning the AONB, have an impact on its management.

3 EUROPEAN POLICIES

3.1 European Landscape Convention

Although the UK has not yet signed the European Landscape Convention it clearly sets out an agenda for landscape protection and management on a European level and as such is an important element in informing a strategic approach. The Convention asks member states:

- a) to recognise landscapes in law as an essential component of people’s surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity;
- b) to establish and implement landscape policies aimed at landscape protection, management and planning.
- c) to establish procedures for the participation of the general public, local and regional authorities, and other parties with an interest in the definition and implementation of landscape policies.
- d) to integrate landscape into its regional and town planning policies and in its cultural, environmental, agricultural, social and economic policies, as well as in any other policies with possible direct or indirect impact on landscape.

Specifically the Convention asks each country to undertake to raise awareness of landscape protection, identify special landscape characteristics, and to set and implement objectives for protection, management and planning of the landscape.

3.2 Objective 1

Denbighshire is designated as an Objective 1 area by the EC, entitling it to a variety of grant packages to revitalise the rural economy.

Cadwyn Clwyd, using Objective 1 funds as part of their Leader + programme, have established the Clwydian Range Action Initiative, which aims to ‘pump prime’ pilot projects for sustainable rural regeneration that are too new and innovative for others to back in isolation. The objectives of this initiative are wholly compatible with the aims for the AONB and the Development plan for the Leader + project states ‘The Local Development Strategy will also complement and provide an extension to the Sustainable Development Fund allocated to the Clwydian Range AONB. The SDF will provide a mechanism for implementing innovative sustainable environmental projects for local communities. Leader+ will provide an essential test bed for new and novel ideas in this area.’ AONB officers work closely with Cadwyn Clwyd staff and have already supported several joint community projects including environmental improvement works such as common and pond restoration and a booklet celebrating the natural and historical heritage of Cwm, Waen and Tremeirchion.

3.3 Common Agricultural Policy

The Common Agricultural Policy defines how agriculture will be supported or otherwise in member states of the European Union. The changes that will result from the recent mid-term CAP review may have a significant impact on the AONB as farming is the major land use in the area. The final shape of the reforms is still uncertain but the decoupling of subsidies from produce and the possible ‘shake up’ of the agri-environment scheme may give opportunities to ensure that farming subsidies within the AONB are tailored to meet the specific needs of land management within a protected landscape.

Although details of exact methods of payment are yet to be finalised it is interesting to note that producers will be required to actively farm and maintain in “good agricultural and environmental condition” all land held as payment entitlement.

Although the extent and speed of change is as yet unknown it is predicted that Welsh beef and sheep production will fall and it is likely that each farm business will react differently as it takes advantage of market opportunities.

3.4 European Habitats Directive

The European Community's 1992 European Habitats Directive aimed to set up a network of outstanding nature conservation sites throughout Europe. Each member state identified candidate sites of particular importance for certain habitats or species, known as Special Areas of Conservation or SACs, that will give additional protection to these areas. The Alyn Valley Woods is one of the British candidate SACs.

4 NATIONAL POLICIES – WALES

4.1 The Wales Spatial Plan – People, Places Future – Welsh Assembly Government aims “for a dynamic, prosperous and inclusive Wales where our heritage and environment are valued and where we work together and with our neighbours to achieve sustainable development across Wales.” It is a consideration of what should happen where in Wales and sets out a framework for planning. Its key values and objectives are Respecting Distinctiveness, Valuing our Environment, Building Sustainable Communities, Increasing and Spreading Prosperity and Achieving Sustainable Accessibility. In setting out these values it recognises that they are interdependent. As the environment depends on vibrant communities with a strong and cherished sense of place, so these communities depend on prosperity and sustainable accessibility.

4.2 The Green Economy – Countryside Council for Wales – This report identifies that the economy and the environment are intertwined and that the management and use of the environment underpins the whole Welsh economy. It challenges the assumption that there are natural conflicts between economic and environmental considerations and maintains that the environment is fundamental to the Welsh economy. Our countryside provides not only superb locations in which to live and work but also underpins the rural economy upon which jobs in farming, forestry, fishing, tourism and the public sector are dependent. The environment in Wales currently supports 120,000 full time jobs. Investment in the Welsh environment is an investment in the economic infrastructure of the country.

4.3 Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales The Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest (1998), which is a non statutory document, identifies the most outstanding historic landscapes throughout Wales. These landscapes carry the physical evidence of past ages and have a unique role in linking the human past with what we see today. The Vale of Clwyd has been identified as an outstanding historic landscape in Wales. The area includes land from Tremeirchion south to Denbigh and Ruthin and extending eastwards to include the hillforts of Moel y Gaer, Bodfari; Penycloddiau; Moel Arthur; Moel y Gaer, Llanbedr and Foel Fenlli. A substantial part of the Clwydian Range AONB therefore falls within this area. The landscape has been designated for the important evidence it contains for late prehistoric and medieval landuse. Whilst non statutory this document informs the planning process and is a consideration in future management.

4.4 Planning Policy Wales (2002) from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) states “National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are of equal status in terms of landscape and scenic beauty and both must be afforded the highest status of protection from inappropriate development. This equivalent status means that National Parks and AONBs must be treated the same in development plan policies and development control decisions”.

4.5 Minerals Planning Policy Wales (2000) from the Welsh Assembly Government states in its section for National parks and AONBs “Mineral development should not take place in these areas save in exceptional circumstances. All minerals applications must therefore be subject to the most rigorous examination...” it also states “Mineral development, proposed adjacent or close to a National Park or AONB, that affect the setting of these areas should be assessed carefully to determine whether the environmental and amenity impact is acceptable or not”. Whilst these plans are specific to planning, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has also recognised AONBs in other documents.

4.6 The Culture Strategy for Wales (2001) recognises that “The culture of Wales also has a physical dimension that embraces both the national and historic environment, some 25% of the



land area of Wales is recognised for its exceptional landscape qualities through designation as a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty"

4.7 The Plan for Wales (2001) WAG recognises that they can improve the environment by "supporting sustainable development projects with Wales' National Parks and AONB's" This has taken the form of a Sustainable Development Fund for each AONB investing £300,000 into each over a six year period.

4.8 Sustainable Development Scheme Under Section 121 of the Government of Wales Act 1998, the National Assembly for Wales was given a duty to promote sustainable development in everything it does. The Sustainable Development Scheme (SDS) 'Learning to live Differently', November 2000, sets out how it proposes to implement this duty. These principles are incorporated into all aspects of AONB management and sustainable development is an integral theme running through the management plan.

4.9 Woodlands for Wales WAG published its 'Woodlands for Wales' strategy in 2001. The strategy does not have specific objectives for woodlands within AONBs, but there are many elements of the strategy that are relevant (see appendix) and are used to guide woodland management within the AONB. The Forestry Commission, in partnership with the Countryside Service, manage large tracts of forest – Coed Moel Famau, Coed Nercwys and Llangwyfan – within the AONB. Management of these woodlands is based upon the objectives set out in Woodlands for Wales' strategy.

For example:-

Objective: To use woodlands to help create a high-quality visitor experience. Within the AONB the partnership is currently working on an all user trail in Coed Nercwys, and improving the trail network within Coed Moel Famau, including an Animal Puzzle Trail for families and schools.

Objective: To promote health through access to woodlands for all communities. A circular walk up Moel Famau, partly using forest tracks, is one of the first calorie counted walks promoted by the Forestry Commission.

4.10 Wales Tourist Board Their strategy 'Best Foot Forward – a Walking Tourism Strategy for Wales 2002 – 2010, is highly relevant to the AONB. The strategy's Vision is '...of Wales as the best UK walking tourism destination, offering the widest choice, and the best managed, presented, and promoted walking visit opportunities of anywhere in the UK.' Its emphasis on developing and promoting sustainable tourism is wholly in keeping with the aims of the AONB.

5 RELEVANT UK POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

5.1 Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 and CRow Act, 2000

There are 8 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, SSSIs within the AONB that are legally protected under these acts, with CCW having responsibility for their protection. Denbighshire County Council and Flintshire County Council between them own two of these sites at Loggerheads and Prestatyn Hillside and the Countryside Service manage these in close consultation with CCW. The Alyn Valley Woods and Alyn Gorge Caves are also a candidate SAC.

5.2 Ancient Monument and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

This act provides the legislative framework for the identification and protection of scheduled ancient monuments. There are currently 35 scheduled monuments within the Clwydian Range AONB which are protected under this act. These monuments vary from large hillforts like Penycloddiau to the small caves on the slopes of the Gop in Trelawnyd and the Bronze Age barrows at The Piggeries, near Llanarmon yn Iâl. Denbighshire and Flintshire County Councils own or part own four of the major hillforts, Foel Fenlli, Moel y Gaer, Llanbedr; Moel Arthur and Pen y Cloddiau. Management work has been carried out by the Countryside Service in conjunction with CADW at several of these sites.

5.3 1989 Water Act

The Environment Agency (EA) has statutory environmental management powers under the 1989 Water Act. It works with local authorities to protect and enhance water quality. EA are producing local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPS) to sustainably manage river catchments.

Within the AONB the quality of water of both the river Alyn and the Wheeler are monitored by the EA on a regular basis. The River Alyn is prone to flooding. Coed Cymru and the EA are investigating ways of reducing the impact of serious flooding through the planting of native trees and woods.

6 LOCAL POLICIES

Section 84 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act gives power to the local planning authorities to “take all such actions as appears to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area”.

6.1 Local Planning Policies

‘The Denbighshire Unitary Development Plan (2002) – Denbighshire County Council’

The Denbighshire UDP covers the plan period 1996 – 2011 and was adopted in 2002. As an adopted plan, all planning applications must be determined in accordance with its policies unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Policy ENV2 “Development affecting the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will be assessed against the primary planning objective to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. Small-scale development will only be permitted where it would not detract from the character and appearance of the AONB.

Major industrial and commercial development within the AONB will be subject to the most rigorous examination and will not be permitted unless there is an overriding need in terms of proven national interest and there being no alternative sites.

Development in the AONB should be designated to a high standard and contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the area.”

Policy HSG17 “Gypsy sites within the AONB or AOB will not be permitted”

Policy MEW1 “Applications for mineral working or the extension to existing operations with the AONB will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances”.

‘Draft Flintshire Unitary Development Plan (2002)’

Policy L2 “Development within or affecting the AONB will be permitted only where:

- a) it maintains and where appropriate enhances the intrinsic traditional and rural character of the area;

and –

- b) it will be designed to high standard using traditional materials and planting

Major industrial and commercial development within the AONB will be the subject of rigorous examination and will not be permitted unless there is an over-riding need in terms of proven national interest and there are no alternative sites”

6.2 Denbighshire and Flintshire Local Biodiversity Action Plans

These plans, published in 2003, aim to maintain and enhance biodiversity within the counties, to halt the decline of habitats and species and to assist their recovery. They implement the UK Biodiversity Action Plan at a local level. Conservation of habitats and species within the AONB is guided by the recommendations in the Denbighshire and Flintshire LBAPs.



6.3 'Pick and Mix' Choosing Culture and Leisure in Denbighshire

The Countryside Service which manages the AONB is part of the Culture and Leisure section of Denbighshire County Council.

The vision in the 'Pick and Mix' strategy is:
"To celebrate and promote culture and leisure in Denbighshire, creating an environment in which culture and leisure can flourish and play a fundamental part in enriching people's lives and regenerating the county."

The strategy sets out six themes to achieve the vision

1. Opening Doors
2. Learning for Life
3. Opportunities for All
4. Working with and Through Others
5. Striving for the best
6. Delivering the Vision

These themes have been taken into account in the development of the AONB management plan and thus run throughout the plan.



6.4 Community Strategies

Flintshire and Denbighshire are both in the process of preparing Community Strategies. The special qualities of the AONB, the need to conserve them and the value to the local community needs to be fully recognised in these Community Strategies.

Community Development officers from both counties have been involved in the consultation process for the AONB management plan production and, coupled with ongoing consultation, this will ensure that the forthcoming Community Strategies will have relevance to and be consistent with the management plan.

6.5 Local Transport Plans

Both Denbighshire and Flintshire have produced Local Transport plans. These plans include the provision of public transport links with isolated communities and leisure bus services exploring the AONB. AONB officers work with Highways staff to ensure the routes are beneficial for both visitors to and communities within the AONB.

7 VOLUNTARY SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

The Voluntary Sector are an important component of the land management of the Clwydian Range and manage the following areas:

7.1 National Trust

National Trust own and manage Graig Fawr, near Dyserth.

7.2 North Wales Wildlife Trust

They have two small reserves, Y Graig and Aberduna, within the AONB.

7.3 Woodland Trust

The Woodland Trust own and manage three woodlands within the AONB at Coed Ceunant, Coed y Felin and Coed y Glyn.

8 A PROTECTED LANDSCAPE NETWORK

The Clwydian Range AONB does not exist in isolation but is rather part of a network of protected landscapes within the UK and across the world. Within the UK the Clwydian Range is part of a family of designated landscapes, which include the AONBs of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the National Parks of England, Wales and Scotland and the National Scenic Areas of Scotland. Together they cover nearly 6.5 million hectares or 26% of the UK land area.

8.1 National Association of AONBs – The NAAONB was formed in 1998 as an independent organisation to act on behalf of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales. Its role is to raise the profile of AONBs and to ensure that their conservation and enhancement is kept on the agenda of those involved in AONB management at a national level. It played an important role in ensuring that the importance of AONBs featured strongly in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The long term Vision of the NAAONB is to “be part of a major independent body representing those responsible and involved in the management of all protected landscape areas of international importance in the UK.”

In this respect it plays an important role in ensuring a close working relationship with the National Parks in England and Wales through the Association of National Park Authorities (ANPA). This close working relationship is particularly relevant in the light of the CRoW Act which puts AONBs on an equal footing with National Parks. Many elements of the Environment Act 1995 as it relates to National Parks have been mirrored in the CRoW Act 2000 for AONBs in order to strengthen the statutory basis for AONBs. The National Park Review currently taking place in Wales may open the door to productive joint working and help to develop a framework for consistent management across designated landscapes in Wales.

8.2 International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources – Category V Landscapes

AONBs together with other designated landscapes in the UK are part of a global network and sit within a worldwide category of protected areas known as “Protected Landscapes”. Category V refers to one of six categories of protected areas worldwide. Category V Landscapes recognises the significance of AONBs in global terms and ensures a consistent approach to landscape conservation internationally.

The IUCN recognises that thinking on protected areas is undergoing a fundamental shift. “Whereas protected areas were once planned against people, now it is recognised that they need to be planned with local people, and often for and by them as well. Where once the emphasis was on setting places aside, we now look to develop linkages between strictly protected core areas and the areas around: economic links which benefit local people, and physical links, via ecological corridors, to provide more space for species and natural processes.”



AONBs and National Parks in Wales



The IUCN through Category V Landscapes is working towards,

- ‘ helping to empower local communities to be active participants in the identification and management of protected landscapes and demonstrate how the results can benefit the community;
- ‘ promoting the value, importance and understanding of the protected landscape concept as a management approach to a range of protected areas categories and the wider rural area;
- ‘ The global programme will promote and demonstrate the use and value of Category V (Protected Landscapes) as a functional and practical mechanism for the protection of biodiversity, cultural diversity and the sustainable use of natural resources.
- ‘ Following the 1996 Montreal Resolution, which required IUCN to develop the protected landscape concept, and gain support for the wider use of Category V, the task force will develop a global programme for protected landscapes for World Commission for Protected Areas (WCPA.)

8.3 IUCN on the need to consider Climate Change in Environmental Planning

Climate change is one of the principle environmental challenges of the 21st century. The warming of the Earth's atmosphere is already adversely affecting fragile ecosystems and poor people's livelihoods worldwide. These trends are projected to accelerate over the coming decades.

Climate change is a priority for IUCN because it is closely linked with its vision: a just world that values and conserves nature. Because of the threat posed to ecosystems and people, we could not achieve this vision without taking climate change into account.

Understanding that climate change impacts on nature and society is a first step to successfully mitigating and adapting to climate change in a manner that is environmentally sound and socially equitable.



9 THE MANAGEMENT PLAN PROCESS

9.1 The first phase was the production of the State of the AONB report that provides the basis for measuring the condition of the AONB. This document looks at the Special Features that make up the outstanding qualities of the AONB and identifies their current extent and condition. Within this examination the main pressures and issues affecting the Special Features have been identified in order that objectives can be drawn up that address these pressures.

In order to do this it has first been necessary to develop a Vision for the Clwydian Range. Having identified what the special qualities are it is important to have a clear and agreed ideal state for these features and the Range as a whole. Phase two determined this Vision. The achievement of the objectives and actions in this plan will move us closer to achieving this Vision.



9.2 Consultation

The management planning process has recognised from the outset that there are a number of stakeholders with an interest and influence in the Clwydian Range and its future. It is important that these stakeholders are engaged from the outset and contribute to the identification of its special character, the issues affecting change and its future management.

In order to facilitate this there has been widespread consultation throughout the management planning process. The Joint Advisory Committee developed a Vision for the AONB and a draft list of Special Features for the Clwydian Range (see section 3). Wider consultation within communities and a stakeholder seminar challenged this list in order to ensure that the final selection reflected the opinions of all stakeholders. At a series of community meetings residents were also asked to identify what issues they considered to be most pressing. Similarly stakeholders and all organisations with a management influence within the AONB were asked to help identify the main pressures affecting the special features and responses to them. (see appendix 1 for details). The draft report was then sent for consultation and stakeholder's comments incorporated before the final plan was produced.

