



CLWYDIAN RANGE AONB

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The Tourism Company

2008 - 2013



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of only a small number of locations in Wales designated for the exceptional quality of its landscape, which is linked to its historical and cultural heritage. This quality means that the Range can play a very significant role in the overall appeal of North Wales for tourism. At the same time, tourism can provide an increasingly important source of income and prosperity for the communities living in and around the Range.

This strategy and action plan provides a framework for the development of tourism in the Clwydian Range that is based on the principles of sustainability, taking full account of the need to conserve the area's special environment and heritage and maintain the quality of life of local communities. It is based on a detailed assessment of the area's resources, needs and opportunities and has involved extensive consultation with local interests in and around the AONB.

The strategy reflects national, regional and local policies for tourism and sustainable development. In particular, it relates closely to the Rural Development Strategies for Denbighshire and for Flintshire, which place considerable emphasis on the opportunities in this area for sustainable rural tourism. The strategy builds on the priorities and policies of the Clwydian Range AONB Management Plan and related recent initiatives, such as the Heather and Hillforts project and the Local Geodiversity Action Plan. It also complies with the 12 principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and forms the basis for recognition of the Clwydian Range under this charter.

The following strategic approach is set out:

- Recognising the Clwydian Range as a jewel in the crown in the tourism product of the North Wales Borderlands (and beyond this within North Wales and Wales as a whole) based on easy access to exceptional landscape and associated cultural and natural heritage.
- Giving highest priority to the conservation of environment and the area's special qualities, and to the management of visitors, as a basis for sustainable tourism, and being recognised for this at a national and European level.
- Developing and projecting a range of diverse visitor experiences, supported by high quality visitor facilities and services, based primarily around outdoor activities and the interpretation of heritage.
- Seeking a higher return to the local economy from people who come to the Range, increasing length of stay and spend per head.
- Helping local tourism related enterprises¹ to understand the special qualities of the Range, to identify with it, to work together, and to put these qualities across to visitors.
- Pursuing an active visitor management policy, based on providing excellent facilities at certain key sites, judicious encouragement of exploration and dispersal, and promoting more environmentally friendly access.
- Working with local communities to gain more benefit from tourism and to minimise pressures on them.
- Adding value to the tourism product, and hence the economic prosperity, in the rest of Denbighshire and Flintshire, and especially the surrounding gateway towns of Mold, Ruthin, Denbigh and Prestatyn.

¹ This includes rural enterprises, such as shops, pubs, garages and post offices, due to their essential part in the visitor experience

- Gaining from the services and complementary attractions available in the surrounding area and gateway towns.

An action plan has been prepared, based around five functional objectives:

1. To raise awareness of the Clwydian Range and all that it has to offer to visitors, encouraging exploration and longer stays

Marketing action centres on a stronger definition and projection of the Clwydian Range brand, to be picked up and used by a wide range of stakeholders in promotional activity. An improved website will be the primary medium for attracting and informing visitors, backed up by orientation print and improved local information delivery and signage.

2. To develop and enhance a set of visitor experiences based on outdoor recreation and appreciation of the area's natural and cultural heritage

Action is set out to strengthen the area's activity tourism offer, focussing on walking, mountain biking, cycling, riding and fishing, through networking, marketing, infrastructure improvement and product development. Further actions seek to gain more tourism benefit from events and from the interpretation of the area's natural and historic heritage.

3. To encourage and support tourism related enterprises in the development and improvement of facilities and services, environmental management, and their relationship to the AONB

Action to support sustainable local businesses includes raising their awareness of the AONB, encouraging sound environmental management, raising support for conservation, supporting improvements in quality and performance and ensuring the application of appropriate planning policies.

4. To improve the management of visitor flows to and within the Range, including impact on the environment and communities within the AONB and in the surrounding area.

Specific measures are proposed to improve the visitor experience and management at key sites. Further actions seek to enhance public transport usage, strengthen links with gateway towns, improve management and interpretation in individual villages and enhance access for all.

5. To strengthen understanding of the visitors to the AONB and the impacts of tourism on the area.

The strategy proposes various indicators for sustainable tourism and monitoring action based on surveys, feedback and observation.

It is proposed that sustainable tourism in the Clwydian Range, including the implementation of this strategy and action plan, should be overseen by a sub-committee of the AONB's Joint Advisory Committee, which should include representatives of a range of different stakeholder interests. In addition, a wider communication forum should be established. A dedicated sustainable tourism officer post is required to drive forward implementation and coordinate the work of others. The actions proposed are in line with the priorities of a number of different funding sources, including the Rural Development Programmes, Convergence funding, Interreg 4, and more specific schemes such as the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund.

INTRODUCTION

The Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a protected area located in the north east of Wales, close to the border with England. The AONB largely consists of a narrow ridge of undulating hills (the Range) stretching some 35km southwards from the coastal town of Prestatyn, located on the Irish Sea. The area covers approximately 160 square kilometres and rises to a height of 554 metres at Moel Famau in the centre of the Range.

Most of the AONB lies within the county of Denbighshire, with a smaller area in Flintshire. The AONB is governed by a Joint Advisory Committee, a non-executive advisory body which comprises 21 members from local authorities, farming, access, tourism, business, and conservation interests. Management of the entire AONB is carried out by Denbighshire Countryside Service²(with agreement from Flintshire County Council).

The purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, including its flora, fauna, geological and landscape features and its historical and cultural heritage. In pursuing this purpose, account must be taken of the economic and social needs of the communities and of the various rural industries. Although not a statutory purpose of designation, it is recognised that demands for recreation should be met, provided this is consistent with the conservation of the area and the needs of other uses.

The AONB is seeking to follow a path of sustainable development (a statutory requirement of the Welsh Assembly Government), which gives heightened importance to the interaction between conservation and the needs of recreation, the local economy and communities.

Tourism is seen as a key activity within the Clwydian Range, as it provides a source of prosperity which, in itself, depends upon maintaining the area's special qualities, thereby providing support and justification for their conservation.

In 2007, The Tourism Company was commissioned by the two county councils, Cadwyn Clwyd³, and the Countryside Council for Wales to prepare a Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Five Year Action Plan for the Clwydian Range AONB. It was agreed that this should comply with the requirements of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (hereafter referred to as the European Charter)⁴. This report was funded jointly through Cadwyn Clwyd European LEADER+ Programme and the Clwydian Range AONB Sustainable Development Fund.

The strategy has been prepared following an extensive period of assessment and consultation. This has entailed:

- An appraisal of all relevant current policy and strategies in Wales, North Wales, Denbighshire and Flintshire.

² Although there is a dedicated AONB Officer, most of the work of the Service covers the whole of the county, of which the AONB is just part.

³ The LEADER+ Local Action Group for Denbighshire and Flintshire

⁴ Drawn up by the EUROPARC Federation. An application for recognition of the Clwydian Range under the Charter will be made in 2008.

- Assessment of past surveys and existing information on the AONB's resources, visitors to the Range and tourism performance in the area.
- Discussion with officers from the AONB, the local authorities, and main agencies and organisations with an interest in tourism and management in the area.
- A postal survey of all tourism enterprises lying within the AONB and a sample of the main tourism enterprises in the immediately surrounding area. A total of 48 questionnaires were returned, representing a 33% response rate. 71% of responses came from enterprises within the AONB, and 29% came from enterprises outside the Range.
- Workshops held in three locations within the Range, openly promoted through posters and extensively circulated invitations, attracting around 70 participants from the local communities, private enterprises, conservation interests and local authorities.
- The preparation and circulation of an interim report for comment.

1 ASSESSMENT

This chapter contains a factual analysis of the AONB's tourism resources and markets and an assessment of impacts and issues. It is based on data and documents obtained from the Clwydian Range AONB, surveys undertaken, consultation with a range of stakeholders, a series of the local workshops, and the consultants' own professional judgement.

The chapter concludes by summarising the assessment in a statement of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

1.1 Economic and social overview

There is very little information specifically about the economy and communities of the AONB itself. Some of the economic and social pressures of the surrounding area, which may affect the AONB directly or indirectly, can be discerned from data available for the counties of Denbighshire and Flintshire.

Population

The population of Denbighshire is 93,065⁵ of which nearly half lives in the northern towns of Rhyl and Prestatyn. Flintshire has a population of 148,594 of which over a quarter lives in Deeside. Population growth in both counties is well above the average for both Wales and the UK as a whole with 4.4% growth experienced in Flintshire between the 1991 and 2001 censuses, and 4.1% in Denbighshire. This is compared to growth of 1% in Wales and 2.4% in the UK. This is driven by significant increases in population in those over 50 years of age, but hides a significant loss in population in the 20-34 age ranges⁶ which will have impacts in the future on health and workforce needs.

A recent study on tourism in the neighbouring Vale of Clwyd shows that the population within a 60 minute drive time of that area is almost 1 million and within a 90 minute drive time it is almost 4.5 million.

Economy and Employment

Employment in Denbighshire is highly concentrated in two sectors – distribution, hotels and catering (25% of jobs in 2004); and the non-market sectors of public administration, education and health (40%). Only 13% of employment comes from the manufacturing and agriculture sectors. A large number of Denbighshire residents commute to employment opportunities to the east of the county (Flintshire and NW England). Provision of more employment in people's home area is seen as a priority for economic, social and environmental reasons.

Flintshire has a larger manufacturing base than Denbighshire and has enjoyed considerably more inward investment over the past decade. Primary activities such

⁵ Population data from 2001 Census

⁶ Denbighshire Economic Growth Strategy and A Profile of Flintshire 2003

as agriculture have declined by over 50% since 1991. The services sector accounts for 40% of employment in Flintshire.

Economic activity in Flintshire is high with 79% of people 'active' (compared to 73% in Wales). However, Denbighshire has a higher level of economic inactivity with only 62% 'active'. This reflects the aging population in Denbighshire and outflux of those of working age. Unemployment in Flintshire is 2.3% and slightly higher in Denbighshire at 5.5%.

Denbighshire has Tier 1 'Assisted Area' status, which provides access to the highest rates of financial support for industry available in the UK. The county also qualified for Objective 1 Structural Funds from European Union and will continue to qualify for Convergence funding under the new programme. Tourism has benefited considerably from the Objective 1 funds. The new Convergence funds will be focussed on the knowledge economy and Lisbon Agenda (jobs and growth). This does provide potential for supporting tourism, but in a different way compared to Objective 1. The Rural Development Programme will provide a more obvious source of EU funding for sustainable tourism development in and around the Clwydian Range.

Social issues

While average earnings of those who live in Denbighshire and Flintshire are relatively high, earnings of those who work in the counties are below average. There is a need for higher paid, higher quality jobs which will encourage residents to work in the local area and spend their income there.

A particular problem in rural Denbighshire and Flintshire, including the AONB, is that of increasing house prices. This is driven by people from outside the area choosing to retire in its peaceful surroundings. This means that local people are increasingly priced out of the market and, at the same time, the population is rising in age.

The Tourism Economy

In 2006, tourism revenue in Denbighshire was £238.3million, in Flintshire £152.8 million⁷. The sector was estimated to directly generate 3,895 FTE jobs in Denbighshire and 2,235 in Flintshire. In Rural Denbighshire tourism revenue was £91.4 million and the sector directly accounted for 1,776 FTE jobs.

In both counties, shopping and food & drink account for the highest visitor expenditure – 22% and 19% respectively in Flintshire, and 23% and 18% in Rural Denbighshire. Accommodation accounts for only 12% of tourism expenditure in Flintshire and 10% in Rural Denbighshire, which reflects the high numbers of day visitors.

Day visitors account for 81% of all visitors in Rural Denbighshire and 72% of all visitors in Flintshire, but they only generate 45% and 33% of the tourism revenue, respectively. The highest spending visitors in both counties stay in serviced accommodation spending, on average, £101.52 a day in Flintshire and £88.26 per day in Rural Denbighshire⁸. This highlights the importance of generating more overnight stays, particularly in serviced accommodation. It is interesting to note that

⁷ STEAM 2006

⁸ STEAM 2006

in both counties, visitors staying with friends or relatives spend over £10 more per day than day visitors.

1.2 Biodiversity, geodiversity, heritage and cultural resources

The most impressive product of the area is the quality of the landscape. The Clwydian Range is one of only five AONBs and three national parks in Wales.

The richness of the landscape comes from a combination of undulating upland, including open heather clad moors and rocky outcrops, gently rolling farmland and wooded valleys. The area is blessed with extensive views in all directions. Attractive hedgerows, stone walls and a number of picturesque small villages add to the striking visual appeal.

The varied geology, topography and past land management practice within the area has resulted in a rich and varied geodiversity and biodiversity. This includes the heather moorland with its distinct range of bird life including grouse, stonechat and whinchat. There are numerous sites within the AONB that are of high nature conservation value including eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), one Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Regionally Important Geodiversity Sites (RIGS) and Nature Reserves (NR).

The rich landscape of the Clwydian Range is the result of geological processes acting over 500 million years. The landscape of heather-clad uplands, ice-carved valleys, rocky limestone, rolling farmland and wooded valleys are a unique and spectacular resource. The area has been influenced by human hands for thousands of years. The Range contains Early Stone Age sites and many Bronze Age burial monuments. However, the Iron Age hillforts which crown the Range, are the most obvious and best known archaeological features of the area. Their function, both defensive and as sites of display, probably varied from controlling centres for territories stretching down the Clwydian Range, across the Vale and up into the hills beyond, to tribal gathering places and summer grazing or sites of ritual.

Much of the landscape pattern visible today of villages and isolated farmsteads dates from the medieval period, and churches of medieval origin (some with a double nave style unique to the area) lie in many of the villages within the AONB.

In more recent centuries, the Range has seen the development of several large parkland estates including Golden Grove and Colomendy. Some developed following the accumulation of wealth built up from the expansion of local industries, particularly lead mining, and extensive remains of this mining activity are still visible in limestone areas.

Offa's Dyke is an important heritage feature of the borderland between England and Wales and Offa's Dyke Path, a designated National Trail, is an important recreational resource. The part of the trail within the Range is very popular, owing to the fine hill scenery and extensive views which characterise this particular section.

Villages

There are some 18 villages within or on the edge of the AONB which provide natural focal points for visitors to the Range and act as gateways to exploring further by foot. Ten of these villages contain designated Conservation Areas. Construction materials were normally sourced locally and this has given a distinctive character to buildings and settlements. A series of booklets entitled 'Villages of the Clwydian Range' have been funded via the Sustainable Development Fund, the latest of which to be produced is Maeshafn. However, some of the most attractive villages – Cilcain, Llanasa, Llanarmon yn Ial – are experiencing problems due to high numbers of visitors and cars at certain times, with a negative impact on local residents.

1.3 Tourism facilities, amenities and services

Accommodation

There are over 60 accommodation facilities in the Clwydian Range, as identified in the product audit (see Annex 2). The majority of the facilities are small guest houses or B&Bs, with a significant number being pubs with rooms. There are a small number of self catering facilities and touring camp sites. There are a few static caravan sites within the AONB.

Fig 1: Graded accommodation within the AONB

Name of accommodation	Type	Village	No of rooms	Grading
Bach Y Graig	B+B	St. Asaph	3	WTB 4*farm
Bryn Tirion Cottages	B+B	Nr Mold	2	WTB 4* B&B
Eryrys Caravan Park	C+C	Eryrys		WTB 4* HP
Gwalia	SC	Llangynhafel	2	WTB 4 stars
Hafan Deg	B+B	Nr Mold	3	WTB 3 stars
Hillcrest	SC	Maeshafn	1 unit	WTB 4*SC
Llainwen Ucha	B+B	Ruthin	3	WTB 2*Farm
Minfford Campsite	C+C	Llanbedr DC	25	awaiting
Parc Farm Caravan Park	Caravan	Llanarmon-yn-Ial	Static	WTB3*T&HP
Penisar Mynydd Caravan Park	C+C	Caerwys Road	42	WTB4*T&HP
Station House Caravan Park	C+C	Bodfari		WTB3*Park
The Clwyd Gate	B+B	Llanbedr DC	10	WTB3*lodge
The Druid Inn	B+B	Llanferres	5	WTB43*Inn
The Old Mill Hotel	B+B	Nannerch	6	WTB3*
Yr-Hen-Feudy	B+B	Ruthin		4*B&B

Source – Visit Wales

Accommodation in and around the Range tends to be located in or near the villages, and in particular along Offa's Dyke National Trail, but otherwise is spread throughout the whole area so that the supply is balanced across the AONB.

Currently only 15 of the facilities are WTB graded, with one awaiting grading. Quality of accommodation across the board is therefore difficult to monitor. The small proportion of graded properties may reflect the small scale nature of the businesses, which are privately owned by individuals, some on farms, others by retired people who have moved to the area, and others by 'life-style' owners. The consultation revealed that many people are put off by the bureaucracy and costs involved with grading.

Accommodation in the surrounding towns is important for the AONB, and vice versa. Increasingly, Ruthin and Mold are being seen as gateway towns to the AONB. There are several varied and good quality hotels in Ruthin, most of which have views across to the Range. Mold is less well served by hotels with most of its bedstock actually located in outlying villages. Prestatyn is potentially an important accommodation base to the north, at the end of Offa's Dyke National Trail, but the amount of serviced accommodation in the town is limited

Visitor Attractions

Visitor attractions within the AONB are largely based on exploration and understanding of the landscape. All but one are managed by Denbighshire and Flintshire Countryside Services and / or the Forestry Commission.

Loggerheads Country Park, owned and managed by Denbighshire Countryside Services, is one of the area's visitor honeypots, receiving around 180,000 visitors a year. The 85 acre country park has extensive visitor facilities including a small visitor centre and shop, picnic area, toilets and a café. It also has two waymarked walks, an industrial heritage trail and a discovery trail. The car park is one of the largest in the AONB but at peak times there is a shortage of capacity.

Moel Famau Country Park covers over 2000 acres of upland, centred on Moel Famau, the highest summit in the Clwydian Range. It has fewer visitor facilities than Loggerheads but has extensive parking, some interpretation and visitor orientation, superb views, three of the Range's hillforts and a number of waymarked walks. It is also extremely popular, attracting around 160,000 visitors per year, particularly with walkers but also the less active who come and enjoy the view across the Vale of Clwyd to Snowdonia from the upper car park. The Jubilee Tower is a striking landmark and draw for visitors.

Coed Moel Famau is a 1047 acre site managed by Forestry Commission Wales, with elements managed in partnership with Denbighshire Countryside Service. The site has an arboretum, numeracy and puzzle trail, off road cycling provision and a waymarked, sheltered route to the summit of Moel Famau, as well as parking, a picnic area, toilets and information panels.

Penycloddiau Nature Area & Llangwyfan Forest contains 29 acres of recovering native broadleaved woodland below an Iron Age hillfort and adjacent to Llangwyfan Forest. A section of the Offa's Dyke National Trail passes through the site and there are good bird-watching opportunities - managed in partnership by FCW and DCS.

Moel Findeg is 55 acres, consisting of a rich combination of birch woodland, heath and purple moor-grass wetland which hide evidence of old lead mine workings.

Coed Nercwys is owned by Forestry Commission Wales and managed in partnership with Denbighshire Countryside Service. It is 322 acres with a history stretching from Bronze Age burial, mining and agriculture to plantation and recreation. It is also home to nightjars, long eared owls and great crested newts. It has a multi-user route which allows visitors to explore the forest.

Bishops Wood is a SSSI with mining and quarrying remains hidden within its ancient oak woodland. There is limited parking and interpretation on site.

Coed Bell contains a rare mature elm tree with a girth of 12 feet and a tumulus from the Bronze Age as well as bluebells which carpet the semi-natural woodland in the spring.

Pen-y-Ffrith Bird Gardens, privately owned and managed, has a collection of waterfowl, pheasants, rheas, owls, and Pygmy goats and is set in woodland gardens which include a Bluebell Walk, bog walk fernery and waterfalls. It is open from March to the end of November.

There are a number of other access sites, including Graig Fawr, owned by the National Trust, and various sites managed by the Wildlife Trusts.

There are a number of attractions outside the AONB which complement what is on offer in the Range itself. Of particular note is the extensive number of historic heritage attractions, including St Asaph Cathedral, Nant Clwyd House, St Winifreds Well, Greenfield Valley, Wepre Park, the Gaol in Ruthin, and castles in Rhuddlan, Ruthin, Flint and Denbigh. Other kinds of attraction which attract significant visitor volumes include the Tweedmill factory outlet centre and Theatre Clwyd in Mold.

Walking / Countryside Access

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

Offa's Dyke National Trail passes through the range and attracts 33,000 people every year. The most popular section of the Trail follows the ridge line of the Clwydian Range to the Jubilee Tower built on the summit of Moel Famau. The trail runs from Chepstow to Prestatyn and was opened in 1971. The whole trail is 177 miles in length. Many people choose to complete only short sections in day trips or to complete the whole trail over many weeks, months or years.

There are a number of publications which contain descriptions of walks in the Range. One of the AONB's 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.

Generally the footpaths are in good condition and there are ongoing management plans in place to repair and upgrade where necessary. There are still some paths which need to be opened up. This is part of the AONB management plan. There is some illegal use of routes by cyclists, horse riders and motor vehicles.

Outdoor Activities

Although walking remains the most popular activity in the AONB, there are a number of other activities which are important and growing in popularity. Cycling, mountain biking, horse riding, fishing, paragliding and other activities are all available in the Range.

The Clwydian Range offers a wide selection of mountain biking trails, ranging from easy routes for people with a reasonable level of fitness, to physically demanding high level routes. The Ride the Clwyds⁹ initiative has worked to improve the management of the routes in the area and their promotion.

⁹ www.ridetheclwyds.com

The Llandegla Mountain Biking centre, which lies just outside the AONB on the A525 towards Wrexham is a new facility consisting of a purpose-built visitor centre with shop and café, bike hire, bike sales /repair and a meeting room. There are three mountain bike trails ranging from 5 to 19km as well as a 4.5km walking trail. It has been extremely popular and attracted around 70,000 users in the first year. There is no accommodation on site but links are being developed with local campsites and B&Bs.

The bridleway network is more extensive within the AONB than elsewhere in Denbighshire and Flintshire, however coverage is still patchy. The Wales on Horseback initiative has been seeking to establish a more co-ordinated horse riding product and has brought together more than 40 liveries, B&Bs, farriers etc. However, marketing of this initiative has proved challenging. There could be scope to develop it further. Associated facilities such as sufficient parking and security for horseboxes will also have to be improved. A number of new bridle routes have been established by the British Horse Society (BHS), including the Seahorse Ride which runs north to south along a bridle network.

There are nine fisheries within the AONB. The 'Fish the Clwyds' project is a joint marketing initiative, with the production of leaflets and a website. Fishing is growing in popularity and the AONB is well placed to tap into the market.

There are several golf clubs surrounding the AONB, all of which welcome visitors. Facilities include driving ranges, golf lessons and golf club hire and at the large clubs, such as Denbigh, handicap certificates are required.

Other activities available on an ad-hoc basis in and around the AONB are paragliding, paintballing, off-road motorbiking, abseiling, caving and climbing. Current levels of activity are low enough that user conflicts are few and far between, however as more people undertake more activities within the Range, there will be a need for careful management.

Events

A number of events take place throughout the year in the AONB. They include themed walks (archaeology, nature, geology), practical activities (mountain biking, bird watching, moth trapping), and family fun activities, including crafts and re-enactments. Activities are published in Denbighshire Countryside Service's 'Out and About' guide and Flintshire County Council's Countryside Events programme.

Festivals are held in surrounding towns such as the Ruthin Festival and Denbigh Midsummer Festival. There is an annual Denbighshire and Flintshire Agricultural Show. Mold Food & Drink Festival takes place in September each year. Mold is the first town in Wales to be admitted to the Cittaslow network¹⁰.

Helva Gelf is a local open studios event taking place over three weekends in September. Ten of the 40 artists taking part are located in the Clwydian Range.

¹⁰ An international movement concerned with quality of life of towns and cities and linked to the Slow Food movement

Food & drink

Local pubs, of which there are approximately 20, are the main providers of food and drink within the AONB. Most serve food at lunch time and in the evening. Quality is variable, as are opening times.

There are several cafés/restaurants in the AONB including the licensed restaurant at Afonwen Craft Centre, Hideaways Café at Gweryd Lakes and the Loggerheads Café. The latter is currently closed, awaiting a new tenant. Llandegla Mountain Bike centre, just outside the AONB, has a popular café. There are a number of cafes in nearby towns; however opening times are a problem, especially at weekends.

There is an opportunity to make more of local produce, through raising awareness of food produced locally amongst B&Bs, cafes and restaurants. There are farmers markets in Ruthin and Mold. There are farm shops at St Asaph, Treuddyn, Llanbedr and Gwasaney (near Mold).

Cadwyn Clwyd has put together a directory of local producers which has been distributed to accommodation providers and restaurants in the area. This covers the whole of their area. The number of specialist local producers within or directly associated with the AONB appears to be quite limited.

Shopping

There are few opportunities for visitors to shop in the AONB. The main retail outlet is the Afonwen Antiques and Craft Centre in the north of the Range which has two showrooms and over 60 showcases of 18th to 20th century antiques and collectables. The Loggerheads visitor centre includes a small gift shop. For mountain bike enthusiasts the shop at Llandegla has a wide range of equipment. There are a number of village shops in the area and garages also have retail outlets.

The limited availability of shopping in the AONB is compensated for by the range of independent retailers that can still be found in the surrounding towns.

Craft retailing is an important feature of the surrounding area. The new Ruthin Craft Centre will be a 'dynamic zinc and cast stone building with undulating roofs to echo the surrounding Clwydian Hills'.¹¹ The new centre will house three galleries, six artist studios, a retail gallery, education and residency workshops, tourist information point and café with courtyard terrace.

The Helva Gelf Open Studios event, already mentioned, will help to boost the retail offer of the Range.

1.4 Accessibility and Transport

Road

The Clwydian Range lies in close proximity to the main east to west transport artery routes in north Wales. The A55 cuts through the north of the Range and the A494 cuts through the southern part, linking to the A5. There is a network of non principal classified B and C minor roads which provides access to the remoter areas. Car

¹¹ Ruthin Craft Centre website www.ruthincraftcentre.org.uk

parking is available at Moel Famau Country Park, Loggerheads Country Park, Cilcain and the Gwaenysgor viewpoint. Parking in other areas is restricted to smaller informal lay-bys, which become full very early during the summer months.

Public transport

A strategic public transport network links the main towns within Denbighshire and Flintshire to each other by bus (Rhyl, Prestatyn, Rhuddlan, St Asaph, Mold, Denbigh, Ruthin, Corwen, Llangollen) and also creates a link to the main urban areas located outside of the County; such as Chester, Wrexham, Chirk and Abergele.

The Chester to Holyhead rail service passes through Flint and Prestatyn, and the Chester-Wrexham-Shrewsbury line runs to the east of the Range. Bus services from these towns connect to AONB gateway towns such as Ruthin and Mold, and on into the AONB itself. However, bus timetables do not currently link into rail timetables which in practice makes connections time consuming and inconvenient.

Denbighshire and Flintshire County Councils are working proactively to promote the use of local bus services for leisure journeys. The Clwydian Ranger network operates on Sundays and Bank Holidays to offer car-free access to major tourism points in the Clwydian Range during the summer months. There were 2,800 recorded passenger journeys on this service in 2005, which does not include those with passes who do not buy tickets. A user survey was undertaken and respondents overwhelmingly found the service excellent, although there were some complaints about drivers not being familiar with routes, and connections not working properly. The service is publicised through leaflets, some 26,000 of which are distributed in and around the AONB.

1.5 Tourism Administration

Tourism within the AONB is not the responsibility of one single organisation. A number of public sector organisations in the Clwydian Range are involved in supporting the tourism industry, either through the provision of infrastructure, funding, training or marketing activity.

The Clwydian Range Joint Advisory Committee has the responsibility for the overall management of the AONB. Its terms of reference include: advising on the preparation and implementation of the statutory AONB Management Plan; advising on matters which affect the AONB, including Unitary Development Plans, development proposals and other initiatives; and promoting and managing the quiet informal enjoyment of the Clwydian Range AONB providing this is compatible with landscape conservation. All these responsibilities have a bearing on tourism, but tourism itself is not specifically identified or separately addressed in the activities of the JAC.

Denbighshire Countryside Service¹² manages the AONB on a day to day basis, and therefore has a key role to play in the co-ordination of tourism. At present it does not have a member of staff working specifically on tourism issues in the AONB although a number of posts have functions that relate strongly to tourism, notably in visitor services, education and interpretation. However, staff working in these fields have a county-wide remit.

¹² Also on behalf of Flintshire County Council

Denbighshire and Flintshire County Councils have tourism departments which undertake product development work as well as the marketing activities described below. However other departments also impact on tourism in the AONB, in particular with respect to infrastructure, transport and planning. Denbighshire County Council's Economic Development Unit has prepared a business and marketing strategy for the Vale of Clwyd, which includes the AONB in part.

Cadwyn Clwyd is an important player in tourism and has funded a wide variety of tourism related projects through the Leader + programme, many of which include, or are specific to, the AONB.

There are no private sector tourism associations operating specifically within the AONB. The Flintshire Tourism Association is very active and is supportive of the further promotion of the Clwydian Range as an important tourism asset in the area. Within the AONB itself, The Loggerheads Business Group was set up in the wake of Foot and Mouth in 2001, and now has a small website promoting businesses in the area. However, it is not exclusively concerned with tourism. CANTATA is an EU Interreg funded project in Denbighshire which is focused on capacity building within tourism businesses and provides an important communication channel between the Council and private sector.

With such a range of bodies and, in particular, the involvement of two local councils, there is a danger of duplication of roles and a real need to ensure that tourism work is developed in a co-ordinated and integrated fashion.

1.6 Current Marketing, information and interpretation

Marketing activity

The body responsible for the outward marketing of the area is the North Wales Borderlands Marketing Area Partnership. This is a partnership group with the lead taken by the local authorities. It is supported by Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham councils, and Tourism Partnership North Wales. The main promotional vehicles are the website www.borderlands.co.uk and an A4 colour brochure. The profile of the Clwydian Range in the website and print is low, but it is referred to in the context of certain thematic treatments of countryside access and landscape. In 2006 the Partnership produced a series of individual thematic brochures (castles, golf, walking, sacred places) under the Borderlands brand using Objective 1 funding from Denbighshire. These remain available electronically and could be maintained in print with continued financial support. Promotional activity for the North Wales Borderlands area is largely through tying into Visit Wales campaigns.

Marketing activity is also undertaken separately by the two County Councils. Flintshire has recently produced a series of leaflets on attractions, where to dine and accommodation in the county in preparation for the Eisteddfod which was held near Mold in August 2007. A new website is currently under construction for the Flintshire Tourism Association which, when up and running, will serve as the county's main online visitor presence. A Flintshire Leisure Drive has recently been developed and promoted, which extends into the AONB. The Flintshire Rural Walks publication has

been enthusiastically received by residents and visitors. It includes walks in the AONB.

Denbighshire County Council has been active in marketing, including handling a lot of the promotional activity for the wider area, using Objective 1 funding. It has undertaken promotional activity individually for the county of Denbighshire, including newspaper campaigns and direct mail of an A4 flyer *Discover Denbighshire*. A publication entitled *Dog Friendly Venues in Denbighshire* lists accommodation and restaurants where dogs may be taken. The CANTATA initiative has produced a county guide to Denbighshire. It gives a general overview of the county's heritage and eight towns with sections on the outdoors, history, local character etc. It will serve as a tool for businesses to improve their knowledge of the area. It is free of charge and will be sent to c1000 businesses in Denbighshire.

The Denbighshire Countryside Service produces two full colour A5 booklets promoting countryside access opportunities. *22 Countryside sites in Denbighshire and the Clwydian Range AONB* has a whole section on the AONB, listing the various country parks and attractions with locations and facilities. *Out and about in Denbighshire's Countryside* is an annual events calendar which lists events throughout the county, some of which take place in the AONB. Denbighshire Countryside Service are producing a Rural Walks in Denbighshire publication, building on the success of the sister publication Rural Walks in Flintshire. The print is primarily distributed in the county and the surrounding area, through a partnership with Denbighshire County Council's Tourism Department.

The website www.clwydianrangeaonb.org.uk has a mixture of corporate and visitor information, including sections on accommodation, food and activities in the Range. Some funding has been dedicated to updating it so that it has more of a visitor focus in the future.

The only promotional publications specifically for the AONB are the A4 colour magazines *Capturing the Clwyds* and *Capturing the Clwydian Range*, produced by Denbighshire Country Service with financial support from Flintshire County Council. They contain feature articles about the Range and its activities. With a print run of 20,000, they have been distributed to accommodation and other outlets in the area.

A number of marketing initiatives and related promotional material cover themes and products in and around the Range. Cadwyn Clwyd has been instrumental in driving forward many of them. They include:

- Moel Famau Animal Puzzle Trail
- Welcome to the Vale of Clwyd – Farm holidays in North Wales
- Country Pubs in the Vale of Clwyd
- Camping and Caravan Sites in Rural Denbighshire
- Fishing in and around the Clwydian Hills
- Wales on Horseback
- Ride the Clwyds.

The profile and identity given to the Range in these initiatives and the resulting print items has not been consistent.

Tourist Information Centres

There are no TICs within the AONB, however Denbighshire and Flintshire County Councils run Tourist Information Centres in Rhyl, Prestatyn and Llangollen, and Mold respectively. Prestatyn TIC is seasonal, only open during the summer months, outside which time the area is covered by Rhyl TIC. The TIC at Ruthin was demolished along with the craft centre which housed it, and a new unmanned information outlet will be installed when it is rebuilt. In the meantime, enquiries are passed to Llangollen. There is a further supplementary information outlet located in Denbigh Library. The TIC in Mold is located within the town library and, although it contains a wealth of information and knowledgeable staff, is restricted by library opening hours (which includes Saturday opening Easter to October only). The Visitor Centre at Loggerheads has space dedicated to information on the Clwydian Range and interpretation of its key features.

Visits to the TICs have revealed that staff awareness and knowledge of the AONB is generally good, although as none have a direct focus on the Range, experience of the product and knowledge of specific details is less good. Nevertheless, staff are keen to know more about the AONB and promote it more. Very few enquiries come in relating directly to the AONB, although they will point visitors towards it if relevant. There are increasing numbers of enquiries to do with walking and other outdoor activities, particularly cycling. The TICs do offer an accommodation booking service and have full information on graded accommodation available in the Range.

Signage

Visitor signing to and within the AONB has strengths and weaknesses. Main roads, including the A55, carry entry signs to the AONB, which is important for the area's profile. However, this awareness is not maintained within the AONB, such as through use of the AONB logo on local destination signs. Few village signs indicate that they are in the AONB. Signage to attractions and sites is generally good although not always consistent. Signing of lay-bys and parking areas could be improved in places.

Interpretation

Interpretation of the AONB occurs in a number of rather fragmented ways. These include the small exhibition at Loggerheads Visitor Centre, panels at other countryside sites and some printed material such as *Discover Moel Famau Country Park: The Essential Guide for exploring Moel Famau* and various books on walks. The guided walks and other events clearly play an important interpretative function.

The Heather and Hillforts Landscape Partnership Scheme, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has interpretation as one of its key themes. The Scheme commissioned an Interpretative Plan and some of the concepts and ideas have been developed and are being implemented. Various creative techniques are being used. One approach is to design and locate material that is able to interpret the unique heritage to people who may be disinclined or unable actually to access the hillforts themselves. Interpretation is also included in the Local Geodiversity Action Plan.

1.7 Current Visitors

No dedicated visitor survey has been undertaken for the Clwydian Range in recent years. However a picture of visitor profiles and patterns can be built up from a number of sources. These include:

- Visitor surveys at a number of sites in the AONB in 2002 which was drawn together in a *Preliminary Report on Tourism within the AONB*.
- The Audience and Access Development Plan for the Heather and Hillforts scheme, which was based on a survey of local residents and a very small visitor survey, in 2004.
- The North Wales Visitor Survey 2004 provides an overview of visitors to Denbighshire and Flintshire.
- Local authority STEAM data for 2005.
- Impressions of the market profile of visitors, provided by enterprises in the AONB surveyed for this strategy.
- People counters on public rights of way and car counters in some countryside site car parks.

Visitor Numbers

There is no systematic method in place to allow the calculation of visitor numbers to the AONB. However, Loggerheads receives approximately 180,000 visitors per year, and Moel Famau some 160,000. It is estimated that 30,000 people walk Offa's Dyke National Trail each year, with between three and five thousand completing the full 177 mile stretch. It is generally believed that the vast majority of those coming to the AONB are day visitors and do not stay overnight. According to STEAM figures, 1.9million people visited Rural Denbighshire (of which 81% were day visitors), and 2.7million visited Flintshire (of which 72% were day visitors).

Visitors to Loggerheads and Moel Famau Country Parks

	2002	2003	2004	2005
Loggerheads	95,582	186,504	190,345	180,040
Moel Famau	95,635	131,288	162,999	164,865

Source: *Visits to Tourist Attractions 2005, Visit Wales*

Visitor profile and composition

According to the North Wales Visitor Survey, the region has a more mature visitor profile than the Welsh average with over 40% over 55 years and just under 40% aged 35-54. This is reflected in both the Denbighshire and Flintshire results which are close to the NW average.

The average party size of visitors to North Wales (NW) was just under 3 persons. The Denbighshire results reflect this whereas the average for Flintshire was slightly more at just over 3 persons.

59% of visitors to NW were ABC1 social class which is higher than the UK population but lower than most visitor surveys. 31% of visitors were from social classes C2DE which is lower than the UK population but higher than most visitor surveys in the UK. The figures for Denbighshire and Flintshire are 60% (ABC1) / 33% (C2DE) and 61% (ABC1) / 34% (C2DE) respectively.

Denbighshire (51%) and Flintshire (54%) both receive higher proportions of couples whose children have left home than the North Wales average (43%), but similar proportions of families (c24%).

Tourism enterprises surveyed suggested that older couples make up the largest market, and families with children make up only a relative small percentage of the current market of tourists who stay in the Range.

Origin and length of stay

The vast majority of visitors to Denbighshire and Flintshire come from the UK (93% and 95% respectively). In Denbighshire, the largest proportion was from North West England (37%) with 14% from the West Midlands (14%). 23% were North Wales residents on a day trip. In Flintshire, 49% came from North West England and over 25% were NW residents.

This is reflected in the lower level data. According to the Loggerheads Survey (2002), 30% of visitors came from Wirral and Merseyside, 17% from Chester and Cheshire, 27% from Flintshire and 11% from Denbighshire. Smaller attractions, such as Clwyd Forest, attract higher proportions of local visitors. It is important to note the links between Loggerheads Country Park and Merseyside – many young people come on school trips and then return in later life with their families. The Heather and Hillforts research of local residents found that over 60% of local respondents had visited Moel Famau and Loggerheads Country Park in the past year.

According to the enterprise survey undertaken for this report, when visitors do stay overnight they may stay up to 1 week, although most will stay for 2-3 nights which highlights the importance of the weekend / short break market.

The level of repeat visits is high. According to the NWVS, 78% of visitors to both counties had visited before. The enterprise survey estimated that 66% of visitors were on their second or subsequent trip. According to the 2002 visitor survey, 50% of all visitors visited 1-3 times a year.

Expenditure

The average level of visitor spending per head in the AONB appears to be relatively low, reflecting the high proportion of day visitors. In the 2002 survey, 36% said that car parking would be their only expenditure and another 32% said they would spend less than £5.

According to the NWVS, the average expenditure by visitors was £22.70 in Denbighshire and £20.83 in Flintshire, somewhat lower than the NW average of £27.17.

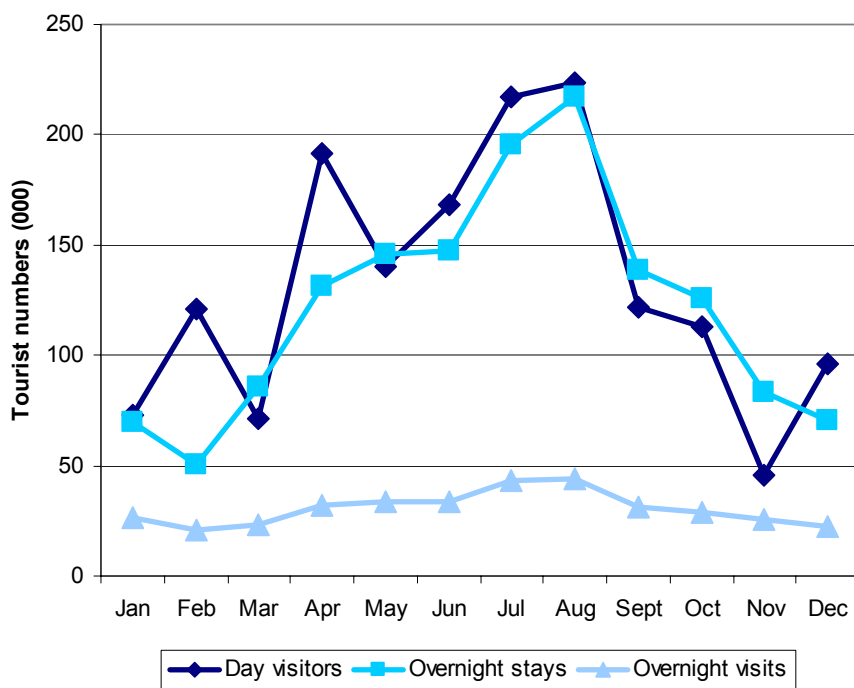
Seasonality

Anecdotal evidence suggests that tourism in the AONB is largely seasonal with the peak being in July and August. This is supported by the STEAM figures for Rural Denbighshire which show peaks in day visits and overnight stays during this time, with an additional peak in day visitors during April. Peaks in day visiting can also occur on certain days in winter when there is snow on the ground.

Table: Visits by month to Rural Denbighshire 2006

('000)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Day visits	73.0	121.0	71.4	191.6	140.5	168.2	216.8	223.3	121.5	113.0	45.8	96.4
Overnight visits ¹³	26.6	21.1	23.6	31.9	33.6	33.4	43.6	43.9	31.5	28.5	25.6	22.5
Overnight stays ¹⁴	69.7	50.6	85.4	131.1	146.0	147.1	195.2	217.0	138.7	125.6	83.7	70.9

Source: STEAM report for Rural Denbighshire 2006



Reasons for visit and activities undertaken

The evidence from past surveys suggests that the main attraction of the AONB is its beautiful landscape and visitors come to enjoy it in a number of ways, by driving through the Range, walking their dogs, walking a waymarked trail, or through activities such as mountain biking.

According to the visitor surveys in 2002, 65% of visitors come to walk or 'dog walk', with a further 12% coming for fresh air and exercise, which may have included walking. Over 50% had used one of the waymarked trails, including Offa's Dyke National Trail. Other activities included mountain biking, Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, hang gliding and paragliding, model gliders, abseiling, climbing and caving and fell running.

Accommodation used

As already mentioned, the majority of visitors to the AONB do not stay overnight in the Range. However, the 2002 research indicated that, of visitors staying overnight in the area, approximately 30% stayed with friends or relatives, a further 30% were

¹³ This refers to the number of people who stayed overnight (one or more nights) in Rural Denbighshire

¹⁴ This refers to the number of nights visitors stayed in Rural Denbighshire

camping and approximately 20% stayed in hotels or B&Bs. Very few were self catering.

1.8 Visitor perceptions

The sources identified in the last section can also be used to provide some evidence of what visitors feel about the area and what they may be looking for in the future.

An important conclusion from the 2002 visitor surveys was that the majority of regular visitors to the Clwydian Range want to see it kept as it is and are not particularly looking for more facilities. However, new or less frequent visitors, including those from further away, suggested that they would like more information and facilities. The need for more information and facilities comes out elsewhere in the surveys as well. Many cyclists interviewed called for more off-road cycle routes and information about them. It is important to remember, however, that this data is five years old and more provision has been made since then.

The 2004 surveys for the Heather and Hillforts project obtained data mainly from residents of Denbighshire and Flintshire (481 completed questionnaires), many of whom are regular visitors to the Range, together with a small number of people interviewed on site (84 completed questionnaires). These data can therefore be said to throw light on the perceptions of visitors and interested residents. When asked what would encourage them to visit the hills more frequently, over 50% mentioned the provision of more information, followed by public toilets (45%) and better signposting. Events and better parking were also quite frequently identified as important for encouraging visits.

It is reassuring to note that the vast majority of respondents to the above survey strongly supported the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the hills. However, this same group did not appear to see attracting more visitors to the area as being detrimental – indeed 62% were in favour of this and only 11% against.

When asked whether they would be interested in participating in a number of activities listed, 60% said that they would like to find out more about the heritage of the area, and 44% said that they would be interested in heritage guided walks.

1.9 Enterprise performance and needs

The results of the survey of local tourism enterprises are particularly important in guiding the tourism strategy. They are presented in detail in Annex 2 of this report.

Recent trends in tourism enterprise performance appear quite encouraging. Of those surveyed, 28% had seen significant growth in business in the last three years and 48% said that it had grown a little. 75% had made some investment or improvement in their facilities in this period, though often quite modest in nature. Over half (58%) were planning further investment in the next few years. The main barriers to investment and growth were seen as lack of capital and planning restrictions.

On the other hand, the need for increased levels of tourism is also strongly felt by local enterprises. 83% said that increased business was either essential or necessary for them to achieve reasonable profitability. Enterprises were particularly looking for more business in the months of November and January through March.

However, June and October also stood out as months when more business was sought, compared with the Easter period and high summer which tend to be busier.

The survey tested enterprises' reactions to a list of activities related to the Clwydian Range AONB in terms of their importance to the future success of their business. The full results are given in Figure 11 in Annex 2. The highest priority was given to more active marketing, information provision and branding of the Range as a place to visit. There was also a lot of support for improved web-pages and more packaging of accommodation and activities. Enterprises also wanted to be kept well informed about the AONB, to work together, and to have improved dialogue over planning policies.

1.10 Stakeholder feedback

In addition to individual consultation, a balanced view of stakeholder opinion was obtained from three workshops held in different parts of the Range. These were attended by some 70 participants, with a good mix of public sector officials, tourism enterprises, conservation interests and representatives of the local communities.

An initial exercise entailed participants working in pairs to rank the top three priority objectives for a tourism strategy in the Range, from a pre-prepared list. The results were weighted and the objectives are shown in rank order below.

Improve information on access and places to visit in the Range
Strengthen awareness and the identity of the Range
Improve the quality of the visitor experience of the Range
Manage the impact on the local environment - flora and fauna
Extend the range of tourism product offered within the Range
Support the services on which those who live in the Range depend
Manage the impact of visitors on the local community
Support existing tourism businesses within the Range
Provide more resources for conservation activity within the Range
Encourage visitors to reduce their dependence on the private car
Encourage visitors to increase their length of stay
Extend the season for visits to the Range
Bring new job opportunities to the area

Priority was given to issues of information, identity and quality of visitor experience, followed by concerns for managing impacts on the environment and communities. More specific objectives, such as reducing car dependency, increasing length of stay and providing more jobs, were less likely to be identified in the top three. Discussion revealed that while these were not considered as unimportant, stakeholders felt that by generally promoting the area more effectively as a high quality and well managed visitor destination, other benefits would flow from this.

Stakeholders at the workshops spent time identifying the benefits and problems brought by tourism in the Clwydian Range, their vision of what tourism in the area would look like in 10 years time, and some ideas for action.

Benefits were seen mainly in terms of bringing life and prosperity to the area, supporting local shops and services and local jobs. Stakeholders felt that income from tourism benefited conservation and the cultural identity and recreational

opportunities which could be enjoyed by residents. Health benefits of outdoor recreation were mentioned.

Two main problems were identified. The first was congestion from traffic, on roads and in villages. Car parking was considered to be inadequate in places, but it was appreciated that the solution may be more complex than simply extending car parking provision, which is not favoured by everyone. Public transport was considered as generally inadequate and poorly connected, but even if it was improved there was doubt about the possibility of achieving a significant switch away from car use. The second main problem identified was from certain specific activities that caused disturbance and other damage, notably motorised access on the hills and some motor sport events. It was felt that bylaws to prevent this were inadequate or poorly applied. Other problems raised included: patchy quality of visitor facilities; inflexible application of planning control; insufficient marketing; poor signing in places; and seasonality of demand (although stakeholders noted some improvement with this latter issue).

The vision for the future was of a distinctive area, better known as a place to stay, which had maintained and enhanced its special qualities. Tourism was seen as being largely small scale, provided by small enterprises which were better linked together than at present. Packaging of opportunities should be encouraged. The Range was seen as a place both for quiet enjoyment of the countryside, appealing to a range of markets, and for a set of specific activities. Walking and to a lesser extent mountain biking were seen as providing a major reason for people to come to the area. Stakeholders were keen to see local communities becoming increasingly engaged in planning and benefiting from tourism and interacting with visitors. It was also felt to be important to see more benefit to farmers from visitor spending, directly or through stimulating the sale of local produce. Creative and appropriate diversification was supported, including the use of existing buildings, with planning policies adjusted to allow this. There was a desire to see greater spend per head by visitors, and also a general increase in awareness of the environment and how to protect it.

Priorities for action identified at the workshops included the following:

- Improved marketing, including reassessing the North Wales Borderlands campaign and how the Clwydian Range can benefit from this.
- Ensuring coordination with other tourism initiatives in Denbighshire and Flintshire
- Strengthening the Clwydian Range website and links into and out of it.
- Training that is really well tailored to the needs of businesses and their ability to respond to it.
- Improved familiarisation for businesses about the AONB and its attributes.
- Better coordination of public transport provision
- Better knowledge of current visitors and what might encourage them to spend more time and money here, and improved feedback from them as a stimulant for quality.
- Developing a wider range of activities, including equestrian tourism.
- Developing and linking more small scale attractions and interpretative sites.
- Improved information, including creating one leaflet for the Range, showing the main locations and activities.
- Providing and promoting a range of walks for people of all abilities.

1.11 Market Trends

Information on market trends in the Clwydian Range itself is quite limited. In general, it appears that tourism demand has been growing in the last few years as evidenced by visitor numbers at attractions and the results of the enterprise survey. The North Wales Borderlands area appears to have been performing slightly better than Wales as a whole.

Visit Wales has ceased to make quantitative market forecasts. Rather, marketing is guided by assessment of relevant trends, including wider economic trends and lifestyle changes. Segmentation of markets is based primarily on attitudinal factors.

The domestic segment identified as providing greatest opportunity for Wales and which is taken as a priority in Visit Wales marketing is the Independent Explorer. The description of this segment, which follows, suggests that it is well suited to the strengths and aspirations of the Clwydian Range:

Independent explorers are in search of new experiences and places. They are slightly upmarket and tend to be adults aged 30 years and over. They shun the over commercialised tourist honey pots. They are free minded, they do not follow the herd. They are free spirited, they look for places that allow them to be themselves, that enrich them, that challenge them. They like to interact with the place to understand culture, to meet its people and to return refreshed and enriched.

The above market segment relates well to a number of general market trends which can be observed in the UK as a whole. Those most relevant to the Clwydian Range can be summarised as follows:

- Ongoing growth in short breaks, to cities but also to the countryside. These include weekend but also extended and mid week breaks.
- Recovery in overseas markets, including traditional markets of Ireland, USA, Germany, Netherlands and France, which are Visit Wales's main targets.
- Ongoing growth in day visit taking, but affected by access and congestion issues.
- A population that is increasingly money rich but time poor.
- A general tendency for higher quality accommodation enterprises to outperform others.
- Climate change – stimulating more weekend break taking away from the main summer period.
- Increasing desire for new experiences and for exploring different, distinctive places.
- Increase in concern for health and interest in energetic activities – on day trips and holidays.
- Major recent growth in internet use in visit information gathering.
- Increasing environmental interest and awareness.
- Ongoing stiff competition from overseas destinations, fuelled by low cost flights.

1.12 SWOT Analysis

The assessment of tourism in the Clwydian Range, based on the consultation undertaken and the evidence assembled in this chapter, can be summarised in the following SWOT analysis. It is important to note that 'Opportunities' are taken as external and internal factors that create the context for future success, rather than as a list of specific opportunities to pursue.

Strengths

- Attractive natural and man-made landscapes throughout the area
- Distinctive upland ridge – visible and identifiable
- AONB designation – one of few in Wales
- Very extensive views
- Proximity to large population (but this is also a weakness)
- Gentle and easily accessed hills, compared to much of Wales
- Hillforts and Jubilee Tower, creating iconic shapes and features
- Specific natural and cultural heritage interest (grouse, geology, hillforts etc.)
- Themed events programme
- Variety of country parks and other managed access areas
- Offa's Dyke National Trail as established popular National Trail
- Recent development of mountain biking facilities
- Some picturesque villages
- Nearby attractive and historic gateway towns
- Proximity to other attractive rural areas – Vale of Clwyd, Vale of Llangollen, Dee Estuary
- Proximity to the coast

Weaknesses

- Small size of the Range and the AONB, limiting the scope as a destination
- Limited amount and range of accommodation in the Range itself
- A lot of unregistered accommodation - probably of patchy quality and difficult to promote
- Very few diversified attractions
- Farms not closely tied in to tourism
- Very little awareness of Clwydian Range brand, especially outside the area
- Constrained parking and road capacity
- Limited public transport and poor connectivity
- Limited staff time specifically dedicated to AONB (compared with other protected areas)

Opportunities

- Strong local attachment to the Clwydian Range
- Positive support for increasing sustainable tourism from a wide range of stakeholders
- Gateway towns keen to link to and get more out of association with the Range
- Growing short breaks market, notably the Independent Explorers segment
- Growing outdoor activities market
- Heather and Hillforts project providing impetus for creative access and interpretation
- Clwydian Ranger bus service already established as an initiative to develop
- A number of other local initiatives that can be strengthened and expanded
- Possible southwards extension of the AONB area
- New Rural Development Plans and associated funding opportunities
- Local Geodiversity Action Plan provides a wealth of information and raises awareness of the area
- Sustainable Development Fund as a potential funding source

Threats

- Overlap of destination brands, causing confusion and duplication of effort
- A culture of dependency on external funding, especially from Europe
- Increasing pressure from day visitors, especially from their cars, bring local resentment and devaluing the experience for staying visitors
- Cuts in local authority budgets to support tourism and necessary infrastructure
- Increased competition from other destinations in UK and Europe, including neighbouring areas such as the Lake District and Snowdonia.
- Inappropriate development and activities damaging the area's special appeal

2 STRATEGY

This chapter looks at the current policy context for tourism in the Clwydian Range, and draws attention to the requirements of the European Charter. Stemming from the assessment and analysis in the previous chapter, it sets out a strategic approach and vision for sustainable tourism in the AONB, identifies target markets and presents a set of functional objectives that form the framework for the action plan.

2.1 Current policy framework

The tourism strategy for the Clwydian Range should reflect where possible the current policies for sustainable development, the environment, the countryside, culture and tourism in Wales and the region (Denbighshire and Flintshire). It is also extremely important that the strategy is closely aligned to the Management Plan for the Clwydian Range AONB.

An analysis of some of the main current policy documents is contained in Annex 3 of this report. The main points arising from this analysis which have a particular relevance for the sustainable tourism strategy are as follows:

- Tourism is clearly identified as an important economic force on Denbighshire and Flintshire. It is referred to explicitly in the Economic Development Plans for both counties, as it is seen as a sector exhibiting market growth and capable of generating employment locally including in villages and small towns. The strategies call for improved quality, skills and market access (including packaging) in the sector.
- More specifically, tourism is recognised as contributing very significantly to the Rural Development Plan for Wales and the two local Rural Development Strategies (RDSs) for Denbighshire and Flintshire. Its key role here is seen as helping to diversify the rural economy in a way which will support cultural distinctiveness, sense of place and the quality of the environment. Strong integration with other aspects of the rural economy is called for. The RDS's variously identify more particular tourism priorities, including improving quality standards, collaborative marketing, use of I.C.T. and promoting environmental tourism.
- Within the context of tourism strategies per se, the concept of sustainable tourism is clearly recognised and promoted in Wales. It is one of the four key themes of the Wales Tourism Strategy, Achieving our Potential, leading to benefits to local communities and the environment.
- The quality of the natural environment and landscape is recognised as a key tourism resource in national, regional and local tourism strategies. In this regard, the regional and local tourism strategies already recognise the Clwydian Range as a key tourism asset for north east Wales, which is as yet little known.
- Key themes emerging in all tourism strategies include: reducing seasonality; capitalising on the growth of short breaks; strengthening local distinctiveness; partnership working and improving destination branding and identity. All are relevant to the Clwydian Range.

- The AONB Management Plan for the Clwydian Range does not contain specific tourism policies. However, it recognises the importance of tourism to its overall objectives, and creates the right context for sustainable tourism. Two key principles include:
 - UPS5: *To enhance the economic potential of the area, whilst reconciling the need to protect the environment, for example through cultural tourism opportunities.*
 - UPA4: *To raise the profile of the AONB among those living and working there and visitors to the area.*

Perhaps the most directly relevant of the Policies in the Management Plan is Policy 6: *To promote the sustainable use and enjoyment of the landscape of the AONB in a way that contributes to local prosperity and social inclusiveness.*

- There is a clear sense from the AONB Management Plan and the objectives of the Heather and Hillforts scheme, that policies and actions towards visitors should not be dominated by economic considerations. Key policies relate to improving awareness, appreciation, understanding and enjoyment. Social inclusion and enabling access for all are important elements of the policy context.

A Tourism Strategy for Flintshire has been prepared, covering the period 2007 – 2013. The strategy's overall vision encompasses increasing visitor numbers, increasing the value of tourism, developing a stronger sense of place for Flintshire, improving access to information, improving the quality of accommodation and attractions and monitoring the impact of tourism.

A new tourism strategy for Denbighshire is about to be commissioned. This will have a specific task of pulling together the various strands of tourism in the county, including the needs of the coastal strip and rural Denbighshire. It will reflect recent tourism strategies and action plans in the Dee Valley and the Vale of Clwyd, and will also seek to integrate this tourism strategy and action plan for the Clwydian Range into wider tourism policies and actions for the county.

2.2 European Charter requirements

The Clwydian Range is seeking to comply with the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and to be duly recognised under the Charter.

The European Charter explicitly refers to a balance between the needs of the environment, the visitor and the host community. It emphasises the need to conserve, bring out and promote the special qualities of each protected area as a basis of its tourism offer. It identifies four key aims for sustainable tourism in protected areas that it requires a sustainable tourism strategy to address:

- To conserve, enhance and gain value from the environment and heritage
- To increase economic and social benefits from tourism
- To protect and improve the quality of life of local people
- To engage in effective visitor management and enhance the quality of tourism offered.

The Charter elaborates these four aims in a set of 12 principles, or underlying aims, which point the way to the kinds of structures and actions required. These are:

1. To increase awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas as a fundamental part of our heritage that should be preserved for, and enjoyed by, current and future generations.
2. To improve the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, this takes account of the needs of the environment, local residents, local 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.

Particular requirements for the award of the Charter include:

- A permanent structure for working together. Specifically, the Charter expects that: *A permanent forum, or equivalent arrangement should be established between the protected area authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism industry*
- A strategy for sustainable tourism in the protected area. This needs to be based on local consultation and an assessment of the area's needs and opportunities. The aims of the strategy should be in line with the four key aims set out above.
- An action plan for five years. This should identify the responsibilities of the different players and ensures that the 12 principles of the Charter are addressed in the protected area.

2.3 Strategic approach

Based on our consultation, surveys and findings, we suggest that the sustainable tourism strategy for the Clwydian Range should embrace the following approach:

- **Recognising the Clwydian Range as a jewel in the crown in the tourism product of the North Wales Borderlands (and beyond this within North Wales and Wales as a whole) based on easy access to exceptional landscape and associated cultural and natural heritage.**
- **Giving highest priority to the conservation of environment and the area's special qualities, and to the management of visitors, as a basis for sustainable tourism, and being recognised for this at a national and European level.**

- **Developing and projecting a range of diverse visitor experiences, supported by high quality visitor facilities and services, based primarily around outdoor activities and the interpretation of heritage.**
- **Seeking a higher return to the local economy from people who come to the Range, increasing length of stay and spend per head.**
- **Helping local tourism related enterprises¹⁵ to understand the special qualities of the Range, to identify with it, to work together, and to put these qualities across to visitors.**
- **Pursing an active visitor management policy, based on providing excellent facilities at certain key sites, judicious encouragement of exploration and dispersal, and promoting more environmentally friendly access.**
- **Working with local communities to gain more benefit from tourism and to minimise pressures on them.**
- **Adding value to the tourism product, and hence the economic prosperity, in the rest of Denbighshire and Flintshire, and especially the surrounding gateway towns of Mold, Ruthin, Denbigh and Prestatyn.**
- **Gaining from the services and complementary attractions available in the surrounding area and gateway towns.**

2.4 Vision

In 2013:

The Clwydian Range is a well known fine upland area, very accessible and with stupendous views, providing one of the main reasons why people come to North East Wales. Many people come here for short breaks for two nights or more, staying in good quality rural accommodation in the Range or in the surrounding towns and villages. Many are repeat visitors, often having come here first for the day or passing through but now preferring to stay over.

The area provides a wide range of outdoor activities, which visitors can select and book from easy to use information. Most local people and visitors are enthusiastic about the area's landscape, geodiversity, biodiversity and interesting cultural heritage sites, understand something about them and support their conservation.

The proportion of people who are not reliant on a private car to reach or explore the Range has been increasing each year. Vehicle access is well managed, and traffic congestion and car parking does not present a problem.

Over 60% of tourism enterprises are involved with environmental management and are recognised for it. They are also well aware of the special qualities of the Range and pass this on to their guests. The enterprises feel involved with the management, conservation and promotion of the Range as a location for sustainable and outdoor tourism, with good communication between them and with the AONB and countryside management teams.

¹⁵ This includes rural enterprises, such as shops, pubs, garages and post offices, due to their essential part in the visitor experience

2.5 Target markets

Primary targets:

Short and extended breaks, taken in the area

General markets, mainly couples without dependent children. Interested in exploring rural areas with a mix of walking and heritage. Some may be repeat visitors to the area. Primarily from north of England and Midlands.

Active outdoor recreation seekers, where activity is main purpose of holiday/break.

The largest market is for walking holidays, both linear but also centre based. Other markets include cyclists, mountain bikers and horse riders, and some other specific interests such as fishing. Staying markets/breaks should be targeted, through information linking accommodation with a range of activities.

Secondary targets:

Holiday takers in Wales – domestic and overseas

Visitors to Wales (especially N Wales) who could be encouraged to include the Range in their choice of places to visit. Targets should be aligned with Visit Wales targets for domestic and overseas markets. The 'independent explorers' segment is especially relevant.

Transit traffic

Users of the A55 and other through-routes to Snowdonia and Ireland (Holyhead). The approach should include encouraging stops, but more especially raising awareness and interest for return visits.

Educational groups

This includes formal and informal educational groups, based primarily around outdoor and environmental education.

Wildlife/conservation enthusiasts

People with a general or specific interest in biodiversity, geodiversity, heritage and conservation, who may be attracted by particular events or participatory activity.

Day visitors

This is a segment seen as a key market to influence (seeking increased spending and alternative access) rather than to expand. However, some growth at less busy times of year could be sought.

2.6 Objectives

In order to achieve the vision, and following the strategic approach outlined above, a set of action is proposed over the next five years. This action will be pursued within the framework of the following five objectives.

1. To raise awareness of the Clwydian Range and all that it has to offer to visitors, encouraging exploration and longer stays

This objective is particularly related to European Charter principles 1 and 7 concerning effective communication of the special qualities of protected areas to visitors, while also supporting principle 11 on generating benefit to the local economy.

2. To develop and enhance a set of visitor experiences based on outdoor recreation and appreciation of the area's natural and cultural heritage

This is central to Charter principle 8 on promoting specific products that enable discovery and understanding of the area. It also supports principle 6 on the quality of the visitor experience.

3. To encourage and support tourism related enterprises in the development and improvement of facilities and services, environmental management, and their relationship to the AONB

This relates primarily to Charter principle 6 on quality, but is also important with respect to principle 5 on environmental impact, and 3 and 9 concerning stakeholder engagement and knowledge.

4. To improve the management of visitor flows to and within the Range, including impact on the environment and communities within the AONB and in the surrounding area.

This objective supports both principle 5 of the Charter on environmental protection, principle 10 on impact on the quality of life of communities, and principle 12 on monitoring and influencing visitor flows.

5. To strengthen understanding of the visitors to the AONB and the impacts of tourism on the area.

This is primarily relevant to Charter principle 12 on monitoring, but also relates well to principle 5 on protection and 9 on stakeholder knowledge.

2.7 Indicators

A key principle of sustainable tourism is that it should involve a process of monitoring impacts on the economy, society and the environment on a regular basis, so that modification action can be taken in the light of unacceptable change.

Indicators of sustainability are required, against which monitoring of change can take place.

Many studies have been carried out to identify sustainability indicators for destinations. A recent list of 50 possible indicators was produced for the European Union's Tourism Sustainability Group¹⁶. This can be used as a basis for selecting indicators for the Range. However, it is suggested that the following indicators from the list should be adopted as principle indicators:

¹⁶ *Action for more sustainable European tourism.*

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/services/tourism/doc/tsg/TSG_Final_Report.pdf

- Visitor numbers at key sites (admissions, car park tickets)
- Number and % of bedspaces in registered/quality graded accommodation (audit)
- Monthly occupancy of accommodation (constant sample of businesses agreeing to provide data)
- Average spend per head (visitor survey)
- Average length of stay (visitor survey)
- % of visitors arriving by means other than car (visitor survey)
- % of visitors using public transport within destination (visitor survey)
- Number of jobs supported (enterprise survey)
- % of residents indicating that they are satisfied with local impact of tourism (residents survey)
- Environmental state of selected sites (observational)
- % of visitors satisfied with the experience (visitor survey)

NB many of these indicators are collated using the STEAM model. There is opportunity to develop its use for the AONB specifically.

3 ACTION

This chapter describes a set of actions that will be pursued over the next five years to implement the strategy, grouped under the five functional objectives. In the final chapter these are summarised in an action table, with identified priority, responsibilities, indicative costs and funding sources.

1 To raise awareness of the Clwydian Range and all that it has to offer to visitors, encouraging exploration and longer stays
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This objective will be addressed by a set of action on marketing and information delivery.

1a Define Clwydian Range brand and disseminate guidance on brand identity and usage

Marketing and information delivery should be underscored by a strong brand policy. This should involve brand definition and then providing devices for spreading brand identity, awareness and exposure.

The current Clwydian Range logo is a reasonable well established device for signalling association with the brand, with an appropriate design. More work is needed on clarifying the brand values behind the logo and how, and by whom, it should be applied.

Action should include:

- Agreeing on core brand values, a positioning statement and associated messages that define the brand.
- Agreeing on a policy of use of the Clwydian Range logo. This should include:
 - Use on all material that specifically refers to the Range.
 - Use by enterprises and other stakeholders that wish to associate themselves with the Range, subject to meeting an agreed set of criteria. These criteria may be linked to environmental accreditation (see under Objective 3).
- Preparing a technical advice note on how the logo should be used, including graphic and design details.

1b Strengthen profile and coverage of the Range in destination promotion

The approach here is not to establish a new and expensive separate promotion for the Clwydian Range as a destination but to ensure that the Range is far better promoted within existing destination marketing activity.

This particularly applies to the North Wales Borderland campaign (website and print) where the profile of the Range is currently very low. This may partly be explained by the relative lack of accommodation and specific attractions in the Range, but conversely a higher profile identification of the Range as a special feature is well

justified in terms of stimulating interest in visiting the wider region with consequent economic benefits for all.

The review of marketing areas in Wales and the new Denbighshire Tourism Marketing Strategy will set parameters for ongoing marketing of the area, and the promotion of the Range should tie in with this.

Action should include:

- Commissioning, maintaining and making available a set of high quality photographs, picking up on the area's core brand values and reflecting sustainability issues in terms of selection of sites, activities and seasons to illustrate.
- Preparing suitable text about the Range, and particular messages to put over, that can be used in various media.
- Seeking to influence not only public sector related destination promotion (Borderlands, counties, TPNW, Visit Wales) but also private sector and commercial publications.

1c Maximise the impact of the Clwydian Range website

By far the most cost effective marketing vehicle is the AONB website. This should be given highest priority as the basis for promotion and information delivery. Although the current site has some strong features, it could be made more effective.

A programme of revamping and developing the site should be completed, which should pay special attention to:

- More evocative messages, backed with hard information, on what the area has to offer.
- An emphasis on staying visit opportunities – including accommodation information and linking this to activities etc.
- Information content that is specifically designed to reflect the strategic approach and actions set out elsewhere in this document – for example, a really practical and highly visible feature on reaching and exploring the Range by public transport.
- Improving the usability of the site, from maps to annotated listings, backed up by readily downloadable information.

Action should also be taken to drive business to the site. This can be achieved by strengthening links to and from the site and by various content management techniques that maximise search engine visibility. Key words used to reach the site should be closely monitored and content adjusted accordingly.

1d Undertake targeted and selected tactical promotion

A small amount of direct promotion of the Range is proposed (in addition to its coverage in destination marketing in 1a). This should be particularly related to encouraging staying tourism, notably out of season, and may relate to particular themes and activities as identified under Objective 2.

Action should include:

- Stimulating media coverage, notably in outdoor and environmental media.

- Participating in a small number of carefully selected events and exhibitions, with the use of good quality display material.
- Supporting clusters of enterprises in their own promotions.
- Investigate and improve opportunities to market the AONB in North West England, specifically, Cheshire, Wirral and Merseyside.

1e Produce dedicated print items covering the whole Range experience

Print should be available that sets out very clearly what the Range has to offer. This should be orientated as much to visitors already in the area, who may be less likely to access the website, as to people seeking information prior to arrival. There is an important role for two different types of print:

- Magazine style, with articles describing the special qualities and features of the area, strengthening understanding, interest and support. This is well performed by Capturing the Clwyds and this should be continued.
- A new, comprehensive orientation piece, fold out and map-based. The objective of this will be to make it absolutely clear where the Range is, what it covers, and all the various ways to access and enjoy it. Unlike Capturing the Clwyds, which provides evocative copy, it should be focussed on hard information. It should contain standardised entries on visitor attraction and activity providers.

1f Improve distribution and visibility of information

Strengthening exposure of visitors to information will influence behaviour on current and repeat visits as well as raising awareness and profile of the area.

Action should include:

- Reviewing all distribution processes and outlets.
- Maximising the visibility and use of Range information in accommodation outlets, including the use of bedroom browsers.
- Encouraging accommodation enterprises to make visitors aware of information prior to arrival – for example through providing the Range website to all enquirers and bookers.
- Raising the visibility of Range information in a variety of local outlets – TICs, shops, garages, public venues – through dedicated racking bearing the Range logo.

1g Use signage to raise awareness of the Range

Significant success has been achieved with securing identification signs for the Range in a number of locations. It could still be more comprehensive.

Action includes:

- Completing signing of the AONB/Clwydian Range on the main A55 throughroute.
- Preparing and implementing a schedule for provision of AONB/Clwydian Range signs on all main routes into/through the AONB.
- Preparing a sign that can be used as an adjunct to entrance signs for villages to identify them as communities of the Range, and seeking agreement with communities for their use.

2 To develop and enhance a set of visitor experiences based on outdoor recreation and appreciation of the area's natural and cultural heritage

Actions to achieve this objective focus on developing and improving product offers around countryside themes, relating them particularly to encouraging more overnight stays, and improving the way they are presented to the market.

2a Strengthen and package the walking offer

Walking appeals to a large and very varied market and is the premier product of the Range. The Offa's Dyke Path (ODP) is a major generator of business for much of the accommodation and pubs. Ways of gaining more year round benefit from the market should be pursued. Identification and promotion of walks is being supported through the new walks books for Flintshire and Denbighshire, but more consideration should be given to raising the profile and awareness of walks in and around the Range itself.

A comprehensive programme of action should be introduced to really put the Range on the map as a leading walking area. This would entail:

- Using the profile of the ODP as a draw.
- Setting out a suite of walking opportunities at all levels, including circular walks and linear walks that use public transport.
- Bringing together accommodation operators with an interest in walking – reviewing walkers welcome standards and how these are applied and promoted locally.
- Pursuing publicity seeking events, and media coverage, around walking.
- Stepping up the walking offer on the main CR website, with links to other walking related sites.
- Maintaining a programme of route improvement and maintenance, prioritised on the walks promoted to visitors.

2b Strengthen and package the mountain biking offer

Mountain biking has been the subject of a number of active and successful initiatives in the area in recent years, including the Llandegla centre and the Ride the Clwyds initiative. These provide the basis for cementing the area as a leading destination for mountain biking. Further action is needed, involving:

- Providing ongoing support for the Ride the Clwyds initiative; pursuing income streams that may make it more financially sustainable, including advertising.
- Further strengthening links with local accommodation providers.
- Pursuing careful extension of the mountain bike trail network.
- Continue support for existing cycle events (i.e, Merida) and develop opportunities for new cycle events and challenges from the private sector.

2c Investigate and develop on/off road cycling product

Cycling holidays, and casual cycling on holiday, are becoming increasingly popular. There is a link here to mountain biking (for example Llandegla has a family cycle trail) but in general the cycling touring and family cycling markets appear to be rather undercatered for in the area.

Owing to the small size of the AONB, the approach to the cycling holiday market may be best tackled over the wider area of Denbighshire and Flintshire, but with certain action taken within the Range to strengthen the opportunities here. This could include:

- Investigating the possibility of opening up more off-road cycling opportunities, including the feasibility of using the old rail track from Mold to Denbigh.
- Identifying on-road routes suitable for cycling, with a review and implementation of possible relevant management and calming measures.
- Improving information for cyclists and strengthen area wide marketing.

2d Develop riding product and offers

Riding tourism provides a small but growing and high spend market, suited to many rural areas seeking to promote sustainable tourism.

One form of riding tourism involves facilitating riding holidays for people with their own horses. A positive initiative has already been taken here by Cadwyn Clwyd through their support for the *Wales on Horseback* initiative, which offers riding between rural accommodation providers. It covers a wider area but around 80% of enquiries are for the Range. This should be further assisted through:

- Improvement of bridleways, including strategic permissive links where required.
- Supporting improvements to accommodation, including bringing them up to minimum standards for quality grading.
- Further support for marketing.

Provision of riding establishments with horses for hire, such as pony trekking centres, has been static in many rural areas, owing partly to issues of insurance. However, there is still market demand and opportunities should be promoted, and further development encouraged as appropriate.

2e Further develop linkages and product around fishing

There are more locations for fishing in the area than for any other outdoor activity. Cadwyn Clwyd has produced a brochure on fishing in the Clwyds which links these sites. However, more action could be taken to strengthen the impact of this initiative, including:

- Bringing the providers together in a network.
- Improving the quality of the information, including better identity with the Clwydian Range.
- Strengthening links to accommodation.
- Limited tactical promotion.

2f Develop events, including geodiversity, biodiversity, culture and heritage themes, and promote them as a holiday experience

The Out & About in Denbighshire's countryside programme is a strength of the AONB, and specific themed events have been particularly popular. They can be good at stimulating visits at different times of the year and evening or early morning events encourage overnight stays. An example is the black grouse viewing events. More could be made of events and conservation interest as a tourism resource, with action including:

- Extending the presence of creative themed events in the programme and investigating the possibility of including community events.

- Achieving much better promotion of the events programme through the accommodation establishments.
- Highlighting events up front in the CR website and publicity.
- Looking at the potential to promote and develop more active conservation holidays.
- Utilising the Denbighshire 'What's on' web pages and encouraging the AONB community to submit their events.

2g Improve coordination of interpretation of the Range as a component of the visitor experience

There are various opportunities for creatively improving interpretation of landscape, wildlife and historic and cultural heritage of the Clwydian Range, and to use this to strengthen the visitor experience and length of stay. The Heather and Hillforts programme is pursuing a number of interpretative initiatives, contained within their interpretation plan *Understanding our Uplands*. The Local Geodiversity Action Plan for the Clwydian Range also supports various interpretative activities.

It is important that these schemes, which have different orientations, are related to the sustainable tourism strategy. This may require further coordination of interpretation on behalf of the AONB, paying particular attention to:

- The specific needs of the AONB, its conservation objectives and links to the Management Plan.
- The strategic relationship between interpretation, the appeal of sites, visitor flows and information.

Based on this, specific action should be supported to implement a range of interpretation provision, including:

- Sensitive interpretative displays at a number of key sites.
- Provision of creative linkages between sites, such as the interpretative trails using new technology proposed in the Heather and Hillforts programme.
- Strengthening the events programme, as identified at 2f above.

This interpretation action should involve local communities, as covered under action 4d below.

2h Strengthen Clwydian Range presence in wider promotion of local produce and crafts

Consultation has revealed a lot of interest in promoting local food and craft products, as a way of strengthening the distinctiveness of the area and of retaining more spend in the local economy. However, it was generally felt that the amount of production within the Range itself was too limited to support a separate campaign for the area.

Action should therefore involve:

- Encouraging more participation by Clwydian Range producers, users and suppliers (e.g. farmers, catering outlets and retailers) in wider food/produce schemes within Denbighshire, Flintshire and the Cadwyn Clwyd area as a whole.
- Specifically identifying those producers/products which are in the Range, within these wider schemes.

3 To encourage and support tourism related enterprises in the development and improvement of facilities and services, environmental management, and their relationship to the AONB

Actions to achieve this objective cover creating the right context and support for enterprises in the area to prosper and also to engage in meeting the wider sustainability objectives of the AONB. They are focussed on tourism enterprises, such as accommodation providers, but also relate to other enterprises that support or gain from tourism, such as shops, garages and other service providers.

3a Ensure all tourism related enterprises have excellent knowledge of the AONB and pass this on to their visitors

A high priority should be given to strengthening the relationship between individual tourism enterprises and the AONB. This is an important aspect of the European Charter – the recently introduced Part 2 of the Charter prescribes a process of recognising those enterprises that have developed such a relationship, identifying them as partners.

Central to this is the level of awareness by tourism enterprises of the special qualities of the AONB and the various ways it can be enjoyed. This can be strengthened by the following action:

- Holding social familiarisation events for information staff, tourism enterprises and other local enterprises that have contact with visitors in and around the AONB and wider in Denbighshire, Flintshire, and Wrexham. There is an opportunity to link with the Heather & Hillforts Heritage Host project.
- Providing talks, training events etc.
- Strengthening networking between local stakeholders.
- Providing reference materials on the AONB (in addition to literature distribution as identified in 1f).
- Raising the profile of the AONB with the local residents and encouraging the use of information to pass to visiting friends and relatives.

The experience of the Cantata programme in Denbighshire could be of use here.

3b Encourage and support tourism enterprises in environmental management.

Part 2 of the Charter will also require tourism enterprises to demonstrate an active approach to environmental management, recognising that by being located in and around a protected area they should be seen as leading the way in such matters.

Action should include:

- Setting up a network between enterprises to work together and support and encourage each others on environmental work.
- Actively encouraging participation in the Green Dragon award scheme, identifying and seeking to overcome any barriers to this. Targets for participation should be set.
- Providing some dedicated training sessions for the network, with access to individual advice if required.
- Providing grant assistance to help with environmental management.
- Ensuring the relevant public services are in place, including recycling.

3c Work with enterprises to raise support for conservation

The Charter encourages initiatives to raise support for conservation from tourism enterprises and visitors. Some protected areas in the UK have established 'visitor payback' schemes with tourism enterprises providing the vehicle for raising voluntary support from their visitors for specific conservation projects. Opportunities to pursue this approach should be discussed and pursued in the Clwydian Range.

3d Provide assistance for improvement (in quality and performance) and development of tourism enterprises

The current provision of accommodation and attractions in and around the Range is quite limited, and there is also scope for improvement amongst existing enterprises. Particular opportunities to pursue are quality self-catering, inns and B&B accommodation, appropriate attractions related to heritage and nature, and activity centres.

Actions to support this include:

- Ensuring all tourism enterprises have access to appropriate business support. Currently there is no dedicated service for this, but there is a recommendation that a dedicated rural tourism business support structure should be created for Denbighshire¹⁷.
- Facilitating clusters of enterprises to identify their own training needs and then supporting relevant provision (as in the Gallu scheme on S Wales, which is being looked at in this region). Some dedicated training could be provided for business clusters in the AONB.
- Providing a dedicated fund to be used tactically to support specific tourism business improvements, including environmental management activity as in 3b.

3e Reassess planning policies relating to tourism enterprise development and improvement and promote understanding of them

Planning policies and their application have arisen as a major issue during the consultation. While strict planning control has been a major ally of tourism, through ensuring a pristine and unspoiled countryside, there do appear to be occasions where some flexibility, for example in the conversion of existing buildings, might have led to the establishment or improvement of tourism enterprises of good quality, without detriment to the environment.

This situation could be improved by greater clarity of planning policy towards different kinds of tourism development. Currently, supplementary planning guidance is being prepared for the AONB in the form of design guidelines. This should take account of tourism issues. In general, the emphasis placed on use of existing buildings, rather than new build, maintaining the local vernacular, and minimising landscape impact through appropriate screening, should be retained. Action to communicate the guidelines and improve dialogue with existing and potential tourism providers should be pursued.

¹⁷ In *Growing Denbighshire's Tourism Product – Strategic Priorities for Investment*, Crease, 2007

4 To improve the management of visitor flows to and within the Range, including impact on the environment and communities in the AONB and the surrounding area

Actions to achieve this objective include work to improve and manage accessibility and visitor flows and to shape the way visitors are catered for and managed at individual sites and within local communities.

4a Support a programme of enhancement and maintenance of facilities at key sites

The country parks and other key sites, owned and managed by the local authorities and the Forestry Commission, provide a major resource for tourism in the area. The strategy should be to maintain and improve the quality of experience that they are able to offer visitors, while managing and catering for increased numbers over time, and using certain sites to orientate visitors to what the rest of the Range has to offer.

The Loggerheads and Moel Famau area is very important as a gateway and honeypot location for the Range. The area is under pressure, notably from car parking, at certain times of year. Further investment is needed in this area, supported by this strategy and action plan.

At Loggerheads a comprehensive programme of investment and improvement is needed over time, to include:

- A feasibility study into car parking, looking at supply and demand, and making recommendations on actions to relieve pressure as well as provide well managed expansion. This may subsequently lead to new investment.
- A plan of action to create better use of the existing buildings, including the shop.
- A study of the mill, with proposals for interpretation and visitor access, leading to implementation.
- Improvements to the tea gardens.
- Improvement of trails, including disabled access to the lower path loop.
- Provision for recycling, so that Loggerheads can be an exemplary operation in terms of environmental management.
- Provision of more human resources, notably a warden to facilitate visitor management and communication.

At Moel Famau, work is needed on the car park, including its surface, to enable better management in summer and winter, together with improvement of overflow parking arrangements. The popular walking route from here to the summit at the Jubilee Tower also requires continual maintenance to control erosion.

4b Improve identification and management of smaller access sites, car parks, viewpoints and lay-bys

Less investment is required at the other access sites, although resources are needed to enable their ongoing effective maintenance.

During the consultation, attention was drawn to the important role of small car parks and lay-bys in the area. These should be subject to a systematic programme of improvement, including:

- advance signing
- appropriate information provision and
- improvement of viewpoints/ panoramas.

4c Develop and promote the Clwydian Ranger bus service and public transport links generally

Rising environmental concerns and the major local problem of car parking justify the need for a strong commitment to promoting the use of non-car access to and within the Range, notably by public bus. This is also a requirement of the European Charter.

Action should include:

- Maintaining financial commitment to the Clwydian Ranger dedicated bus service. Similar services elsewhere have taken a long time to establish, and the strategy may need to seek commitment of sustained resources over a prescribed period.
- Significantly increasing the promotion of both the Clwydian Ranger and other scheduled weekday and weekend bus services, through both print and publicity.
- Reviewing timetabling and adjusting if required.
- Encouraging and helping all accommodation and other tourism enterprises to provide clear information on how they can be accessed by public transport, including offering a pick-up service, and on how their guests can enjoy the Range without a car.
- Ensuring that the operation of the bus service is as environmentally sound as possible.

4d Work with local communities on village enhancement, interpretation and management schemes

The villages within and immediately around the Range provide an important part of the visitor experience. They also contain communities that stand to be most affected by tourism, both positively and negatively. Cadwyn Clwyd has been working with a number of villages on simple interpretation schemes (e.g. literature, information boards) and management activity (e.g. village lengthsmen). This has also been supported by the Sustainable Development Fund. Work with the individual communities should maintain these initiatives and seek to strengthen them in the following ways:

- Paying particular attention to car parking and traffic management, which is an issue in a number of villages.
- Linking village information and interpretation schemes more effectively into mainstream visitor information and promotion.
- Supporting selected local events and promoting them more actively to visitors, if appropriate and welcomed by the communities.

4e Strengthen links between the Range and gateway towns

This is an important strategic objective. The gateway towns provide a diversified offer and a range of services for visitors to the Range, while the landscapes and activities in the Range a major draw for the towns.

Individual tourism related plans and initiatives are being pursued by the towns, including:

- Action in Mold relating to its Cittaslow status.
- The Prestatyn Business Action Plan, and initiatives to identifying it as a walking destination, maximising on its link to Offa's Dyke Path.
- Town centre regeneration and management work in Ruthin and Denbigh.

In each case, opportunities for improved visitor orientation and information are being pursued. Ruthin and Denbigh are also central to the Vale of Clwyd visitor economy strategy, which contains actions that reflect the proximity to the Range and links to it.

Opportunities for action to strengthen links centre mainly on:

- Improved information about the Range in the towns, and vice versa. This has implication for formal information provision, e.g. at TICs, and also improved awareness amongst tourism enterprises.
- Strengthening transport access, as in 4c above.
- Certain opportunities for joint promotion – e.g. between accommodation in the towns and activities and events in the Range.

4f Improve tourism signposting

Tourist signing, to visitor attractions and other locations, in the Range is not unreasonable, but is not comprehensive, and there are occasional problems of gaps and inconsistency. It could be used more strategically to assist visitor flows.

Action should include an audit and review of all visitor signing, followed by an identified programme of improvement.

4g Improve access for all

The European Charter has a specific requirement that attention is paid to the needs of people with physical disabilities or who are economically disadvantaged, to ensure that they are not discriminated against in the enjoyment of protected areas. Opportunities for economically disadvantaged people does not appear to be a big issue in the Range and there is a reasonable variation in the price of accommodation available, but this should be taken into consideration in the future provision of camping, hostel accommodation etc.

Further action should be taken on improving access for disabled people, including:

- More trails for disabled access, where possible.
- Improved information on accessibility across the area, relating to all relevant activities and services.

<h2>5 To strengthen understanding of visitors to the AONB and the impacts of tourism on the area</h2>
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The actions to achieve this objective involve undertaking a set of regular surveys. The design and results of these should enable monitoring to take place against the indicators selected (see section 2.7) as well as providing other data and information to guide planning and management.

5a Undertake regular visitor surveys

In the past there has not been a systematic and regular programme of visitor surveys for the AONB. These are important in understanding visitor profiles, activities, reactions and needs, maintaining quality control and analysing the success of initiatives. Visitor surveys should be held at least every two years and should seek responses from 500 - 1000 visitors. Ideally, dedicated surveys should be undertaken for the Range. However, an alternative is to piggy back onto visitor surveys for wider areas (e.g. Denbighshire), provided specific questions can be included to cover the needs of the Range, and interview sites include locations in the Range.

5b Maintain regular feedback from tourism enterprises

The enterprise survey undertaken for this strategy demonstrated the value of obtaining regular feedback from the tourism business sector. This could be repeated at intervals, again perhaps every two years. It may be necessary to recruit a separate panel of businesses that are prepared to supply occupancy and attendance information.

Rather than simply relying on qualitative survey data, regular feedback should be obtained from enterprises on their needs and reactions, through meetings and networking.

5c Explore and develop opportunities to expand and focus use of the STEAM model

Managed in this area by Wrexham County Borough Council, the STEAM model provides opportunities for improving knowledge of tourism impact related to the AONB. Tourism businesses should be encouraged to input their data monthly. People and car counter data could also be added and it would be possible to arrange for a specific report showing visitor activities and trends in the AONB.

5d Keep abreast of impacts on the local environment and communities

Some indication of environmental impacts can be obtained from the responses from visitors and enterprises. However, it is also important to establish some direct processes of observing environmental change. This may be achieved through selecting a number of sites and recording changes each year in a systematic way. Sites may include sensitive habitats, access routes prone to erosion, etc.

In some areas, impacts on communities are monitored through regular residents' surveys. It is suggested that a residents' survey for the AONB could be held say every three to five years, covering a variety of issues, including tourism. This could be supplemented by qualitative feedback through community meetings and reports from community representatives.

4 DELIVERY

This chapter summaries the action plan presented in Chapter 3 in the form of a table, with indicative costs, suggested year(s) of execution, main partners responsible and possible external funding sources. In the remainder of the chapter, proposed overseeing, management and communication structures for delivering the plan are set out. Finally, information is provided on potential external funding sources.

Abbreviations used in the table:

AONB	The AONB team + all countryside services (Denbighshire and Flintshire)
DT	Denbighshire Tourism Unit
FT	Flintshire Tourism Unit
WCBC	Wrexham County Borough Council
TPNW	Tourism Partnership North Wales
CCW	Countryside Council for Wales
RDPs	Rural Development Plans
Conv	Convergence funding
CC	Cadwyn Clwyd
SDF	Sustainable Development Fund
TGs	Tourism Grants (Section 4) Welsh Assembly Government
FC	Forestry Commission
HH	Heather and Hillforts scheme
LGAP	Local Geodiversity Action Plan

SUMMARY ACTION PLAN

		Indicative cost (£)	Year	Agencies	Potential external funding
1	To raise awareness of the Clwydian Range and all that it has to offer to visitors, encouraging exploration and longer stays				
1a	Define Clwydian Range brand and disseminate guidance on brand identity and usage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree on brand values - Set criteria for use - Produce technical/graphic usage manual 	1,000	1	AONB	RDPs
1b	Strengthen profile and coverage of the Range in destination promotion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influence entries/coverage - Prepare copy/messages - Commission/maintain photographic resource 	4,000	1	AONB, DT, FT, TPNW	RDPs
1c	Maximise the impact of the Clwydian Range website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Website redevelopment - Annual management and site exposure 	25,000 3,000 p.a.	1 1-5	AONB	RDPs
1d	Undertake targeted and selected tactical promotion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exhibition display material - Media work, exhibition attendance, ad hoc promotion - Explore marketing opportunities in NW England. 	10,000 5,000 p.a.	1 1-5	AONB, DT, FT, TPNW	RDPs,
1e	Produce dedicated print items covering the whole Range experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capturing the Clwyds - CR map/brochure 	5,000 p.a. 5,000 p.a.	1-5 1-5	AONB, DT, FT	RDPs
1f	Improve distribution and visibility of information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review, improve, influence - Create dedicated racking - Maintain expanded distribution 	8,000 2,000 p.a.	1 2 2-5	AONB, DT, FT	RDPs
1g	Use signage to raise awareness of the Range <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review and complete AONB boundary/welcome road signs - Create village/community signs and erect 	50,000 50,000	1-2 2-3	AONB, Highways, CC	RDPs

2	To develop and enhance a set of visitor experiences based on outdoor recreation and appreciation of the area's natural and cultural heritage				
2a	Strengthen and package the walking offer - Stakeholder/accommodation liaison and networking - Stepped-up trail information and marketing initiative - Key route improvement to focus on Rural Walks	4,000 p.a. 100,000	1-5 1-5	AONB, FC	Conv RDPs
2b	Strengthen and package the mountain biking offer - Support for Ride the Clwyds - Further route development	3,000 p.a. 50,000	1-5 3-5	AONB, CC	Conv RDPs TGs
2c	Investigate and develop family cycling product - Strengthen area wide information/marketing - Feasibility assessment of Mold-Denbigh rail line - Road route calming and identification	25,000 Tba 30,000 ?	1-2 3-5	Highways, DT, FT, AONB, CC	Conv RDPs
2d	Develop riding product and offers - Project officer, route development, maintenance and associated information. - Further marketing/development support to place to place package	100,000 5,000	1-2	AONB, CC, BHS	RDPs SDF TGs
2e	Further develop linkages and product around fishing - Networking, marketing and information support	3,000	2	AONB, CC	RDPs SDF
2f	Develop further events, including biodiversity, geodiversity, heritage and culture themes, and promote them as a holiday experience - Marketing and information support	5,000 p.a.	1-5	AONB, CC, CCW	RDPs SDF
2g	Improve coordination of interpretation of the Range as a component of the visitor experience - Coordination of interpretation (possible further consultancy) - Implementation of site and trail/linkage interpretation	15,000 200,000	1 1-3	AONB, CC, HH, CCW, CADW	RDPs, HH, Conv, SDF, Arts funding
2h	Strengthen Clwydian Range presence in wider promotion of local produce and crafts - Input to wider produce/crafts initiative	2,000	1-3	CC, AONB	RDPs

3	To encourage and support tourism related enterprises in the development and improvement of facilities and services, environmental management, and their relationship to the AONB				
3a	Ensure all tourism related enterprises have excellent knowledge of the AONB and pass this on to their visitors - Talks, events, training, familiarisation, networking	5,000	1-5	AONB, DT, FT	RDPs, SDF
3b	Encourage and support tourism enterprises in environmental management. - Support for accreditation, networking, training - Dedicated financial assistance/grant scheme	5,000 150,000	1-5	AONB, CC, CCW	Conv., RDPs, SDF
3c	Work with enterprises to raise support for conservation - Investigate and implement visitor payback scheme	5,000	2-5	AONB, CCW	RDPs, SDF
3d	Provide assistance for improvement (in quality and performance) and development of tourism enterprises - Ensure links to relevant advice and training - Dedicated fund for product improvement	300,000	1-5	DT, FT, TPNW, CCW, AONB	Conv. RDPs TGs
3e	Reassess planning policies relating to tourism enterprise development and improvement and promote understanding of them - New guidelines and communication		1	AONB, Planners	
4	To improve the management of visitor flows to and within the Range, including impact on the environment and communities in the AONB and the surrounding area				
4a	Support a programme of enhancement and maintenance of facilities at key sites - Loggerheads: Review of building use and operations o Feasibility study of car parking o Feasibility/interpretation study for mill o Capital investment o Warden with focus on Visitor Services - Moel Famau: o Work on car parking surface o Ongoing erosion maintenance on route to summit	20,000 25,000 Tba 500,000 ? 25,000 p.a. Tba 100,000 ? Tba 30,000 ?	1 1 1-5 1-5 1-2 2-3	AONB, FC, Highways	Conv.. RDPs
4b	Improve identification and management of smaller access sites, car parks, viewpoints and lay-bys			AONB, Highways, H&H	Conv. RDPs

	- Signage and site improvements	100,000	3-5		
4c	Develop and promote the Clwydian Ranger bus service and public transport links generally - Financial support to Clwydian Ranger - Promotion of all public transport access	12,000 p.a. 4,000 p.a.	1-5	AONB, Transport depts. DT, FT, CCW, H&H	Conv. RDPs
4d	Work with local communities on village enhancement, interpretation and management schemes - Set of individual schemes in each villages, integrated into area information, interpretation and marketing	100,000	1-3	CC, AONB, CCW, LGAP	Conv RDPs SDF
4e	Strengthen links between the Range and gateway towns - Relevant support for information and marketing	10,000	1-5	AONB, DT, FT	RDPs
4f	Improve tourism signposting - Review and fill gaps	Tba 50,000 ?	3-4	AONB, Highways	RDPs
4g	Improve access for all - Access/trail development/improvement at Loggerheads Country Park - Improved information	50,000 5,000	1-3 2-4	AONB, CC, H&H	RDPs SDF
5	To strengthen understanding of visitors to the AONB and the impacts of tourism on the area				
5a	Undertake regular visitor surveys - Visitor survey every 2 years	10,000 p.2a	2,4	AONB,DT, FT, CC, CCW	RDPs
5b	Maintain regular feedback from tourism enterprises - Enterprise survey and contacts	3,000 p.2a	2,4	AONB,DT, FT, CC, CCW	RDPs
5c	Develop STEAM opportunities	600 pa	1-2	AONB, WCBC, DT, FT	RDPs
5d	Keep abreast of impacts on the local environment and communities - Environmental observation - Residents survey and contacts	3,000	3	AONB,DT, FT, CC, CCW	RDPs

Structures for implementation

An effective reporting, management and implementation structure is required to oversee and carry out this strategy and action plan. This needs to be designed to encourage a feeling of ownership by all relevant stakeholders.

The requirement of the European Charter for a permanent forum or equivalent body, bringing together the protected area authority, tourism businesses, conservation interests and community interests, needs to be addressed.

To presence of the JAC and its balanced make up goes some way towards meeting this requirement.

Looking at the necessary functions, it is suggested that two kinds of structure are required:

- An overseeing and executive body combined, which will be responsible for seeing that the strategy and action plan is carried out. It would meet three to four times per year, bring together representatives of the main interests, and report to the JAC to ensure that the sustainable tourism work coordinates with, and is supported by, wider work in the AONB and the implementation of the Management Plan. This body could be constituted as a sub-committee of the JAC. It would need to contain representatives of the tourism enterprises, local authority tourism departments, and conservation and community interests.
- A wider, more open structure that brings together all stakeholders with an interest in tourism in the AONB. This could be formed as 'standing forum' open to all, largely manifested by an annual, or biannual, forum/meeting. It is possible that over time this forum may wish to establish some kind of membership structure for participants, but this should not be a requirement at this stage, in the interests of avoiding duplication of organisations.

There is a clear requirement for an officer post linked to the AONB team which will take responsibility for the strategy implementation, including coordinating the work of others. This would need to be at least a half time post, and might be located with Cadwyn Clwyd, the AONB team at Loggerheads, or Denbighshire Tourism.

Funding

Four main opportunities for external funding present themselves, relevant to the action plan as a whole.

The Rural Development Programmes for Denbighshire and Flintshire, through Axes 3 and 4. Both RDPs are looking to support sustainable development in the rural areas of the two counties. The economic diversification and environment focussed orientation of this strategy means that it meets many of the priorities of the RDPs.

Convergence Funding. As a replacement of Objective 1, this is available in Denbighshire, with a reduced scheme also applying to Flintshire. Currently, the implications of Convergence for tourism are still being worked out. The focus of this strategy on sustainable development again gives it relevance to this scheme. It is

likely that Convergence may require larger scale or composite applications, and so the strategic and comprehensive nature of this strategy and action plan may be relevant. Individual marketing initiatives, that benefited from Objective 1, are unlikely to be supported. Denbighshire Tourism is taking a lead on developing proposals to the Convergence fund for tourism in North Wales.

Sustainable Development Fund. Dedicated to the AONB, this fund is for small projects of between £1,000 and £25,000. It seeks to support innovative, sustainable, environment projects, which involve local communities. It has already been applied to some tourism projects in the area.

Interreg 4. Assistance under this round of cross-national EU funding could provide opportunities, especially for programmes and initiatives that may not be eligible or given priority under the above schemes.

Opportunities for the application of more specific funding dedicated to tourism development and marketing should also be pursued where appropriate. Some discretionary funding for marketing is provided through Tourism Partnership North Wales via the North Wales Borderlands Marketing Area Partnership. Financial assistance aimed primarily at tourism enterprises is available through the Welsh Assembly Government's Tourism Grants scheme (under Section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act, 1969), with priority currently given to projects delivering job creation through serviced accommodation and provision for activity tourism.

It is recommended that further consideration is given to how this strategy and action plan, as a whole and in terms of its individual components, can best be put forward for assistance under all of the schemes referred to above. This will require some coordinated thinking, looking together at the degree of appropriateness and likelihood of success against each scheme.

In all cases the availability of matching funding will be a critical issue and local authorities and other agencies should consider the action plan against their own budgets and programmes.

ANNEX 1: AUDIT OF VISITOR FACILITIES IN THE CLWYDIAN RANGE

Accommodation

Name	Type	Location	Grading
Allt Gwymbod Caravan site	C+C	Llanarmon-yn-Ial	
Bach Y Graig	B+B	St. Asaph	WTB 4*farm
Bach Y Graig	SC+BB	Tremeirchion	WTB 5*SC
Barlows Caravan Park	C+C	Caerwys	
Bathasarn Hall Caravan Park	C+C	Llanbedr DC	
Bella Vista	B+B	Bodfari	
Blue Lion Inn	PH	Cwm	
Bryn Bowlio Caravan Park	Caravan	Tafarn y Gelyn	
Bryn Tirion Cottages	B+B	Nr Mold	WTB 4* B&B
Bryn Tirion Cottages	SC+BB	Llanferres	
Caerwys Castle Caravan Park	Caravan	Caerwys	
Colomendy Arms	PH	Cadole	
Downing Arms	PH	Bodfari	
Eryrys Caravan Park	C+C	Eryrys	WTB 4* HP
Fron Haul	B+B	Nr. Denbigh	
Graig Park Country Club	H	Meliden	
Gwalia	SC	Llangynhafel	WTB 4 stars
Gweryd Fishing Lakes	SC+BB	Llanarmon-yn-Ial	
Hafan Deg	B+B	Nr Mold	WTB 3 stars
Halycon Quest Hotel	B+B	Prestatyn	
Hillcrest	SC	Maeshafn	WTB 4*SC
Llainwen Ucha	B+B	Ruthin	WTB 2*Farm
Maes y Garnedd Hol. Cottages	SC	Loggerheads	
Melyd Arms	PH	Meliden	
Minfford Campsite	C+C	Llanbedr DC	awaiting
Moel y Parc	SC	Afonwen	
Nant Mill Touring C+C	C+C	Prestatyn	
Parc Farm Caravan Park	Caravan	Llanarmon-yn-Ial	WTB3*T&HP
Penisar Mynydd Caravan Park	C+C	Caerwys Road	WTB4*T&HP
Pwll Gwyn Inn	PH	Afonwen	
Roughsedge Guest House	B+B	Prestatyn	
Silvermere	BB+C	Prestatyn	
Station House Caravan Park	C+C	Bodfari	WTB3*Park
Swn yr Afon	B+B	Bodfari	
The Cherry Pie Inn	PH	Afonwen	
The Clwyd Gate	B+B	Llanbedr DC	WTB3*lodge
The Cross Foxes	PH	Nannerch	
The Crown Inn	PH	Trelawnyd	
The Crown Inn	PH	Pantymwyn	
The Dinorben Arms	PH	Bodfari	
The Druid Inn	B+B	Llanferres	WTB43*Inn
The Druid Inn	PH	Llanferres	
The Eagle & Child	PH	Gwaenysgor	
The Griffin	PH	Llanbedr DC	
The Griffin Inn	B+B	Llanbedr DC	
The Gronant Inn	PH	Gronant	
The Kinmel Arms	PH	Llandymog	
The Miners Arms	PH	Maeshafn	
The New Inn	PH	Dyserth	
The Old Mill Hotel	B+B	Nannerch	WTB3*
The Owain Glyndwr	PH	Maeshafn	
The Owain Glyndwr Inn	B+B	Nr Mold	
The Owain Glyndwr Inn	SC+BB	Gwernymynydd	

The Raven Inn	PH	Llanarmon-yn-lal	
The Red Lion	PH	Dyserth	
The Salisbury Arms	PH	Tremeirchion	
The Smithy Arms	PH	Rhuallt	
The Sun Inn	PH	Eryrys	
The Three Pigeons	PH	Graigfechan	
The Three Pigeons Inn	SC	Graigfechan	
The White Horse	PH	Cilcain	
The White House Hotel	B+B	Rhuallt	
The White Lion Inn	PH	Llanasa	
Two Hoots B+B	B+B	Cwm	
We Three Loggerheads	PH	Mold Road	
Yr-Hen-Feudy	B+B	Ruthin	4*B&B
Plas Penucha	B+B	Caerwys	
Philadelphia Chapel	B+B	Llanarmon-yn-lal	
Maeshafn Youth Hostel		Maeshafn	
Gwenoldy		Afonwen	

Attractions

Name	Type	Location	Entry Fee
Moel Hiraddug	Hillfort	Nr Dyserth	none
Mel-y-Gaer Bodfari	Hillfort	Bodfari	none
Penycloddiau Nature Area and Llangwyfan Forest			none
Penycloddiau	Hillfort	Llangwyfan	none
Moel Arthur	Hillfort		none
Moel-y-Gaer Llanbedr	Hillfort	on Moel Famau	none
Moel Famau Country Park	Country Park	Llanferres	none
Moel Fenlli	Hillfort		none
Loggerheads Country Park	Country Park	Loggerheads	
Coed Moel Famau			none
Coed Nercwys			none
Moel Findeg			
Bishops Wood			
Coed Bell			
Pen-y-Ffrith Bird Park and Gardens	Wildlife	Llanarmon-yn-lal	
The Warren	Woodland Courses	Bodfari	

Activity providers

Name	Type	Location
Abseil UK	Abseil	Loggerheads
Bodfari Fish and Game	Fishing	Bodfari
Sarn Fly Fisheries	Fishing	Nannerch
Fly Fishing	Fishing	Nannerch
Cilcain Fly Fishing Club	Fishing	Cilcain
Trout Fishery	Fishing	Cilcain
Lake Hill Fishery	Fishing	Llandegla
Rhydtalog Riding Centre	Riding	Graianrhyd
Gweryd Lakes	Fishing	Llanarmon-ya-lal
Llandegla Trout Fishery	Fishing	Llandegla
Bridlewood Riding Centre	Riding	Gwespyr
Pennant Uchaf	Riding	Rhuallt
Gweryd Lodge	Riding	Llanarmon-ya-lal
Maes y Wern	Riding	Llandymog
Ruthin Golf Club	Golf	Ruthin
Denbigh Golf Club	Golf	Denbigh
Holywell Golf Club	Golf	Holywell

Mold Golf Club	Golf	Mold
Nine of Clubs Golf Club	Golf	Caerwys
North Wales Golf Driving Range and 9 Hole Course	Golf	St Asaph
Rhuddlan Golf Club	Golf	Rhuddlan

Retail

Afonwen Antiques Gift and Craft Centre	Gift shop	Afonwen
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Food and drink

Name	Type	Location
Hideaways Café at Gweryd Lakes	Café	Llanarmon-yn-Ial
The Red Lion	pub	Meliden
Waterfall Café and Shop	Café	Dyserth
The White House Hotel	restaurant	Rhuallt
Fynnon Beuno Tearooms	Tea rooms	Tremeirchion
Fron Haul Tea Rooms	Tea rooms	Bodfari
Afon Wen Craft Centre	Café	Afon Wen
The White Horse	pub / restaurant	Hendrewydd
Caroline's Pantry	café	Tafarn y Gelyn
Loggerheads Café	Café	Loggerheads
They Owain Glyndwr	pub / restaurant	Maeshafn
The Gronant Inn	pub	Gronant
The White Lion Inn	pub	Llanasa
The Eagle and Child Inn	pub	Gwaenysgor
Melyd Arms	pub	Meliden
The Blue Lion Inn and Restaurant	pub / restaurant	Cwm
The Smithy Arms	pub / restaurant	Rhuallt
The Salisbury Arms	pub	Tremeirchion
The Dinorben Arms Inn	pub / restaurant	Bodfari
Pwll Gwyn Inn	pub / restaurant	Afon Wen
Downing Arms	pub	Bodfari
The Cherry Pie Inn	restaurant	Afon Wen
The Cross Foxes	pub	Nannerch
The Kinmel Arms	pub / restaurant	Llandyrnog
The White Horse	pub	Cilcain
We Three Loggerheads	pub	Loggerheads
Colomendy Arms	pub	Cadole
The Miners Arms	pub	Maeshafn
The Druid Inn	pub	Llanferres
The Griffin	pub	Llanbedr DC
The Sun Inn	pub	Eryrys
The Raven Inn	pub	Llanarmon-yn-Ial

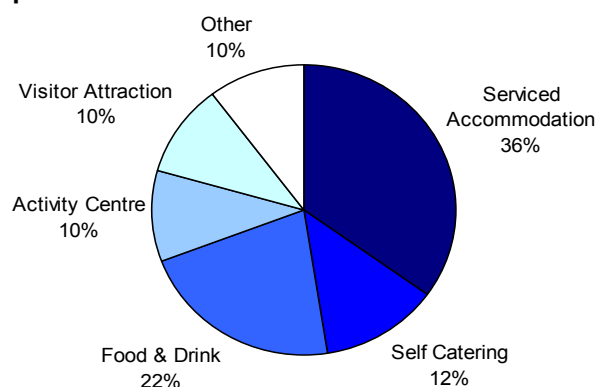
ANNEX 2: ENTERPRISE SURVEY RESULTS

A postal survey of tourism enterprises in and around the Clwydian Range AONB was undertaken. A total of 48 questionnaires returned, representing a 33% response rate. 71% of responses came from enterprises within the AONB, and 29% came from enterprises outside the range.

Enterprises

Nearly half of all responses came from the accommodation sector, including 19% from guest houses / B&Bs, 13% from hotels, 2% from group accommodation, 10% from caravan or holiday home parks and 2% from other self-catering. The highest number of responses came from the Food & Drink sector (22%), with 10% coming from each of the activity centre / operator and visitor attraction sectors. No responses were received from tour operators. These results reflect the large number of B&Bs and pubs within the AONB. However, it is also important to note that given the significant proportion of responses from the accommodation sector, results of the survey may be skewed towards the staying, rather than day, visitor.

Figure 1: Types of Enterprise



23% of responses came from enterprises on a working farm or small holding which highlights the importance of tourism in the diversification of the agricultural sector.

Enterprises on average employed 4.7 full time and 5.3 part time. However, the results are skewed by one or two enterprises employing large numbers, while the majority employed between 0 and 8 people.

27% of enterprises had accommodation quality grading, 15% were Walkers Welcome and 13% were Cyclists Welcome. A further 13% had other 'gradings' including Visit Wales VAQAS accreditation, CAMRA, Egon Ronay Food, FWA Federation and AALA licensed. No enterprises held Green Dragon awards for environmental management.

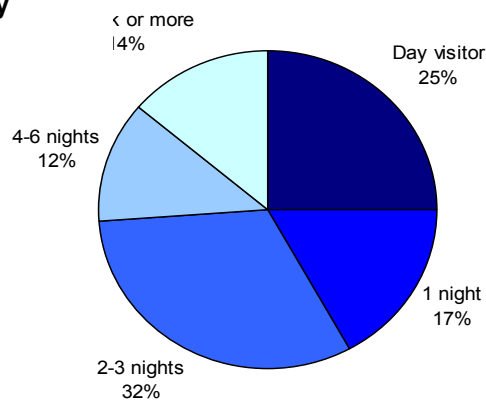
57% of enterprises were members of a tourism association or trade organisation. 19% were members of North Wales Tourism, 10% members of Visit Wales and 6% members of the Offa's Dyke Association. Other groups mentioned included the CLA,

National Caravan Council and Flintshire Tourism Association. This shows that there is already a considerable openness to working together.

Visitors

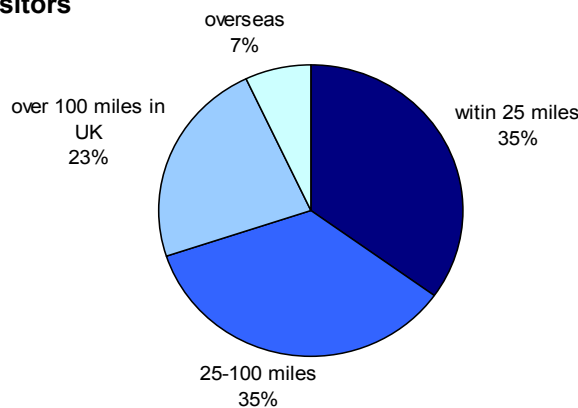
Enterprises were asked how long they thought their customers stayed in the area. Given the high proportion of accommodation providers which responded, this answer is biased towards staying visitors and does not accurately reflect the vast majority of visitors to the area which come for a day. However, it does show that visitors are staying in the area, some for over a week, with the 2-3 night (i.e. weekend) market particularly strong. This is a good basis on which to increase the number of staying visitors.

Figure 2: Length of stay



Visitors to the Clwydian Range AONB tend to come from areas close by, with 35% coming from within 25 miles, from towns such as Chester and Wrexham as well as more local people. A further 34% come from within 100 miles, which includes the Northern England conurbations such as Manchester, Liverpool and the Wirral. 23% came from elsewhere in the UK and 7% from overseas. Although the local market is driving tourism in the AONB, nearly a third come from over 100 miles away which shows that there is an existing market with much development potential.

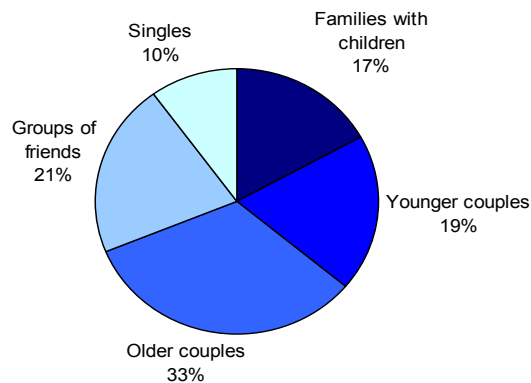
Figure 3: Origin of visitors



33% of customers were thought to be visiting the area for the first time, which suggests a high number (approximately 2/3) of repeat visits. This indicates a high level of loyalty among visitors of the AONB, and a large potential to convert day visitors to staying visitors on subsequent visits.

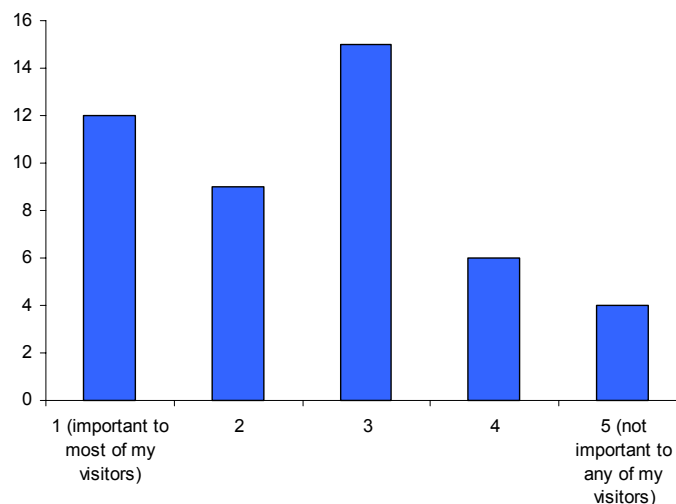
Visitors to the area include a fairly even spread of families, couples, groups of friends and single people, which highlights its wide appeal.

Figure 4: Visitor profiles



Enterprises were asked how important they felt the Clwydian Range was in attracting their visitors to the area. Most enterprises felt it was important to some or most of their visitors, with very few saying that it was not important to any of their visitors.

Figure 5: Importance of the range in attracting visitors



Enterprises were asked to rate how important some of the main activities are to their visitors. They were asked to score each activity on a scale of 1 to 5, where one is 'important to most of my visitors' and 5 is 'not important to any of my visitors'. The most popular activities were those which involved exploring the range, either driving through the countryside, walking, or exploring the towns and villages. Specific activities were deemed to be less important.

Figure 6: Importance of activities

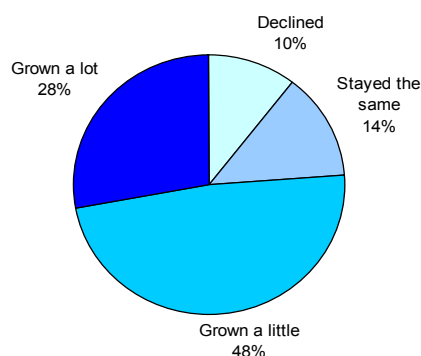
Activity	Average of responses
Driving around in attractive countryside	2.41
Taking longer walks (over 2 hours)	2.57
Taking shorter walks (up to 2 hours)	2.61
Exploring small towns and villages	2.64
Visits to attractions	2.83
Other outdoor recreation	3.05
Cycling (including mountain biking)	3.07
Horse riding	3.53
Fishing	3.61

Business performance

Enterprises were asked a series of questions regarding their business performance, seasonality and development plans.

Over ¾ of those who responded felt that their business or visitor numbers had 'grown a little' or 'grown a lot' over the last three years. This indicates that tourism in the AONB is in a period of growth bringing benefits to the tourism enterprises.

Figure 7: Business performance / visitor numbers over last three years

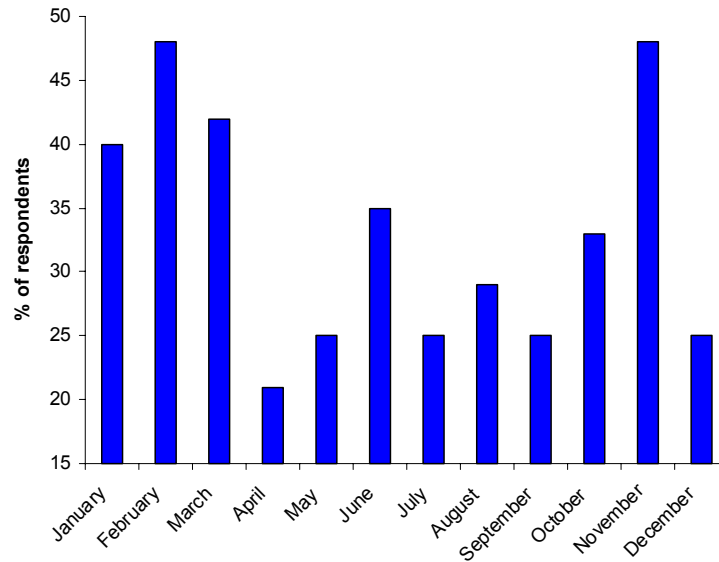


During this period, three quarters of respondents had made investment in their business or increased activity. This ranged from physical expansion (purchasing a neighbouring shop, converting a barn for accommodation), to quality upgrades such as refurbishment, new equipment and new catering facilities; extending opening hours, increased marketing activity and web development. 58% said that they had plans to improve, develop or extend their business in the next few years.

Nevertheless, although tourism in the area is growing and enterprises are able to invest and expand, there is no room for complacency. 83% said that attracting more business was either necessary in order to achieve a reasonable profit or essential to

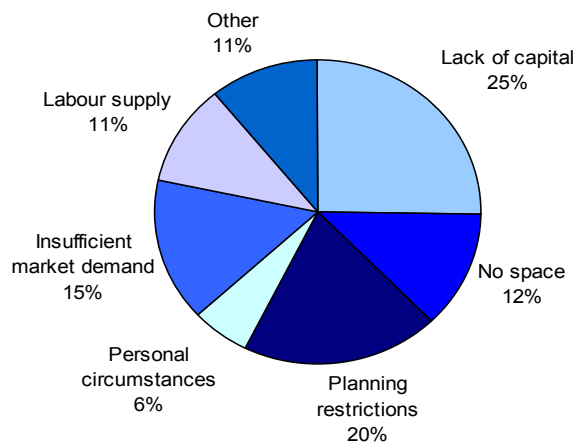
keep the business going. In particular, enterprises expressed a desire to see more business in the winter months and shoulder season.

Figure 8: Months where enterprises would like to see more business



Lack of capital and planning restrictions were deemed to be the main barriers to growth of enterprises, with insufficient market demand and no space being other important factors. Some specific barriers mentioned were a lack of interest by Visit Wales in the Clwydian Range, insufficient parking and a lack of business advice.

Figure 9: Barriers to growth



In order to ascertain the enterprises' attitudes towards sustainability, they were asked to rate certain aspects according to their importance. Those which would have a direct positive impact on the business such as energy saving, using local produce and waste reduction were deemed to be more important than the more indirect actions of supporting local environmental projects and supporting visitors to use more public transport.

Figure 10: Importance of sustainability

	Average of responses
Energy Saving	1.83
Using local produce	1.91
Waste reduction	1.93
Supporting local environmental projects	2.34
Supporting your visitors in the use of public transport	3.28

38% of enterprises had experience of working in partnership to promote tourism packages with other businesses. These ranged from organised groups such as the Farmhouse Holiday Group (Croeso Dyffryn Group), Wales on Horseback and North Wales Tourism, to small groups in a particular location (i.e. an activity company working with a neighbouring inn). A further 6% expressed an interest in joining such activities. In this area, therefore, there is considerable work needed to encourage enterprises to work together, building on the wide range of activities which are already underway.

Improving tourism in the Clwydian Range

Enterprises were asked to rate a number of factors in terms of importance to the future success of their business. Actions to do with marketing and promotions coming out top, followed by a need for better communications both between the enterprises themselves and with local authorities and tourism organisations. Less of a priority were product development issues, the feeling being that what is already there is good but it needs to be better marketed to visitors, and transport / traffic management issues. It is important to note, however, that the lowest average score was 3 which shows that all the factors are of some considerable importance to enterprises.

Figure 11: Factors for the future success of business

Factor	Average of responses
More active marketing of CR as a place to stay	1.52
Better info on where to go, what to do in the CR, post arrival	1.63
Strengthened image and branding for the CR	1.65
Improved / extended website/web pages on the CR	1.66
More packaging of accommodation and activities in the CR	1.75
Improved process for keeping enterprises up to date on the CR	1.79
Better interpretation / promotion of the area's cultural/historic heritage	1.80
Improved dialogue on planning policies relating to tourism development	1.88
Better interpretation / promotion of the area's natural heritage / wildlife	1.91
Strengthening opportunities for enterprises in the CR to work together	1.93
Better identification and promotion of local CR produce	1.98
More, or better promoted local events	2.00
Improving knowledge of the CR to pass on to guests	2.09
Extending and promoting environmental accreditation of enterprises	2.31

Advice/training on business and marketing	2.36
More, or better promoted, guided walks	2.39
Advice/training on environmental management	2.44
Improved provision for road cycling	2.65
More, diverse visitor attractions	2.79
Improved /better promoted public transport	2.82
Improved provision for mountain biking	2.84
Improved countryside access for walkers	2.84
Better traffic management	2.93
Improved provision for horse riding	3.07

Respondents made a number of additional comments on changes they would like to see to improve the experience of the AONB, and what would help them most to improve business performance.

In both cases they called for better and more high profile marketing of the area, and although they are willing to be involved in marketing initiatives most of those on offer are too expensive.

Signage to and within the AONB was also seen as something to be improved. Brown signs on the main roads were seen to be an important means of attracting visitors and raising awareness of the AONB. Within the Range, one respondent called for 'more subtle rustic signage, not big metal monstrosities'.

A number of enterprises stated that more opportunities for web links from the AONB site and others, as well as more co-ordination of the different websites would help improve the situation. Co-ordination of activities in general was also raised by several respondents with a call for 'networks of hotels, B&Bs, dining places, activities, cultural promotions and events'. One respondent noted that 'tourism is a seven day a week operation and this needs to be addressed by some organisations', which reflects comments from several people about the need for extended opening times for services (shops, pubs etc) in and around the AONB.

A number of comments were made regarding the need to reduce bureaucracy in particular with regard to grant application and planning. It was felt that there was no political will to realise the importance of tourism (in particular compared to agriculture in economic terms) and that once this had been achieved a number of improvements would follow suit.

ANNEX 3: POLICY CONTEXT

This annex provides a review of national, regional and local policies which are relevant to this strategy and action plan.

Tourism, recreation and culture

The tourism vision for Wales is set out by the Welsh Assembly Government in **Achieving Our Potential 2006-2013 – Tourism Strategy for Wales**. Its aim is “a customer responsive, innovative, sustainable and profitable industry which makes an increasing contribution to the economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of Wales”. The strategy sets out the future priorities for tourism in Wales, stressing the need to reduce seasonality and increase the country’s share of growth markets such as short breaks, additional holidays, business tourism and overseas tourism. Four key themes are highlighted as ways of achieving this – marketing Wales more effectively as an all year round destination; investing in the product to exceed visitor expectations; improving skills and professionalism in the industry and embracing a sustainable approach to tourism which benefits local communities and the environment.

The **Tourism Strategy for North Wales – Planning Tomorrow’s Tourism Today, 2003-8** sets three key priorities: to strengthen the region’s unique sense of place; to improve the quality of tourism facilities in North Wales; and to reduce seasonality across the region. It identifies the region’s primary strength as the quality of the natural environment. In doing so, it refers explicitly to the Clwydian Range AONB, identifying it as an underused asset for formal and informal recreation. It also points to the high profile of the Offa’s Dyke National Trail and the potential to make more of this, linked to other trails, and points to the potential for further expansion of mountain biking in the area.

These themes are reflected in the **Tourism Strategy for Flintshire**, whose overall vision encompasses increasing visitor numbers, increasing the value of tourism, developing a stronger sense of place for Flintshire, improving access to information, improving the quality of accommodation and attractions and monitoring the impact of tourism. The strategy highlights the need to develop a more consistent image for Flintshire across all industries and calls for an increased focus on the marketing of business tourism opportunities in the County. It suggests that packaging be at the heart of product development, supported by attracting events (such as the Mold Food & Drink Festival) which will in turn encourage more visitors. It encourages further support for the Flintshire Tourism Association and other partnership working which has been extremely successful in the past. The Clwydian Range AONB is highlighted as a strength in Flintshire’s tourism offer.

Denbighshire has a tourism strategy but its period of coverage has passed and it is out of date. The County’s approach to visitors in rural areas is set out in the **Denbighshire Countryside Visitor Services Strategy and Action Plan**, in which the AONB plays a pivotal role. While this document is mainly concerned with practical aspects of management, including branding, marketing and interpretation, it is also closely linked to the framework set out in *Achieving our Potential*. It aims to raise awareness of the county’s offer, increase enjoyment of those who visit and involve the local communities who live and work in Denbighshire’s Countryside, based on sustainability principles and good planning. The strategy covers branding,

logos, press & pr and highlights the need for a clear countryside image, closely associated with other Denbighshire images. It suggests that interpretation should be integrated throughout the components which make up Denbighshire's visitor offer and includes looking at events, arts, websites and walks. It calls for increased awareness of the AONB brand in village signs, road signs and the website and highlights individual actions for the key components of the AONB such as Loggerheads and Moel Famau Country Parks, Moel Findeg, Coed Nercwys, Prestatyn Hillside, Coed Bell.

There are also several strategies and action plans for areas surrounding the AONB, including the Dee Valley, Vale of Clwyd and Offa's Dyke Trail. Again, the same themes emerge – the objectives of the **Visitor Economy Strategy for the Dee Valley** include increasing the value of visitors to the Dee Valley, extending the length of the visitor season and dispersing more visitors from Llangollen to other parts of the Dee Valley (in particular Corwen). The **Vale of Clwyd Strategic Plan** highlights the need for an improved 'sense of place' and raising awareness of the brand by targeting niche markets. It also makes suggestions to reduce seasonality by capitalising on natural assets such as the AONB and increasing cultural tourism which is not weather dependent.

There are a number of WAG level strategies relating to different types of tourism which also provide strategic direction for the AONB.

The **Cultural Tourism Strategy for Wales** was published in 2003 and sets out how Wales can be recognised internationally as a destination offering a quality cultural tourism experience based on its unique culture which forms an essential part of the overall tourism experience. This will be achieved by improving visitor accessibility to Welsh culture through an increased sense of place, relevant training and raising awareness of events. There will also be a focus on improving the quality of the visitor experience with increased translation facilities and development of a database of accommodation where Welsh is spoken. A review of this strategy is in the pipeline. **Pick and Mix: A Cultural and Leisure Tourism Strategy for Denbighshire** takes this to the local level to promote culture and leisure in Denbighshire by improving access to facilities, increasing education and the numbers of people involved in the sector and raising the profile of the county's distinctive cultural character, in particular through areas such as the AONB.

Sports Tourism in Wales: a Framework for Action, published in 2004 was prepared by WTB to provide a strategic reference point for those involved in developing and marketing sports related tourism. It pledges to work with partners to help providers better understand the needs of sports and activity tourists and to develop appropriate accreditation schemes.

Rural Development

The **Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013** places rural development in the European Context and will be the channel through which European funds are distributed. It is divided into Axes 1-4 which will cover the following areas:-

Axis 1: agri-food sector

Axis 2: further developing farmer participation in agri-environment schemes and the continued development of support for forestry measures

Axis 3: creation of employment opportunities and establishment of suitable conditions for sustainable growth (with a focus on women and young people), economic diversification, quality of life projects.

Axis 4: delivering local priorities in a co-ordinated manner and will contribute to achieving the priorities of the other Axes as well as on improving local governance and endogenous development potential through capacity building and needs audits.

Axes 3 and 4 will be delivered at a local level and applications have been invited from suitable partnerships wishing to become involved.

Thus draft Rural Development Strategies have been developed for both Denbighshire and Flintshire by Cadwyn Clwyd, the Leader + organisation which as applied to deliver the RDP (in partnership with others) in both counties.

The **Rural Development Strategy for Flintshire** was prepared by Flintshire CC and Cadwyn Clwyd in conjunction with the Flintshire Rural Partnership as a response to the invitation from WAG for eligible partnerships wishing to participate in Axes 3 and 4 of the RDP for Wales. It sets out a strategic framework for development initiatives based on diversification of the rural economy, increasing standards of living, engagement with rural communities and a holistic approach to rural regeneration.

Four Strategic Themes (ST) emerge, all of which are relevant to tourism:-

- ST1 Development of the Tourism Industry
- ST2 Sense of Place
- ST3 Rural Services, Social Enterprise and IT
- ST4 Energy / waste, land use, forestry and agri-food

Delivery will be through project working groups, established for each of the emerging strategic themes.

Encouragement of tourism activities is a specific measure identified in Axis 3 of the RDP for Wales and indicative actions highlighted in the Flintshire RD Strategy include

- establishing a fund for the development of rural tourism services
- developing green tourism ventures
- investigating the feasibility of developing an iconic visitor attraction
- promoting tourism as a career option
- training for tourism staff
- investing in IQM in businesses
- developing collaborative marketing, packages and promotions
- improving the use of ICT

The **Rural Development Strategy for Denbighshire** proposes that Axis 3 will be delivered by DCC and CC, with other organisations where appropriate; Axis 4 will be delivered by the CC LAG.

Key challenges facing Denbighshire are that although the area is currently characterised by relatively low levels of unemployment, it has low levels of income from employment in the area, is dependent on sectors experiencing structural change and has experienced shifts in demographics due to an ageing population and migration of young people. The Strategy seeks to address these challenges by providing new quality job opportunities in the area and relevant skills to undertake them, diversifying the economy and encouraging the economically inactive into work. Tourism is identified as a sector, along with agri-food, for which new markets can be developed which will safeguard rural services and promote social inclusion.

Axis 4 delivery will be based on the principles of grass root participation, innovation and partnership working. It will look at the development of projects which will create area identities and the development of new products be they on a pre-commercial bases or for tourism (i.e. new marketing product). It will fill a 'niche' because it will

enable the development of pilot projects that are too new and innovative for other organisations / funding sources to back in isolation. The policy is to use the Axis 4 funding for 'pump-priming', to attract and lever additional finance for further development and mainstreaming through Axis 3 or other funding sources.

Axis 4 themes will focus on maximising the use and promotion of local products, enhancement of the environment while using natural resources for sustainable development, valorisation of the cultural heritage, the adoption of quality standards in service provision and products, and improving the visitor experience.

Business Plans containing a range of projects within Axis 3 and Axis 4 to cover the period 2008 – 2010 were submitted by both Denbighshire and Flintshire Rural Partnerships in 2007. The implementation of this strategy was included.

Economic Development

Flintshire Moving Forward is the county's economic development strategy 2003-2008, setting out how the county will address some of the challenges it still faces, despite coming such a long way since the 1980s. The key issues it addresses are the need to develop skills and training opportunities and build on existing manufacturing strength. However, at the same time a step change in entrepreneurship and business start up is needed. Social inclusion needs to be promoted through access to opportunity and community, and a priority will be investment in towns and villages. Tourism is highlighted as having considerable potential which needs to be realised. This will be achieved through:

- working with businesses on quality networking and promotion
- development of Flintshire's untapped assets
- determining and promoting a specific image for Flintshire
- marketing specific packages to include business conferences and heritage trails
- ensuring visitors to neighbouring attractions and drive through tourists know about the county and the quality and range of its tourism opportunities
- lobbying the sector to develop business and staff skills and promoting the sector as a worthwhile career

Denbighshire's Economic Growth Strategy was approved in June 2007. It provides a high level view of the county's economy, in particular that there is generally low unemployment and high economic activity, although this is not the case in some parts of the county. Earnings of residents are high, but earnings of people who work in Denbighshire are low. There is a high dependence on sectors, such as agriculture and tourism, which are going through considerable change. It identifies a series of actions to address these issues. These include:

- improving quality of life – to encourage people who work away to spend more money in the county, keep young people
- need to increase the value added of tourism
- improving the health of retail centres
- raising skill levels of people in employment
- growing and improving productivity of SMEs
- skills with respect to people not in labour market (i.e. 14-19 age group) and bringing the economically inactive into work
- addressing the dependence on immigration from eastern Europe

- realising the potential of optical and healthcare sectors as growing employers
- ensuring the agri-food sector remains vibrant
- increasing broadband coverage so people can work from home.

Clwydian Range AONB

Areas of Outstanding National Beauty are considered to be some of the country's most valuable landscapes and are protected and managed by law to maintain their special character for now and for future generations.

A guide for AONB partnership members has been published by the Countryside Agency and highlights that the primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. However, in pursuing the primary purpose account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment. It also clarifies that recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

The document also sets out the core functions for an AONB. These include developing a vision, strategy and management plan for the area and, promoting the vision and strategy to help distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside. The AONB should implement the management plan, monitor and report on progress and access resources to undertake relevant activities. It should also provide planning advice and related services while liaising with other AONBs at a national level and developing an involvement by the community into the area's management.

Following this guidance, the **Clwydian Range AONB Management Plan** was produced in 2004. It sets out the objectives and actions 2004 to 2009 for the management of the AONB, setting an agenda not only for the Local Authorities charged with its production but all those individuals, agencies, groups and bodies whose activities have an impact on the landscape and who are in a position to have an influence on its future.

The overarching vision is for the AONB to be a dynamic landscape with flourishing communities and a thriving local economy, supporting a rich biological and cultural resource that is accessible to all, and understood and appreciated by all – locals and visitors alike. This will be achieved through the underlying principles of sustainability, awareness and understanding, involving others and protecting the AONB's heritage.

The key objectives are biodiversity, the historic environment, access and recreation, culture and people. The policies which are most relevant to tourism are:-

RoWO2 – provide increased opportunities for off road cycling and horse riding with the AONB and promote these opportunities

BEA4 – to create 2 self guided trails per year around villages with Conservation Areas which will celebrate the architecture and history of the village and provide a 'Walking the Way to Health' opportunity.

SCO7 – involve local and visiting communities in the management of the AONB

SCA6 – Provide a public transport link to all villages 7 days a week by 2008

SCA9 – to have a community arts project every 3 years, starting in 2006

A **Local Geodiversity Action Plan** has also been developed for the Clwydian Range AONB. Its aim is to promote collective action to conserve and enhance the Clwydian Range AONB's outstanding geological heritage and to promote the sustainable use of its geodiversity resources for the social and economic well-being of the inhabitants and those of neighbouring areas and visitors. It has six main objectives which are:

- Ensure effective conservation of the Clwydian Range's unique and outstanding geodiversity by the development of a management plan for the AONB
- Establish an effective local partnership to carry forward the objectives of the LGAP
- Maximise the use of the Clwydian Range's geodiversity for the education of local children and visiting schools and other groups
- Raise awareness of the Clwydian Range's geo-heritage with local people and visitors, to promote sustainable geotourism, attract visitors to the area and stimulate the local economy.
- Develop suitable policies and influence the policies of other groups and organisations to ensure effective geoconservation and sustainable use of georesources for education and geotourism
- To manage information efficiently to achieve all the above.

Heather and Hillforts

The **Heather and Hillforts** Project is key to the conservation of the Clwydian Range. It is a partnership whose aim is to improve the condition of the heather moorland and protect the hillforts of the uplands, increase people's awareness and understanding of these sites as well as to provide new opportunities for people to enjoy the special heritage of the area. It is not the aim of the HHLPS to significantly increase the number of visitors to the project area, but to increase the awareness of the current users about the heritage significance of these sites and to target currently under-represented groups to participate in activities related to the heritage of the uplands as identified in the Audience Development and Access Plan.

The **Heather and Hillforts Audience Development and Access Plan** highlights the potential audiences for H&H and the extent to which they are represented by existing users / visitors. It identifies the main barriers which prevent certain groups from visiting the H&H area and ways in which these barriers may be removed. It is important to bear in mind, however, that by their very nature the hillforts are difficult to access – they were built with the express aim of making access difficult to intruders.

The plan gives an overview of the population local to H&H, which includes some of Wales's most socio-economically deprived pockets of areas. In all, 7 million people live within an hour's drive radius of the H&H area. There are high percentages of older people (25% in Denbighshire are over 60, compared to the Welsh average of 17%) and low proportions of ethnic minorities (1% compared with 2% average).

Road links to the H&H area are good, although increasing numbers of visitors arriving by car is beginning to lead to congestion in some places. Although public transport links are improving, particularly through the Clwydian Ranger bus network, the area is still difficult to reach for those without private vehicles, which is creating a significant barrier for visitors. There are extensive rights of way and permissive routes for those arriving by foot, bike and horse.

Research for the ADP identified 9 target audiences:-

- disabled people
- ethnic minority groups
- graziers and landowners
- life-long learners
- local residents and community groups
- out of the classroom education visitors
- people from disadvantaged areas
- people dependent on public transport
- young people

and the barriers which prevent them from visiting the H&H area. These barriers are organisational, physical, perceptual, social and cultural, sensory and financial, however the most significant barriers are lack of awareness of the area and what it has to offer, poor interpretation in particular for different user groups (i.e. visually impaired, hard of hearing, ethnic minorities etc) and the difficulties posed by poor public transport access.

Policies suggested by the ADP include steps to improve accessibility by enhancing and promoting public transport links, incorporating inclusive design into information provision, outreach programmes, training, events and continued partnership working and consultation.

More specific to the AONB itself is the Clwydian Range Local Geodiversity Action Plan.