

Supplementary Planning Guidance Note

# Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)



April 2018

This SPG was adopted by Denbighshire County Council on 18th April 2018, Flintshire County Council on 22nd May 2018 and adopted as interim guidance by Wrexham County Borough Council on 8th May 2018. The AONB Joint Committee and Partnership approved the content of the document on 22nd June 2018. The draft SPG was the subject of public consultation between November 2017 and January 2018. A report of the comments made during the consultation and the changes made as a result is available on request.

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## **Acknowledgements**

This document has been prepared on behalf of Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham planning authorities and the AONB Joint Committee/Partnership by Iwan Evans Planning, supported by a working group of officers from the three authorities, the AONB and Natural Resources Wales.

**This document is also available in Welsh**

## **Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

### **1. The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

- 1.1 AONBs are designated for their outstanding landscape and the need to conserve and enhance their natural beauty for the enjoyment of existing and future generations. The Clwydian Range was designated as an AONB in 1985 and in 2011 the area was extended to include the Dee Valley. Within the Dee Valley is the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site designated in 2009. The AONB is one of five in Wales and in accordance with national planning policy “must be afforded the highest status of protection from inappropriate development” which is identical to the protection afforded to National Parks.
- 1.2 The statutory designation of the AONB is underpinned by national planning policies in Wales in the document Planning Policy Wales (PPW) (2016). The document states the primary purpose is to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. Development Plan policies and development management decisions should favour the conservation of natural beauty and have regard to economic issues and social well-being. Development which occurs outside an AONB but could have some impact on its setting also needs to be considered.

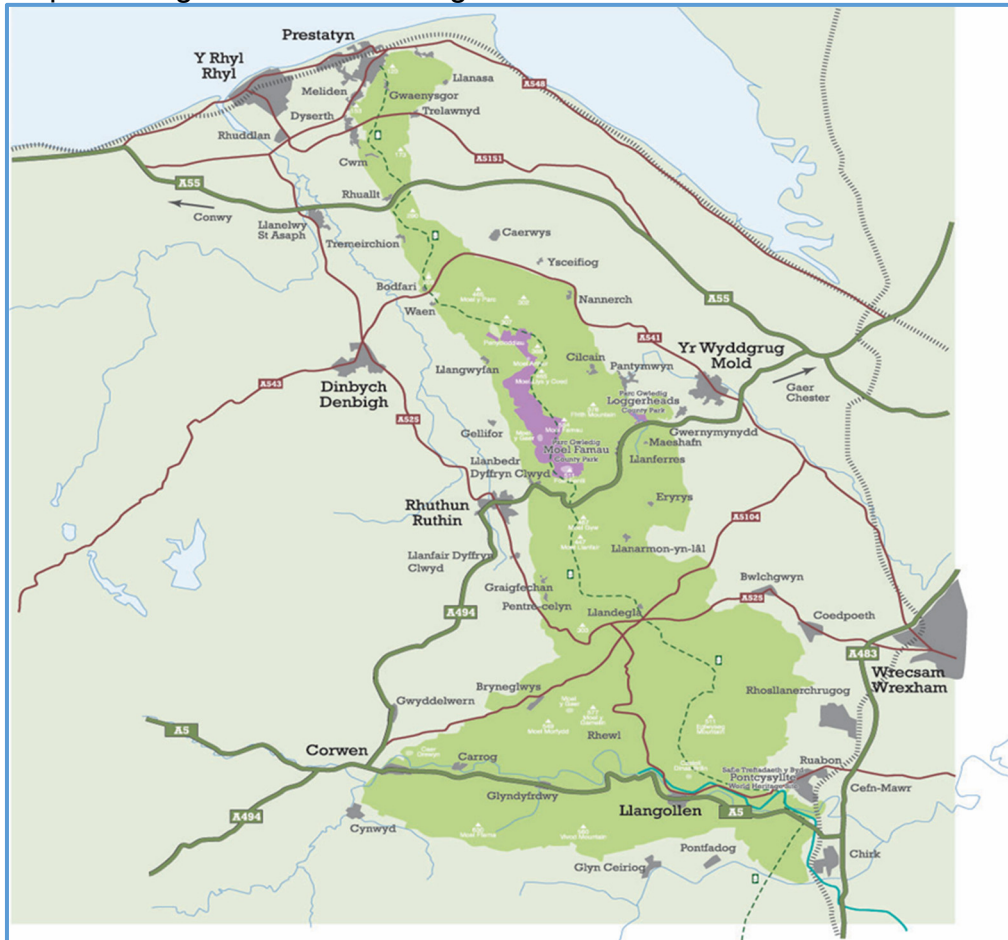
### **2. Purpose of this Supplementary Planning Guidance**

- 2.1 The AONB covers part of the counties of Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham. This guidance is primarily targeted at individuals proposing new development and for decision makers involved in the management of the AONB. The intention is to heighten awareness of the importance of the AONB, and, in so doing, raise the standard of new development and landscape design. It provides some general design principles which should be followed to assist new development proposals whether planning permission is required or not. No specific guidance is given on what proposals may need planning permission as more specific advice is given elsewhere. Permitted development thresholds are however more restrictive within the AONB and a summary of the main differences are shown in Appendix 3. Before considering any new development, it would be advisable to seek professional assistance from a planning agent or architect, to ascertain whether planning permission is needed or any other consents are required such as works affecting public rights of way or highways. If planning permission is required, prospective applicants may wish to obtain further advice from their local planning authority by submitting a pre-application request for advice before embarking on a formal planning application. Further information can be obtained from individual authorities and contact details for planning departments and the AONB are given in Appendix 1 together with a map showing the respective local authority areas within the AONB.
- 2.2 Once adopted by the planning authorities this guidance will be a material planning consideration when they are making planning decisions within their

respective AONB areas or which affect its setting. It should be read in conjunction with the relevant policies of individual development plans and other Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents. With more complex or larger planning applications, full details of the proposal will need to be submitted to allow the local planning authority to fully assess the impact on the AONB. The current main planning policies of individual authorities relating to the AONB are included in Appendix 2. Further information on planning policies and procedures of individual authorities are available on their websites.

- 2.3 The three authorities have entered into a joint agreement to discharge their AONB functions by means of a Joint Committee. This committee is supported by an Officers Working Group which is made up of officers from the local authorities, Natural Resources Wales and the AONB Partnership (The AONB partnership represents landowners, local authorities, farmers, conservation and recreation interests) Critically the local authorities and the AONB must produce an **AONB Management Plan** every five years which provides a framework to inform and guide anyone who undertakes activities within it. This statutory document also identifies the “**special qualities**” of the AONB and includes an Action Plan to conserve and enhance these qualities. The AONB Management Plan can be viewed at:  
<http://www.clwydianrangeanddeevalleyaonb.org.uk/plans-and-strategies/>  
The AONB Joint Committee and Partnership approved this planning guidance.
- 2.4 Designers, developers, landowners and relevant organisations should have regard to this guidance when preparing their plans, proposals or strategies. Local authority planning officers will also assess development proposals against the design principles outlined in this document together with other material planning considerations.

Map showing AONB shaded in green



### 3. What is Natural Beauty?

- 3.1 The concept “**natural beauty**” is mentioned in the primary legislation responsible for designating AONB's and in PPW but there is no statutory definition of the term. The concept can be interpreted differently by individuals, but generally it is how we each perceive and value the countryside around us. Most people however, can equate their understanding to the following definition which was first put forward by the Countryside Council for Wales in 1995.
- 3.2 *“Natural beauty applies to unspoiled, rural landscapes that are largely free from the effects of disfiguring development or urbanisation, although over the ages they have been shaped and nurtured by human activities. People perceive and appreciate “natural beauty” through all their senses, responding to many different aspects of the landscape, including its distinctive character, its aesthetic qualities, the presence of wildlife, its cultural and historical dimensions and its perceptual qualities such as, for example, tranquillity, remoteness and a sense of freedom. Perceptions of, and preferences for “natural beauty” are informed by people’s personal characteristics, cultural backgrounds and individual interests. “Natural beauty” occurs, to varying degrees, in many, though by no means all landscapes. Some places may,*

*however, be judged to display “natural beauty” to an outstanding degree and may as a result be recognised as warranting a national level of protection.”*

(DERIVED FROM A STATEMENT ON NATURAL BEAUTY CCW RESEARCH PAPER)

#### Upland character of the AONB



- 3.3 The term triggers a complex sequence of emotions which begins to explain how we interact with our past heritage and most distinctive natural landscapes. It also assists in recognising what should be conserved and enhanced when planning new development. New proposals need to be successfully integrated within their rural context, with reference to commonly associated issues of landscape and visual amenity, natural and built heritage.

#### 4. **AONB Special Qualities**

- 4.1 Special qualities are those individual features and qualities which define the character of the area and set it apart from surrounding areas. They are a component of the areas “natural beauty” and recognise the human influence in shaping the landscape and establishing cultural identity. The AONB Management Plan identifies these **special qualities** and goes into detail on policies and objectives to conserve and enhance them. **Consideration should be given to how new development proposals impact on these special qualities and whether they are conserved and enhanced during the process.** In some cases, it will not be clear if, or to what degree, new development will impact on the special qualities. Developers and decision makers will need to judge the extent of impact and suggest changes to ensure overall conformity, bearing in mind that the AONB Management Plan is one of several material planning considerations. To assist in this process, the Special Qualities, their individual components and the relevant Management Plan policies to conserve and enhance them are identified below.

Special Qualities	Components of Quality	AONB Management Plan policies relevant to Planning
<b>Landscape Character and Quality</b>	<p><b>Tranquillity</b> – feeling of calm and stillness with peace and quiet.</p> <p><b>Remoteness and Wildness, Space and Freedom</b> – feeling of trepidation and sometimes danger and sense of freedom in a wide-open landscape. Also, a sense of belonging and attachment between communities and their land-scape.</p>	<p>1. Conserve and enhance the Special Qualities and distinctive character of the AONB's landscape and associated features including the historic built form.</p> <p>2. Safeguard the panoramic views, tranquillity and environmental quality of the AONB for the generations of today and the future.</p> <p>3. Secure the equitable, sustainable use of the area's natural resources to con-serve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB.</p> <p>4. Protect and promote traditional cultural distinctiveness within the AONB including the Welsh language.</p>
<b>Habitats and Wildlife</b>	<p><b>Heather Moorland and Rolling Ridges</b> – moor-land ridges of the central Clwydian Range and expansive open moorland found in Llandegla, Ruabon, Llantysilio and North Berwyn.</p> <p><b>Broadleaved woodlands and Veteran trees</b> – various small copses of woodland.</p> <p><b>River Valleys and the River Dee</b> – the dramatic and powerful Dee with the smaller rivers Alyn and Wheeler.</p> <p><b>Limestone grasslands, cliffs and screes</b> – car-boniferous outcrops such as Graig Fawr in Meliden and the Eglwyseg Escarpment in Llangollen.</p>	<p>5. Secure natural systems and networks that provide more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people.</p> <p>6. Restore, reconnect and expand key habitats and species at a landscape scale in order to increase resilience to environmental change.</p>
<b>Historic Environment</b>	<p><b>Historic Settlement and Archaeology</b> – historic settlement patterns, conservation areas and features left by previous generations.</p> <p><b>Industrial Features and the World Heritage Site</b> – includes limestone and slate quarrying, lead mining – the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site.</p>	<p>7. To conserve and enhance features and sites of archaeological, cultural or historic importance within the AONB whilst recognising that the whole of the area has an historic dimension.</p>



	<p><b>Historic Defence Features</b> – chain of Iron Age Hillforts, castles and other defensive features.</p> <p><b>Small historic features</b> – mix of small historic features such as wells, village pumps, boundary stones and way markers.</p> <p><b>Traditional boundaries</b> – drystone walls and hedges reflecting traditional craftsmanship.</p>	<p>8. Ensure that the World Heritage Site is conserved and enhanced in the context of its setting within the AONB.</p>
<p><b>Access Recreation and Tourism</b></p>	<p><b>Iconic Visitor and Cultural Attractions</b> – sites identified with the AONB such as Moel Famau, Castell Dinas Bran, Valle Crucis Abbey, Horse-shoe Pass and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct.</p> <p><b>The Offa’s Dyke National Trail and Promoted Routes</b> – the Offa’s Dyke path stretches from Prestatyn in the north to Llangollen in the south – other footpath networks and extensive areas of Access Land enhances accessibility.</p>	<p>9. To promote the sustainable use and enjoyment and understanding of the landscape of the AONB in a way that contributes to local prosperity and social inclusiveness.</p> <p>10. Ensure the attractiveness of the AONB’s landscape and views as a primary basis for the areas tourism are retained.</p>
<p><b>Culture and People</b></p>	<p><b>The Built Environment</b> – villages, towns and smaller scattered settlements.</p> <p><b>People and Communities</b> – a rich mix of culture and sense of community and services to sustain rural life.</p>	<p>11. Ensure that new development adopts the highest standards of design and is sympathetic to the character and appearance of the AONB.</p>

## 5. Understanding Landscape Character and the Special Qualities

- 5.1 Various elements of the special qualities can be found within different types of landscape which have been geographically defined. These are usually referred to as landscape character areas and are distinctive from each other due to their unique characteristics. It is important to define what makes up landscape character to ensure new development maintains and enhances this character. Other non-development activities such as agriculture will also have an impact on landscape character.

Moel Hiraddug in the north of the AONB



5.2 Information on the area’s landscape and qualities can be obtained from LANDMAP, an all Wales assessment, recorded and evaluated in a nationally consistent manner. LANDMAP provides an assessment of five aspects - Geological Landscape, Landscape Habitats, Visual and Sensory, and Historic and Cultural Landscapes. This information can help us to understand how we can best influence development decisions in the following ways.

<b>LANDMAP</b>	<b>Use in development management considerations</b>
GIS mapping	This spatial framework is helpful in compiling baseline information for a site and its visual setting. The study area could be quite extensive for example in the case of assessing telecom masts.
Description of characteristics, qualities and components	Compiling all 5 LANDMAP aspect area information for a given site and its visual setting together will help provide baseline information on the landscape character.
Evaluation of importance from a national to local scale	Areas with higher evaluations point to where conservation and enhancement will be important. Lower evaluations point to areas where landscape enhancement is required.
Recommends locally appropriate management guidelines	This can point to elements of the landscape that need to be con-served or enhanced which planning proposals should positively address.

5.3 LANDMAP can be viewed at <https://naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/business-sectors/planning-and-development/evidence-to-inform-development-planning/landmap-the-welsh-landscape-baseline/?>

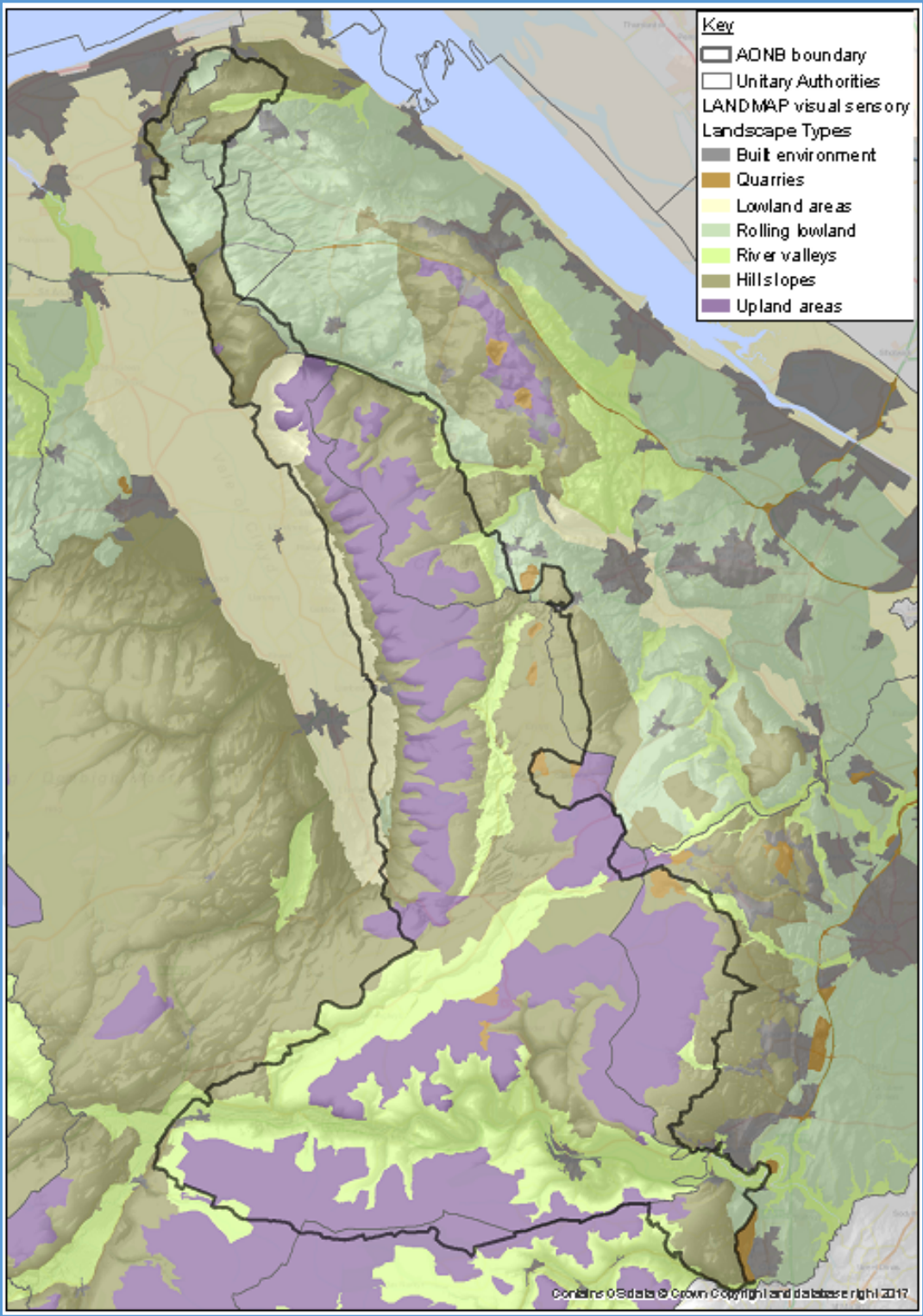
5.4 In addition to LANDMAP, site evaluation will help identify key views, visual character, the presence of distinctive characteristics and special qualities. This local character assessment will also identify specific natural and built heritage conservation features that might need to be addressed for a new development project.

## **6. Landscape Types and Development Considerations**

6.1 Seven main landscape types have been identified in the AONB using LANDMAP visual and sensory data (see Landscape Types map), ranging from the built environment to the remoter upland areas. The special qualities and key characteristics of each landscape type are highlighted in the following table together with analysis of relevant development management considerations. Development can impact on AONB character and special qualities in a number of ways as identified in the tables below. By highlighting the characteristics of each landscape type in more detail, it is possible to build a picture of what con-tributes to character and how it may be possible to retain

and enhance these features. In the case of “Built Environment”, the term is used more generically to include buildings and infrastructure.

**The AONB Landscape Types**



## Built environment



**Special Qualities** Landscape Character and Quality, Historic Environment, Culture and People.

### Key characteristics

The built environment has varying influences on the character of the AONB and its setting, and includes towns, villages, farming and rural enterprise development, residential settlement and transport, energy and communications infrastructure.

The built environment is particularly distinctive where it has derived from a response to place - the way topography, availability of local materials, historical approaches to building, craftsmanship/ vernacular and sometimes incremental evolution has formed places that appear to fit with the landscape. These places often have a sense of rural tradition and history derived from rural farming and mining industry.

Defence, status in the landscape and borderland location of the area's chain of upland hills, has also given rise to some unique historic hillforts, castles, earthworks and field archaeology.

Building materials vary across the area. Their use and inherent colour contribute to local distinctiveness, rural traditions, and general visibility in the landscape and therefore clearly influence the character of the wider landscape as well as the locality. For example:

- The use of stone in buildings, field boundaries and retaining walls is widespread across the area, however the type of stone locally available (limestone, sandy limestone, shales, and slate) and its workability introduces some variation across the AONB.
- White washed farms and cottages with slate roofs, with rendered elevations for weather protection are evident across the area, particularly in open and elevated landscapes.
- Mellow red and yellow brickwork is found in some older farm buildings and worker cottages and terraces, influenced by local brick works and characteristics of clay, before introduction from further afield as transport networks improved and brought more standardised ranges of colour and use.
- Grey ashlar stonework or ashlar-effect render is evident in polite Georgian houses found in some villages and estates.
- Rural estates often use a single colour to mark out the buildings, fencing and gates associated with a large house.
- Faded red oxide roofs mark out some older farms.

- Dark blue metal sheeting is used on some barns, as well as Yorkshire timber boarding.
- Natural and darker stained timber cladding is used in some outhouses and log stores.

There is some relationship between settlement/development, where it lies in the landscape and how this influences the AONB's special qualities:

- Scattered rural farms and development more generally is rarely located much above the mid-point of hillslopes, avoiding steep landforms and more remote, exposed places. The uplands and skylines are therefore in the main free of development except for some strategically located transmitter/telecoms and electricity infrastructure.
- Major transport routes follow the easiest valley lines through the area. The A55 in major rock cutting at Rhualt being an exception.
- Remote, tranquil, wilder character, natural skylines and freedom are most apparent where development is absent or very low key and well-integrated. Night time tranquillity through the absence of light source is also higher.

### **Development management considerations**

- See the section on Key Design Considerations.

### **Quarries**



**Special Qualities** Landscape Character and Quality, Historic Environment, Culture and People, Habitats and Wildlife.

### **Key Characteristics**

- There are a number of relic quarries, rock outcrops, spoil mounds and trackbeds within the area which now after many years of weathering, naturalisation and in places resto-ration have become part of the historical and cultural story of the area.
- Active quarrying lies outside of the AONB, but close enough to influence views from the area, for example sand and gravel extraction at Aberwheeler.

### **Development management considerations**

- There are a number of active quarries within and adjacent to the area. Long term planning for landscape integration along the boundaries of such

developments is necessary, with landscape schemes implemented as part of advance works with ongoing management.

- The reuse of sites for waste management and industrial activities need to avoid impacts upon tranquillity.
- Recreational use of disused sites should promote the quiet enjoyment of the countryside.

### Lowland areas



**Special Qualities** Landscape Character and Quality (tranquillity), Historic Environment, Culture and People.

### Key Characteristics

- The edge of the Vale of Clwyd rises to meet the Clwydian Range. The narrow strip within the AONB shares similar enclosed farmland and historic parkland characteristics with the wider Vale to the west. Rural traditions in field pattern, hedgerows, trees and woodland, narrow lanes, small villages and scattered rural property prevail, with occasional estate influences (estate fencing, gates with modest ornamentation, stone walls and gateways to drives, parkland trees).

### Development management considerations

- This area as well as the wider Vale of Clwyd provides an important setting to the hills and ridges of the Clwydian Range that rise above it. The scale, character and integration of development here needs to take account of elevated views from the adjacent hillslopes.

### Rolling lowlands



**Special Qualities** Landscape Character and Quality (tranquillity, space, remote areas) Historic Environment, Culture and People.

### **Key Characteristics**

- The rolling lowlands lie to north of the area and include the farmed wooded slopes of Gronant Hillside, the farmed Trelawnyd plateau and wooded valley west of Cefn Du.
- These are areas of farmland with mosaic of field patterns and woodland along steeper ground and streams, scattered rural settlement, narrow lanes and one small village. Limestone in building and occasional field boundaries is characteristic of the Trelawnyd plateau.
- The Trelawnyd plateau feels relatively remote in spite of the close proximity to the large villages and towns of the coastal plain.
- There is a strong visual connection with adjacent areas – Gronant hillside connection with the coastal plain, seascape and Prestatyn Hillside; and Trelawnyd plateau connection with the enclosing limestone escarpment and Gop Hill.

### **Development management considerations**

- Tranquillity is locally affected where the A5151 crosses open sections of the Trelawnyd plateau. Noise from the A55 also extends for some distance into this area. Retrofit options to reduce visual movement and noise levels would benefit the area.
- This area contributes to the tranquillity and freedom of views experienced from the adjacent hill slopes and uplands. Consider key views over this area, scale and prominence of development proposals.

### **River Valleys**



**Special Qualities** Landscape Character and Quality (tranquillity, remote areas)  
Historic Environment, Culture and People, Access, Recreation and Tourism.

### **Key Characteristics**

- There are several valleys within the AONB, each made distinctive by their topographical form, visual relationship with surrounding hillslopes and uplands, openness or enclosure provided by woodland, trees and hedgerows and localised presence of settlement, development, roads and activity.
- As lines of least resistance through an area of elevated hills and ridges the valleys they often include villages and main roads, the latter with local effects on tranquillity.

- In the case of the Vale of Llangollen, there are diverse historical influences within a visually scenic valley context - including farming, quarrying, lines of communication (river, road, rail and canal infrastructure) rural villages and town with urban villages to the east.
- The engineering solution to the topographical challenges and beauty of the valley have been addressed in the design of the Pontcysyllte and Chirk Aqueducts and Horseshoe falls. This has given rise to the area's recognition for its landscape and heritage value.
- Scenic qualities and visual interest also derive from a valley's 'lines of visual force' i.e. valley shape, skyline edges, descending ridges, crags/ outcrops and screes and sinuous line of river, to which the pattern of fields, woodland and trees complement the overall scene. An example for the hillslopes area would be how Castell Dinas Bran marks the top of its rounded hill with particular aesthetic effect.

### Development management considerations

- Topography (enclosing hillslopes, narrow valley sections) and floodplains form natural constraints to development within the valley and place pressure open more open and elevated locations where development could be more intrusive.
- Strategic development of a scale to be potentially visible in the landscape should work with 'visual lines of force' and areas with a strong integrating pattern of vegetation (i.e. intact tall hedgerows, lines of hedgerow trees, copses and woodland)
- New proposals within the Vale of Llangollen need to assimilate and complement land-scape character and heritage values to support both the AONB and World Heritage Site.

### Hill slopes



**Special Qualities** Landscape Character and Quality (tranquillity, wild, remote) Historic Environment.

### Key Characteristics

- Hill Slopes include steep rising landform, escarpments below the uplands and lower hills of the AONB.
- Land cover and settlement characteristics are strongly rural and where development is minor or absent perceptions of tranquillity, remoteness and wildness can be particularly strong.



- These areas all form prominent scenic backdrops to adjacent settled lower areas of the north-east Wales coastal plain, Vale of Clwyd, Deeside, Vale of Llangollen and Welsh Maelor and as such provide a strong sense of place.
- Geomorphology and landform has brought about some notable natural and wild areas. For example - outcropping rock, native woodland, and scrub and grassland mosaics of the limestone escarpments above Prestatyn, Dyserth, Bryn Alyn and the Eglwyseg valley.
- Irregular field patterns and woodland edges, scattered farms along winding narrow lanes and tracks occupy more gentle hillslopes, shallow cwms and side valleys of the area. Some large areas of forestry lie within this area.
- Reservoirs are found in some of the shallower eastern facing valleys.
- Scattered farming and worker cottages associated with historical mining and pro-cessing industries lie this area, with occasional villages at lower elevations. Older settlement is distinctive displaying use of stone, vernacular, rural traditions and integration with the landscape.

### Development management considerations

- Slope angle has greatly influenced ease of access to this area and much of the pattern of development hasn't altered or evolved much (with the exception of forestry), which in part gives the landscape a strong rural and traditional character.
- The area's visibility and contribution to scenic quality and sense of place to the more populated adjacent areas, makes the area sensitive to change from development. Available views, development scale, character and integration is therefore important to consider.
- Development within or encroaching upon the more natural and wild escarpments can have particular contrast and appear at odds with the AONB special qualities.

### Upland areas



**Special Qualities** Landscape Character and Quality (tranquillity, remote, wild), Habitats and Wildlife, Access, Recreation and Tourism, Historic Environment.

### Key Characteristics

- The uplands comprise elevated rolling ridges, hilltops and plateau of pasture fields and open moorland. The highest points include Moel Famau (554m) within the Clwydian Hills, Moel y Gamelin (577m) on the Llantysilio Mountain

ridgeline, Ruabon Mountain (502m) on the Esclusham/Ruabon escarpment and Moel Fferna (628m) on the north Berwyn ridge.

- Notable scenic qualities of the area include its natural upland skylines – as the chain of hills that define the horizon and backdrop to north-east Wales; there are some particularly distinctive skyline silhouettes - for example Moel Y Parc from the north, Moel Arthur, Moel Famau (its pyramidal form and the highest point marked by the jubilee tower); the bedding plains and outcrops of the limestone escarpments across the area; and the areas of open moorland heather that create strong colour contrasts with the enclosed lower hillslopes such as at Ruabon and Llantysilio Mountain,
- Development is absent except for some remotely located transmitter infrastructure, quarrying and occasional crossings by electricity infrastructure, roads, lanes and tracks.
- Many areas are open moorland unenclosed by field patterns. Where present post and wire fencing is used, with some dry-stone walling along the Clwydian Hills. Forestry extends into some areas from the adjacent hillslopes.
- The northern Berwyn ridgeline differs, in its access by lanes and pattern of improved pasture fields, occasional forestry and pockets of moorland.
- Historic, cultural marks in this area are visually iconic - in the case of the Jubilee Tower, Castell Dinas Bran and many of the Iron Age hillforts. Other earthworks, cairns and field systems are more subtle, add to the local character but remain of historical importance.
- These areas have wide ranging expansive views of landscape and settled lower areas. The sense of removal from towns and villages below, lack of development and visual foci, openness and exposure contribute to the area's special qualities of space and freedom, remoteness, tranquillity and wildness.

### **Development management considerations**

- This is a very visible area of the AONB where natural skylines make an important contribution to the area's special qualities, making it very sensitive to change from development.
- Accessibility along roads and lanes brings potential for activity, movement and noise that can erode the tranquillity of this area. The high passes are popular destinations for visitors and recreation with notable destinations at Bwlch Pen Bara and the Horseshoe Pass. The management of people, parking and character of development have evolved and been treated differently in these locations, with varying success. These are sensitive open locations where careful attention to visual integration is important to support the areas' special qualities.
- Vertical structures on skylines have considerable contrast against the sky and horizontal form of the landscape. The eye-catching nature of such development makes it very difficult to successfully integrate in designated landscapes.

## **7. Factors for Landscape Change**

7.1 The landscape we see today has largely been shaped by the influence of man. This process continues, although with the progression of climate

variations, the future pace of change will increase. Factors influencing landscape change are discussed below.

- 7.2 **Agriculture and Forestry:** The future care and management of the landscape is heavily dependent on agricultural and forestry activity. Around 20% of AONB land is covered by agricultural conservation initiatives and these have had a positive impact on habitat and landscape conservation, particularly the management of common land. Future changes to agri-environmental support schemes may also impact on the landscape. The challenge will be to ensure that the farming community sustains a living whilst ensuring the landscape and habitats benefit. For example, the right amount of grazing will sustain calcareous grassland to a high biological interest and protect it from the encroachment of woodland scrub. Likewise, the dominant heather moorland of the Clwydian Range, Llantysilio and Ruabon Mountain is improved when bracken is brought under control. The removal or re-instatement of hedgerows, stone walls and tree felling can all have a significant visual impact. The felling and re-planting of older coniferous trees with mixture of broadleaf and conifer species will improve the landscape and biodiversity.
- 7.3 **Tourism:** Tourism can help diversify the local economy and is expected to grow in the future. Currently around £39 million is spent annually in the AONB. There are honey pots such as Moel Famau, Loggerheads and Llangollen which become very busy at certain periods. Sustainable tourism activities should be spread more widely throughout the area and new facilities such as car parking sensitively located and landscaped to reduce landscape impact. The popularity of walking, cycling and associated health benefits and feeling of well-being will assist in the growth of outdoor activities.
- 7.4 **Development:** The future scale and location of new development is determined by local planning authorities in their Local Development Plans. A growing and ageing population will put increased demand on services and housing. The extent of growth in the AONB itself will be limited and of a scale and character which will not undermine the special qualities of the AONB. It will also be important to ensure that urban encroachment or other development outside the AONB does not impact adversely on its landscape character and quality, setting or sense of tranquillity. Development begins to impact on tranquillity with the introduction of intrusive movement, sources of artificial light and sound. More specifically, development can bring pressures on special qualities in the following ways:
- Major roads crossing the area locally affect tranquillity - the A55 having considerably wider visual impact and audible disturbance.
  - Settlement and growth outside and adjacent to the AONB can have a bearing on perceptions of tranquillity, remoteness, space and freedom. It will be important to analyse the impact of larger proposals close to the AONB boundary and, if necessary, to seek mitigation measures or even relocate the development.
  - Active quarries can introduce noise and activity with local disturbance to tranquillity.

- The reuse of disused quarries for waste management/ storage/ industrial processes can bring disturbance to sites that have naturalised over time and are tranquil places.
- The major town of Llangollen is steadily expanding beyond the valley floor. This could alter the balance of open country-side and rural town within views, to one of a town with greater visual influence and urbanising qualities. There are similar smaller scale examples elsewhere, where villages follow the line of the lower hillslopes - for example the villages to the west of the Clwydian Ridge.
- Distinctive rural settlement within the AONB is not limited to conservation areas or listed buildings. Attention to what is locally distinctive and why and how new development might complement this, is important to how the landscape can accommodate change, whilst conserving and enhancing its special qualities.
- Livestock numbers and welfare standards can introduce the need for large barns, on farms that have evolved through addition of smaller barns and outhouses.
- Excessive lighting of development impacts on the sense of tranquillity, wildlife and quality of life.
- The built environment of the AONB, notably the World Heritage Site, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Historic Parks and Gardens all contribute to the special character of the area, and insensitive development and change can impact on the quality of these heritage assets.

7.5 **Renewable energy and climate change:** The area is not appropriate for any large scale renewable energy projects such as large wind turbines or solar farms. Larger renewable energy proposals outside the AONB can be highly visible and impact on its setting. On and off-shore wind farms are redefining the outlook, sense of space and visual focus of views from the AONB. This can affect perceptions of tranquillity, space and freedom. There may be some pressure in the future for smaller turbines and solar panels. The influence of climate change will not be immediately obvious, but increases in temperature will lead to habitat loss and change. More in-tense rainfall will cause further footpath and soil erosion in up-land areas. The AONB has published a document entitled “Working with a Changing Climate” which gives further information on how the area could adapt to climate change.

## 8. Key Design Considerations

8.01 Good quality design does not need to be elaborate or expensive, - usually the best design solutions are those simply conceived and executed. They are respectful of their immediate surroundings and the setting in which they are placed, be that in the open countryside or amongst other buildings. Neither does new design always need to adhere strictly to vernacular building character or the use of traditional materials. Simply cladding an inappropriate building or extension with local stone will not necessarily make it acceptable. **As a point of principle, new development should firstly seek to avoid any adverse impacts on the AONB before investigating mitigation measures.** It is crucial that new development proposals are informed by a

thorough assessment of the site surroundings and its setting. Making use of photomontages can be helpful in demonstrating how a development proposal sits within the landscape.

- 8.02 This guidance adopts a practical and pragmatic approach to design solutions and firstly looks at the proposal and gradually widens the scope of potential impact to the immediate site surroundings and beyond to the wider landscape setting of the AONB. It also gives some practical examples of good design solutions and what should be avoided. It does not however state in detail whether proposals need planning permission (see Appendix 3 for permitted development thresholds). More detailed information on such matters can be obtained elsewhere from the websites of the individual local authorities or from the national planning portal.
- 8.03 This guidance will be supplemented in the future with more detailed Design Notes on topics specific to the AONB.

## 8.1 **Scale and Siting**

- 8.11 Most new proposals within the AONB will be on a relatively small scale due to its rural location. The **scale** of new development should be relative to what's already around it. For example, a new extension on a dwelling should be relative to the existing size of the dwelling. If it is too large it could overwhelm the existing property and surrounding buildings. The positioning of a larger dwelling next to smaller cottages is likely to be out of scale and will stand out. The mass is the combined effect of the height, bulk and silhouette of a building or group of buildings. In some cases, the impact of scale can be mitigated by good siting, design and the sensitive use of materials. Some traditional cottage style dwellings have been spoilt by large insensitive extensions.
- 8.12 Smaller scale housing estates will be appropriate in the larger villages and the same principles of scale and siting will apply. Some new dwellings will be justified as affordable need dwellings. The use of more traditional materials and modest designs should ensure prices are maintained at an affordable value.
- 8.13 New farm buildings will be on a larger scale and therefore their potential impact could be greater depending on site location, their design and use of materials. It would be preferable to site new buildings close to the original farmstead to create a compact farm complex. Stand-alone buildings and structures may have no specific scale reference points and consequently their mass will be more obvious especially if poorly sited. In such circumstances, it may be possible to re-locate a building amongst some natural screening of trees and woodland or within the natural landform. If possible higher vantage points and more visible sites which break the skyline on upland slopes should be avoided. The above advice will also apply to other buildings in more open countryside. Before embarking on a project, the following questions regarding scale and siting should be considered.

## 8.14 It's a question of scale and siting

- Is the scale of the development commensurate with its functional need?
- Is it in scale with the size and mass of surrounding buildings and structures?
- Is the scale relative to plot size and close to established development?
- Will the development impact on neighbouring properties?
- Is the siting appropriate and takes advantage of natural screening and local, topographic features avoiding natural skylines?
- Can the development be re-located to a more suitable site?

## 8.2 Design

8.21 Once matters of scale and siting have been considered, attention can be given to the appearance of the development. The design will need to fit functional needs and the usual approach will be to study the appearance of existing or traditional buildings in the locality. Many new dwellings have introduced more suburban or “executive” style designs which are more common to urban areas rather than the rural character of the AONB. An existing building may be of historic interest or lie within a Conservation Area. If so any alterations or extensions will need to preserve and enhance the original character of the building. Maintaining original rooflines and the spacing between windows and doors make an important contribution to character, and small changes to the design can have a detrimental effect on the overall integrity and appearance of the de-sign. This is commonly referred to as maintaining “local distinctive-ness” by respecting the pattern of the arrangement and size of buildings, their plots, the general range of building styles and integration of harmonious colours and materials.

8.22 Extensions are usually best positioned to the side or to the rear. In terms of scale and design they are usually subservient to the original building by being smaller with a lower roof. If appropriate, a subtle change in the use of complimentary materials can add interest and help date the buildings history.

8.23 For free standing buildings or structures there may be more freedom to express new design ideas which are modern but respectful of traditional design forms. In many cases, modern designs and materials can create interesting and diverse forms of architecture. The contrast can accentuate traditional designs. For example, the careful use of glazing can create interesting new spaces and allow light into older buildings. However, the introduction of more urbanised features such as large windows and elaborate entrance gates and walls should be avoided.

### Innovative designs with good use of modern materials



- 8.24 In many cases the conversion of more traditional agricultural buildings to other more economical uses such as holiday accommodation can be challenging. Local authorities will normally only allow the conversion of structurally sound buildings which have some architectural merit worth keeping. It follows that any scheme of conversion should retain this architectural merit without destroying it. This will usually not involve significant alterations to the original structure such as raising the roof or adding a complete new wing. However, the addition of porches and limited new openings may be acceptable provided the character of the original building is retained. As a general rule, it is preferable to re-use existing buildings that are available for conversion before building from new.

### Sympathetic conversion retaining historic character



- 8.25 Another matter to consider is whether the design will stand the test of time i.e. will it age gracefully and be an example of good design for its era. Before embarking on a project, the following questions on design should be considered.

### 8.26 It's a question of design

- Is the design compatible with existing building character?
- If an extension, is it subservient to the original building?
- Does a modern design echo or compliment more traditional designs in the area and retain or enhance local distinctiveness?

- Does the scheme avoid details which “urbanise” the rural scene with inappropriate windows, gates, kerbs or fencing?
- Can existing buildings be re-used and converted?
- Will it stand the test of time?

### 8.3 Materials

8.31 The choice of materials and the way they are used can be critical in complimenting the design and adding aesthetic value. The predominant building material in the AONB is stone or plain rendering coloured in white or cream. In areas, closer to the Vale of Clwyd and Llangollen reddish/brown brick has been introduced. Most roofs are covered with blue/black Welsh slates. The colour palette is therefore muted with the predominance of blue, grey/white shades. Colours should seek to harmonise with the surrounding landscape and settlements. To understand how colour can be best integrated see

[http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/guidance\\_on\\_colour\\_use\\_screen.pdf](http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/guidance_on_colour_use_screen.pdf)

8.32 If stone is being used it should preferably be re-cycled local stone or new locally sourced stone. Stone pointing is usually flush with lime added to the mortar to give a white colouring which will fade over time. Older field boundary walls will be constructed of dry stone with no mortar added. Roof material is usually darker than the walls and this helps to sit the building down in the landscape and make it less intrusive. A red tiled roof within an area of darker roofs will obviously stand out and be inappropriate.

Good renovation retaining character



8.33 Coloured render (white/cream/grey) can be applied quickly over large areas. In some cases it can be matched with stone i.e. one elevation in stone and others in render. Render should be applied smoothly and not patterned with odd shapes in relief. On more traditional buildings, there is no or limited use of barge boarding with guttering being fixed directly into stone.



### Innovative design and traditional stone boundary treatment



- 8.34 On many new buildings plastic is now being used for doors, windows and boarding. On traditional buildings plastic materials should be avoided, but if this is not possible, at least the existing size of windows and glazing patterns should be retained and appropriate frame colours used. Traditional window openings have a vertical emphasis or occasionally square. These should be retained and similar patterns adopted in extensions and new buildings.
- 8.35 Wooden doors and windows of traditional patterns should be retained on older buildings. The selective use of naturally finished timber boarding can be appropriate in certain locations and is likely to weather over time. The impact of larger agricultural buildings can be softened by the introduction of wooden materials on extensive elevations. Very often the impact of a larger building can be mitigated with correct colouring matching the background hues in the landscape. For agricultural buildings, the use of dark green, grey or blue will blend in with the surrounding countryside. Darker coloured roofs also produce less glare and are less visible from greater distances or surrounding higher ground. On the other hand, lighter coloured materials are likely to stand out and be easily visible from a wider surrounding area especially from higher ground. Likewise, metal cladding of traditional form, shape and colouring can be applied in a contemporary way. In conclusion, use colour to harmonise with the landscape/settlement setting of the development. Before embarking on a project, the following questions on materials should be considered.
- 8.36 **It's a question of using the right materials**
- Are the materials appropriate for the area?
  - Can material be re-cycled or sourced locally?
  - Are the materials being applied in the correct manner?
  - Can modern materials be applied in a sympathetic and innovative way?
  - Does the colouring of materials harmonise with surrounding landscape and development?
  - Will materials stand the test of time?

### 8.4 **Setting**

- 8.41 Any new development should be assessed against its immediate environment and within its wider landscape setting. This is especially true in

a protected landscape where long distance views are important and need to be protected. Higher ground opens wider vistas over the surrounding countryside allowing the eye to scan greater distances. Very often the visibility of development from greater distances is overlooked and although scale is diminished by distance, from certain viewpoints, development can look out of place and prominent. The same can apply when looking up at higher ground which is visible from valley bottoms. Care should therefore be taken to steer development away from the skyline, open elevated ground or sites overlooked from higher ground. The visible impact of new development will be minimised if sited in more enclosed landscapes, hidden by existing landforms and a screen of hedgerows, trees and woodland. Development should work with the contours/flow of the landform and prevailing patterns of land cover to minimise disturbance. Whilst elements of the landscape may be locally changed to accommodate development, the prevailing character of the landscape should remain intact. Visual prominence is when development forms a new focal point in the landscape which detracts from the general scene, visual focus and sense of place.

- 8.42 In this context, new development outside the AONB but close to the boundary can impact on the setting of the AONB and its natural beauty. Consideration should therefore also be given, as stated in Planning Policy Wales (2016), to development outside the AONB which can have an impact on the designated area. The extent of the impact is likely to depend on scale and proximity to the boundary. In some instances, the accumulation of development can, over time, begin to have an adverse impact on setting. This is termed “cumulative impact” of smaller developments. Although a proposal by itself might not be significant, in combination with similar proposals in the vicinity, it has passed the threshold of acceptability.

Pontcysyllte aqueduct



- 8.43 A good example of the concept of setting is in the way the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site has been designated. The actual designation follows the Llangollen canal from Horseshoe Falls near Llangollen via the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct through to Chirk Bank in Shropshire. However, a wider 'buffer zone' following adjoining hillside ridgelines has also been identified acknowledging a wider setting for the canal and aqueduct. One of the overall aims is to “manage the World Heritage Site and Buffer

Zone in a sustainable manner to conserve, enhance and present the Outstanding Universal Value of the site locally and internationally” (refer to the SPG on the World Heritage Site which should be read in conjunction with this guidance if the proposal is within the WHS or its buffer zone). Long distance landscape views are important and new development should avoid intruding on the focus and appreciation of these views. For major developments within or adjacent to the AONB a landscape and visual impact assessment in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (third edition) is recommended, with advice provided by a professional with landscape assessment and design experience.

8.44 There is therefore a recognition that setting goes beyond the immediate vicinity of a building or structure and that a wider perspective needs to be considered. Before embarking on a project, the following questions on setting should be considered.

**8.45 It's a question of setting**

- Is the site visible from a wider surrounding area and is it visually prominent in the landscape?
- Can a building be sited in the fold of the landscape and screened by natural vegetation?
- Will the development spoil important views from within or outside the AONB and impact on its wider setting?
- Does a proposal outside but close to the boundary of the AONB impact on its setting and special qualities?

**8.5 Landscaping**

8.51 Buildings can be screened by good planting schemes, earth mounding and various other forms of boundary treatment. Very often older structures in the countryside have mature planting around them acting as functional wind screens and points of interest. Where possible such features which make up the existing landscape fabric should be retained or enhanced. Trees and plants soften the outline of buildings, add to biodiversity and a modest landscaping scheme can quickly assimilate new development into the countryside. The way a site is enclosed should also be part and parcel of the initial design process and should not be an after-thought. Existing stone walls and hedges should be retained and restored where possible and protected from building activity. However, landscaping will not by itself, make a poor development acceptable.

8.52 Again, as with architectural design, the type of shrubs, trees and permanent materials used for landscaping should reflect what is in the immediate vicinity. Where possible, it is best to choose indigenous species of local provenance and avoid more exotic or alien plants. The planting of leylandii trees or other quick growing conifers should be avoided.

8.53 The means of enclosing a plot can often add to or detract from local distinctiveness. Grand entrances with extensive vehicular access points will

reflect a suburban or more “executive” design approach which should be avoided. Wooden close boarded fencing, or extensive brick walling are not appropriate materials for enclosure in more rural areas; - natural hedging or stone is more acceptable. Likewise using hard landscaping materials such as brick or pavements for access roads are not encouraged and will impede natural drainage. If new external lighting is proposed this should be considered as part of an overall landscaping scheme and kept to a minimum to protect the AONB’s dark skies and avoid light pollution. Excessive lighting will produce glare and light trespass outside the site which can impact on tranquillity, wildlife and local quality of life. It is possible to provide shields and baffles and angle lighting downwards to prevent the upward spillage of light, minimise lighting output (maximum 3500 lumens), introduce timers and specify colour temperature (less than 3000 kelvin) to moderate the impact of lighting over a wider area. Development proposals should be accompanied by sufficient technical details of any lighting to enable an assessment to be undertaken.

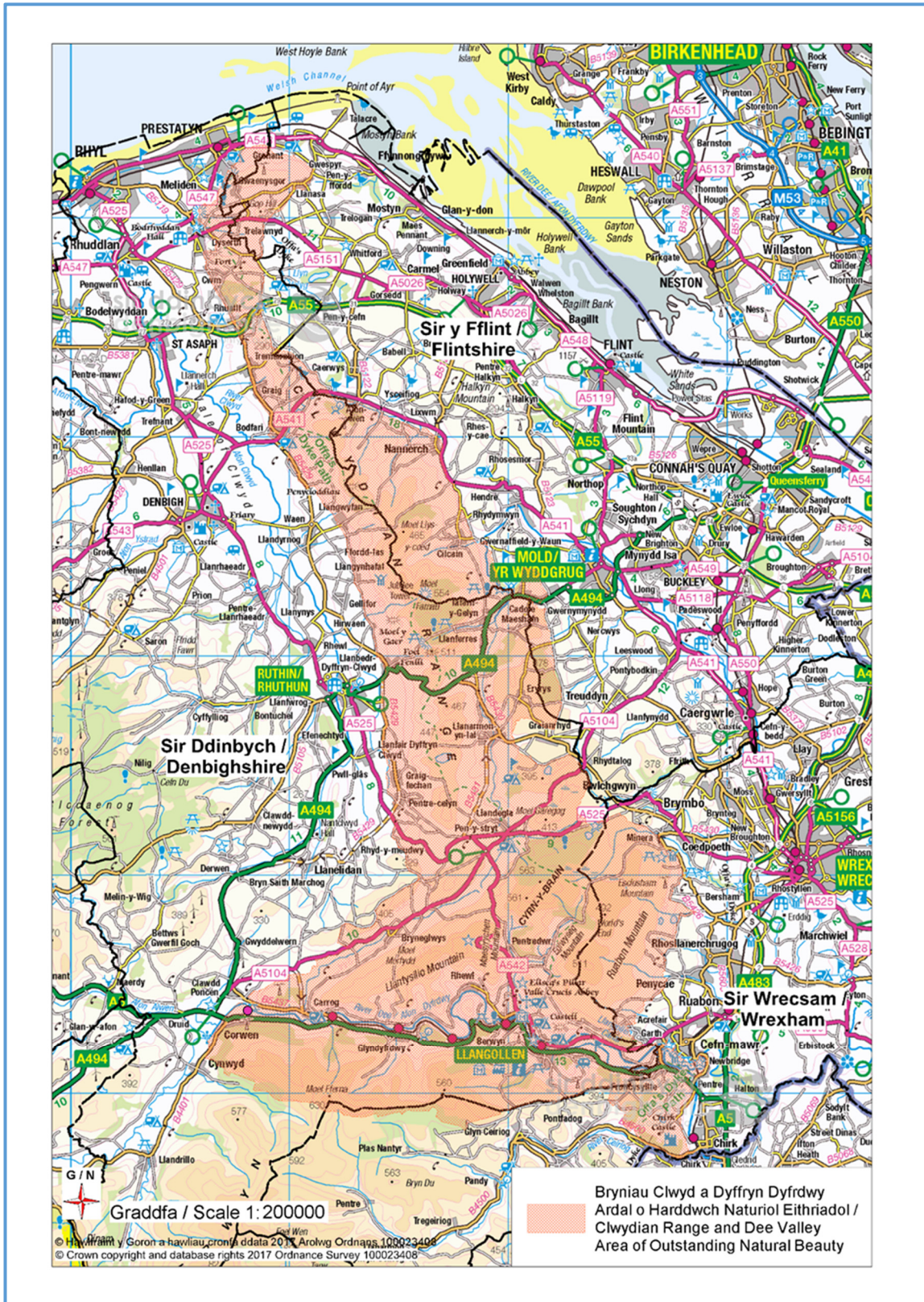
8.54 Development should generally seek to avoid steeper landforms where more extensive engineering work is required. The extent of landscape disturbance from cut and fill, earthworks and retaining structures increases in extent relative to gradient steepness. The successful restoration of disturbed ground is also more difficult due to thin soils and slope angle. Where engineering works are unavoidable, consideration should be given at the outset to the sensitive disposal of any excess material or re-profiling and restoring the site to create a natural landform.

8.55 Taking account of the predominant colour palette of surrounding vegetation can help to identify the correct choice and colour of new materials. Before embarking on a project, the following questions on landscaping should be considered.

**8.56 It’s a question of landscaping**

- Has landscaping been considered at the outset?
- Can a building be located within existing natural screening?
- Are plants and materials compatible to the area proposed with the avoidance of hard landscaping?
- Is the means of enclosure appropriate and not introducing urban elements such as grand entrances?
- Is the lighting scheme properly designed to avoid excessive light and light trespass outside the site?
- Will the landscaping contribute to the natural beauty of the AONB?
- Are existing landscape features retained and restored?

**Appendix 1 Map showing extent of local authority areas within the AONB and contact information**



Contact details for Local Planning Authorities and the Clwydian Range  
and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

**Denbighshire County Council**

Development Management  
P.O. Box 62  
Ruthin  
LL15 9AZ

Email – [planning@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:planning@denbighshire.gov.uk)  
Tel – 01824 706727

Website: <https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/resident/planning-and-building-regulations/planning/planning.aspx>

**Flintshire County Council**

County Hall  
Mold  
Flintshire  
CH7 6NF

Email – [planningdc@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:planningdc@flintshire.gov.uk)  
Tel – 01352 703234

Website: <http://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Planning/Home.aspx>

**Wrexham County Borough Council**

Environment and Planning  
16 Lord Street  
Wrexham  
LL11 1LG

Email – [planning@wrexham.gov.uk](mailto:planning@wrexham.gov.uk)  
Tel – 01978 298994

Website: <http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/planning>

**Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB**

Loggerheads Country Park  
NR. Mold  
Denbighshire  
CH7 5LH

Email – [clwydianrangeaonb@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:clwydianrangeaonb@denbighshire.gov.uk)  
Tel – 01824 712757

Website: <http://www.clwydianrangeanddeevalleyaonb.org.uk/plans-and-strategies/>

## **Appendix 2 Main AONB planning policies of the local planning authorities**

### Extracts from Denbighshire Local Development Plan 2006 – 2021

#### **Policy VOE 2 - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Area of Outstanding Beauty**

In determining development proposals within or affecting the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Area of Outstanding Beauty (AOB), development that would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the landscape and the reasons for designation will not be permitted.

#### **Policy VOE 3 – Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site**

Development which would harm the attributes which justified the designation of the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal as a World Heritage Site and the site's Outstanding Universal Value will not be permitted. The following are considered to be key material considerations:

- i. The authenticity and integrity of the attributes that contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site including views, and features of cultural, artistic, historical, social and natural environmental importance.
- ii. The setting of the World Heritage Site and attributes important to the Outstanding Universal Value of the site present within the Buffer Zone. Where there is a demonstrable need for essential non-residential visitor attraction facilities for the World Heritage Site which cannot be provided within the settlement limit, their location outside settlement limits will be permitted where there is no adverse impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the site present within the Buffer Zone.

Where there is a demonstrable need for essential non-residential visitor attraction facilities for the World Heritage Site which cannot be provided within the settlement limit, their location outside settlement limits will be permitted where there is no adverse impact on the Outstanding Universal Value.

### Extract from Flintshire Unitary Development Plan 2000 - 2015

#### **Policy L2 - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

Development within or affecting the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will be permitted only where:

- a. it maintains and where appropriate enhances the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and preserves the natural tranquillity of the AONB; and
- b. it will be designed to a high standard using traditional materials and planting.

Major developments within the AONB will be the subject of rigorous examination and will not be permitted unless there is an overriding need in terms of proven national interest and there are no alternative sites.

(Flintshire Council are currently preparing a Local Development Plan which will contain a new policy on the AONB)

Extract from Wrexham Unitary Development Plan 1996 - 2011

### **Policy EC5 - Special Landscape Areas**

Within Special Landscape Areas, priority will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape. Development, other than for agriculture, small-scale farm-based and other rural enterprises, and essential operational development by utility service providers, will be strictly controlled. Development will be required to conform to a high standard of design and landscaping, and special attention will be paid to minimising its visual impact both from nearby and distant viewpoints.

(Wrexham County Borough Council are currently preparing a Local Development Plan which will contain a new policy on the AONB)



### **Appendix 3 Summary of main differences in Permitted Development Rights in the AONB, World Heritage Site and Conservation Areas**

1. **House extensions** – permission required if it is more than one storey in height, is to the side of the dwelling and extends more than 3m from the side, or is set back less than 1m from the main elevation of the dwelling.
2. **Cladding of external walls of a dwelling** requires permission, including external insulation.
3. **Enlargement or additions to roofs** of dwellings require permission.
4. **Other domestic outbuildings** or structures within the curtilage of a dwelling re-quire permission if it is located to the side of the dwelling, or the total area of ground covered by buildings or structures (excluding the area of the dwelling) situated more than 20m from the dwelling exceeds 10sq m.
5. **Microwave antenna** on a dwelling or within its curtilage require permission if it faces and is visible from a highway, or is on a building over 15m in height.
6. **Domestic micro generation equipment** – solar/thermal PV equipment on domestic buildings or as stand-alone installations, or biomass heating flues require permission in the WHS or in a Conservation Area if visible from a highway (Note: this does not apply elsewhere in the AONB).
7. **Non-domestic micro generation equipment** - solar/thermal PV installations or biomass/combined heat and power system flues on buildings require permission if fronting a highway. Stand-alone solar/thermal PV equipment require permission if visible from a highway which bounds the curtilage.
8. **Industrial or warehouse extensions** – permission required if the floor space is increased by more than 10% or 500 sq. m, or constructed of materials which do not have a similar external appearance to the existing. Associated refuse and cycle stores also require permission.
9. **Educational or hospital extensions** - permission required if constructed of materials which do not have a similar external appearance to the existing. Associated refuse and cycle stores also require permission.
10. **Office extensions** and associated refuse and cycle stores require permission.
11. **Shop or services establishment extensions** and associated refuse, cycle or trolley stores require permission.
12. **Temporary exploration for minerals** requires permission.
13. **Electricity undertakings require permission for extensions/alterations to buildings** which exceed 10% of the cubic content or 500 sq m in area. Associated telecommunications lines also require permission.
14. **Telecommunication masts** require permission.

**Sources:** The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 as amended by The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (Wales) Orders 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2014 (No.2)

**Note:** This is a summary of the main differences in permitted development rights. Please refer to the source documents to determine if permission is required.