

Protect Mid-Wales' unique Cambrian Mountains: designate them an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 17 Hydref 2022
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Petition title: Protect Mid-Wales' unique Cambrian Mountains: designate them an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Text of petition: The Cambrian Mountains: endless open skies, outstanding biodiversity, spectacular hills and valleys, 5000 years' heritage of Welsh language, farming and mining. Their sense of immense space and peace is rare.

Sadly, conservation of these uplands gets little attention. Farms are bought up for conifer planting or for large wind farms despite the lack of infrastructure.

So beautiful a region needs protection AND longer term rural employment. Designate the Cambrians as Mid-Wales' first AONB!

The Cambrian Mountains' peatlands mitigate climate change by absorbing manmade carbon, and reduce river flooding. Biodiverse native woodlands and fens nurture precious plants, animals and birds. Birds of prey cruise the skies; red squirrels, otters and pine martens roam; butterflies, dragonflies, ladybirds and 15 kinds of dung-beetles call it home! Scattered farms, cairns, chapels and ruins record people's lives and work here since the Bronze Age.

AONB designation would bring balance between development, local communities' needs AND people's need for green space. Existing AONBs like



Gower, Anglesey, Clwydian Hills and Dee Valley thrive while promoting and preserving Welsh landscapes for all.

We need to stop and think: Politicians raise concerns over windfarm plans (mynewtown.co.uk). Large scale afforestation will decimate rural communities warns farming union (nation.cymru). Give the Cambrian Mountains prestige AONB branding and coherent management and watch the region flourish!

1. Background

Nationally important landscapes in Wales are designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or National Parks under the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (hereafter, the '1949 Act')*. Together these 'Designated Landscapes' cover around 25% of Wales. Although National Parks and AONBs have different statutory purposes, together they seek to:

- conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage; and
- promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) says AONBs are “protected by law because of their special landscape qualities, wildlife, geology and geography”. The designation triggers obligations in relation to development plans, and allows for the making of access orders and the establishment of conservation boards.

AONBs differ from National Parks in that they lack the statutory purpose to promote opportunities for the public to enjoy and understand the area.

Wales is home to 4 AONBs (Anglesey, Clwydian Range & Dee Valley, Llyn Peninsula and Gower – additionally the Wye Valley AONB spans England and Wales), and 3 National Parks (Brecon Beacons, Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia).

Designating AONBs

The power to designate AONBs was originally contained in the 1949 Act but was modified by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (hereafter, the '2000 Act'). Under Section 82 of the 2000 Act, NRW can designate any area in Wales (which is not already a National Park) as an AONB if the area is of such outstanding natural beauty that it should be conserved and enhanced. The procedure for designating AONBs is detailed in Section 83 of the 2000 Act.

In response to this petition, the Minister for Climate Change (hereafter, 'the Minister') says NRW is "currently examining the case for designating a new National Park in north-east Wales", adding that this is an "extensive and exhaustive process and will be the priority for the coming years for NRW in terms of new designations".

Planning

NRW says that "AONB have more protection than other areas under the planning process". The Welsh Government's national planning policy – Planning Policy Wales (PPW) – sets out that AONBs must "be afforded the highest status of protection from inappropriate developments" (see section 6.3.8, page 134).

The granting of AONB status may therefore result in the local planning authority (LPA) applying stricter development controls in the area when producing the local development plan, and when deciding planning applications.

PPW states that "major developments should not take place in National Parks or AONBs except in exceptional circumstances". PPW is accompanied by the National Development Framework (the NDF) – Future Wales: the national plan 2040 – which forms the national development plan. The NDF states that "applications for large-scale wind and solar will not be permitted in National Parks and [AONBs]".

The granting of AONB status would also have an impact on smaller household developments with some permitted development rights removed.

Local authority responsibility

Section 89 of the 2000 Act requires the local authority in whose area an AONB lies to prepare and publish an AONB management plan which must be reviewed every 5 years. This will have resource implications for the local authority.

2. Welsh Government action

A review of AONB and National Parks was undertaken in 2015, the resulting '[Marsden Report](#)' provided 69 recommendations.

The Future Landscapes Working Group was later established by the Welsh Government to explore the Marsden Report recommendations, [reporting in 2017](#). The report is explored further in a [Senedd Research article](#).

Welsh Government then published its [Priorities for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks 2018 \(valued and resilient\)](#), which sets out four goals for AONBs and National Parks in Wales:

- they are Valued Places;
- they contain Resilient Environments;
- they support Resilient Communities; and
- the AONB partnerships and National Park Authorities must adopt Resilient Ways of Working.

The Welsh Government's [Programme for Government](#) includes a commitment to designate a new National Park to cover the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, which is currently an AONB.

In her response to this petition, the Minister says NRW is "committed to undertaking an all-Wales technical assessment of natural beauty":

It is intended that this will assess areas against the natural beauty criteria which will help to assess their potential need for future protection.

The Minister extends an invitation to the petitioner to meet with Welsh Government officials, together with NRW officers, to "discuss some aspects of the proposal to designate in greater detail".

3. Welsh Parliament action

There has been no Senedd activity regarding the AONB designation of the Cambrian Mountains.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.