

Designate the Tywi Valley as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 16 Medi 2024
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Reference: SR24/8973-4

Petition Number: P-05-1449

Petition title: Designate the Tywi Valley as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Text of petition:

We, the undersigned, urgently petition the Senedd to designate the Tywi Valley as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

This designation will be in line with the recent decision (November 2023) to designate all AONBs in the UK as "National Landscapes."

The imminent threat of pylons and wind turbines necessitates urgent designation to safeguard its integrity and to protect and preserve its cultural and historical, as well as ecological, significance.

The NRW has characterised the Tywi Valley as having a "National Landscape Character" with unique features which make the valley "both scenically and ecologically outstanding".

The NRW has noted the valley's use as a transport corridor since prehistoric times, its use as a significant agricultural area, and its historical significance (a well' settled area with a long sense of history - as attested by the "string of fortifications, from stone castles to simple mottes and ancient prehistoric hill forts and Roman encampments" which dot the valley.



All of these, the NRW noted, combine to form the archetypal ‘beautiful’ landscape that is the Tywi Valley.

Numerous funding grants have been made in recognition of this unique character of the Tywi Valley.

The Tywi Valley is cherished and loved by visitors and locals alike.

The Tywi Valley is a beautiful unique natural landscape like no other. The Tywi Valley needs your help!

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 (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 four AONBs (Anglesey, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, Llŷn Peninsula and Gower – additionally the Wye Valley AONB spans the Wales and England border), and three National Parks (Bannau Brycheiniog, Pembrokeshire Coast and Eryri).

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* (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 Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies MS, 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”.

Rebranding AONBs

The petitioner refers to a recent (November 2023) decision to ‘rebrand’ AONBs in the UK as ‘National Landscapes’. This is in reference to a [2018 ‘Landscapes Review’](#) which considered whether protections for AONBs and National Parks [in England](#) were still fit for purpose. The [central proposal of the resulting report](#) was to “bring National Parks and AONBs together as part of one family of national landscapes”.

This review and report refers to England only, and Senedd Research is unable to find any evidence that it’s being adopted in Wales. As a devolved area, any changes to designated landscapes policy would be the responsibility of the Welsh Government.

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]”.

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 five 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 [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 response to this petition, the Cabinet Secretary says NRW is “committed to undertaking an all-Wales technical assessment of natural beauty”, and that as part of this NRW is considering “Landscape Character Assessments” that may be of interest to the petitioner when completed.

The Cabinet Secretary highlights that designations need to “demonstrate a level of local support including local political support”, and questions:

... the extent campaigners have secured local support and aligned different, sometimes conflicting, approaches to protecting landscapes.

The Minister offers to arrange for NRW officers discuss the proposal with the petitioner in greater detail.

3. Welsh Parliament action

There has been no Senedd activity regarding the AONB designation of the Tywi Valley.

The Petitions Committee has previously considered petition [P-06-1302 Protect Mid-Wales' unique Cambrian Mountains: designate them an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#). Having received over 20,000 signatures, the petition was debated in Plenary before being closed.

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.