

## **The role of Designated Landscapes in post-Brexit Wales**

### **Our proposition to the Environment Minister Hannah Blythyn AM**

Alliance for Welsh Designated Landscapes<sup>1</sup>  
February 2018

#### **The collective ambition**

*To ensure that Wales' National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are flagships of world-class management of the Welsh environment, equipped to realise the unique contribution they can make nationally and internationally in delivering public wellbeing in 21st century Wales.*

Welsh Government can grasp this opportunity, if its ambition and commitment are big enough and if wise use is made of the reviews of the past four years. Multiple and long-term benefits for the well-being of Wales can, however, more than repay the investment. The Alliance for Welsh Designated Landscapes is poised ready to contribute to this important work.

National Parks and AONBs are iconic natural and cultural assets. Their significance for Wales is deep and wide and encompasses familiar landscapes and places close to the heart, wildlife, history, geology and much more besides. Well-managed access opportunities of the highest standard are an area of special expertise, with outstanding networks of footpaths, bridleways, access land and key National Trails.

As a result National Parks and AONBs play a pivotal role in tourism, with their pull factor for UK and overseas visitors and income generation for local businesses, communities and the wider Welsh economy. From £12m government spending<sup>2</sup> in 2013/14 for example, Welsh National Parks facilitated 12 million visitors, whilst generating £1bn spending on goods and services.<sup>3</sup>

Designated Landscapes already have in place the expertise and experience to deliver rural prosperity in tandem with responsible and sustainable land use which actively protects the assets themselves. With appropriate financial support and changes to land use and environmental management, our Designated Landscapes can deliver at scale on Welsh Government's Sustainable Management of Natural Resources agenda and its Well-being ambitions.

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<sup>1</sup>The Alliance is **the Welsh organisation for Designated Landscapes**. The Alliance was formed in 2014 and brings together the expertise of the Brecon Beacons Park Society, Friends of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, Cymdeithas Eryri the Snowdonia Society, Gower Society, CPRW, National Trust Wales, Cymdeithas y Cerddwyr/Ramblers Wales, RSPB Cymru, YHA Cymru, BMC Cymru and Wildlife Trusts Wales. Collectively we have long-standing involvements in the legal and policy framework for Designated Landscapes, and experience of the management challenges they face.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/students/wholooksafternationalparks/costsandspending>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nationalparkswales.gov.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/389727/Valuing-Wales-National-Parks-.pdf](http://www.nationalparkswales.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/389727/Valuing-Wales-National-Parks-.pdf)

Existing regulatory and reward systems for land management could be reformed following Brexit to secure landscape-scale nature recovery, the resurgence of local communities and the strengthening of rural economies. The deeply-rooted approach to partnership working and the agility of operations are key strengths of Designated Landscapes, which present a massive opportunity under new arrangements.

The 25% of Wales which is designated National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are where this proactive transformational land-use reform can best be prioritised, pioneered, and fully enabled.

The success of the Wales Coastal Path has shown how ambition and commitment generate multiple benefits. Indeed, two of our three National Parks and four out of five AONBs contribute sections of that world-first achievement. The scale of net visitor spending, employment, and health and well-being benefits<sup>4</sup> from this linear development give some inkling of what could be delivered through the entire Designated Landscape portfolio.

The Alliance for Welsh Designated Landscapes offers the Minister and Welsh Government its support and expertise to implement the steps to ensure that these benefits materialise.

### **The opportunity**

Our iconic National Parks and AONBs occupy a special place in our nation's history, culture and psyche. With support and vision these Designated Landscapes can be world leaders in environmentally sensitive management of land and water. They are the natural choice for where we begin to put into action Wales' environment and well-being agenda; they are where we will bring to life our ground-breaking legislation and the benefits which the sustainable management of natural resources truly offers.

Because the qualities of these environmentally sensitive landscapes have long been recognised as nationally important through their designations, many of their planning, development and resource management practices are already integrated and aligned with the principles of SMNR. The mechanisms are in place to safeguard the value of their biodiversity resources, natural beauty and cultural heritage for future generations.

Exiting the EU will herald significant change across Wales. In responding to this change, it will be possible to shape important opportunities to increase the range and reach of benefits our Designated Landscapes offer by securing appropriate funding and support for sustainable management of natural resources. These special places can offer life-changing opportunities for all the people of Wales in addition to the economic importance of their offer to visitors from further afield.

Designated Landscapes house many of our most important natural resources, they provide a ripe opportunity to tackle the challenges associated with carbon capture and storage, biodiversity recovery and water resource and flood management. National Parks and AONBs offer the scale at which changes will make a difference.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.walescoastpath.gov.uk/media/1545/wcp-visitor-survey-2014-2015-final-report-for-publication.pdf>

Upholding the conservation values of Designated Landscapes is absolutely essential if twenty-first century Wales is to safeguard these national icons. Their special qualities and resources are so critical that robust policy and regulatory limits must remain in place to guarantee their national wellbeing value.

But we also recognise that this is not enough. Management must build on what has been achieved and go beyond it. Wales needs to push on and reverse the declining fortunes of rural communities, deliver equitable access and opportunities for all, and kick-start large-scale biodiversity restoration.

We look to Welsh Government leadership, in association with Natural Resources Wales, to:

- establish an unambiguous environment-first approach to the management of our nation's most prized natural and cultural resources;
- support collaborative local incentives which magnify the distinctive and world-renowned qualities of our Designated Landscapes.
- invest in bold transformational land use initiatives which deliver multiple public benefits

Such an approach will receive strong support from across the third sector, business and communities, amplifying the message that Wales is forging a distinctive and long-term approach to natural resource management.

### **Our suggested pathways to success**

Our direction of travel for Wales' designated landscapes must therefore:

- Prioritise the living landscapes of Designated Landscapes as pathfinders for ambitious nature-based approaches to natural resource management.
- Use Designated Landscapes to deliver equality of opportunity for health and wellbeing of Wales on a national scale.
- Invest in the cultural heritage of Designated Landscapes and unlock economic and social rejuvenation across rural Wales.
- Utilise the skills, expertise and networks within Designated Landscapes to lead and drive change beyond their boundaries<sup>5</sup>.
- Promote Designated Landscapes internationally and showcase their contribution to a globally responsible Wales.

The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas has already endorsed such an approach believing it offers *'a way forward which other parts of the UK could have learnt from'*. We now need to prove this and enable Designated Landscapes to demonstrate how they can help lead the way to a more resilient, healthier, increasingly prosperous and vibrant Wales.

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<sup>5</sup> Shared learning can enable the replication/ adaptation of successful approaches, especially the identification of *why* some approaches work better than others. For example, in Snowdonia National Park self-sustaining SMNR-type outputs have already been achieved by use of project officers to build lasting rapport with farmers on the pilots of Tir Cymen and Rhaglen Tir Eryri schemes.

Our Designated Landscapes are already driving a wider agenda in, for example, the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park's apprenticeship scheme<sup>6</sup>, the Snowdon Partnership Plan<sup>7</sup>, the Black Mountains College project<sup>8</sup> and numerous landscape partnership projects across our AONBs.

In short it is time to enable Designated Landscape to help lead the way to a more resilient, healthier, increasingly prosperous and vibrant Wales.

For these reasons Designated Landscapes must be at the heart of Wales' post-Brexit strategies. The 'Brand Wales' world-class environments of our Designated Landscapes have the potential and must therefore be given the opportunity to pull Wales up and away from the risks of lowest-common-denominator options.

This is the investment opportunity of our time: to invest in the 25% of rural Wales where we can transition most readily to nature-friendly, locally bespoke land use. Making this investment will cascade the local social, economic and environmental benefits which are urgently needed and could be provided effectively post-Brexit.

Designated landscapes therefore now need certainty, a clarity of purpose and the resources to deliver real-world sustainable management of rural Wales.

### **The next step**

The Marsden report and elements of the Future Landscapes Wales work provide important pointers and direction for the future roles of Designated Landscapes. Now is the time for Welsh Government to translate the theory into a distinctive environment-first practice in these landscapes. Doing so will enhance the quality, distinctiveness and resilience of these important national assets and provide evidence and experience for adopting similar approaches in other areas and landscapes of Wales.

We trust the Minister will grasp this once in a lifetime opportunity to add further public value to these special places. As the Welsh organization for designated landscapes we look forward to meeting in the near future to discuss how we can help shape and realise this opportunity.

Alliance for Welsh Designated Landscapes.  
February 2018

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales/default.asp?PID=67&NewsItem=1787>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.snowdonpartnership.co.uk/read-me/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/the-authority/press-and-news/press-releases/january-2018/funding-support-for-new-college-feasibility-study/>