

## LLŶN CONSERVATION AREAS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BURUM was commissioned in December 2014, to undertake an evaluation of the nine Conservation Areas within the Llŷn Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The work was expected to:

- Review and update the assessment undertaken in 2003 by BDP company;
- Identify what has changed since that assessment for better or worse;
- Assess and update what contributes to the special character of the Conservation Areas;
- Identify what needs to be done to maintain and protect them in the future.

The report and its findings were drawn up around the following key steps:

- Reading the report and findings of BDP;
- Undertaking desk research to understand changes to the context in terms of legislation, policy and general attitude to Conservation Areas;
- Identifying guidelines and good practice in the field;
- Conducting field work;
- Engaging with Community Councils and other key stakeholders to obtain their views;
- Formulate improvement recommendations for each of the nine conservation areas;
- Offer guidance in terms of measures that will assist the Council to maintain and improve the character of the areas in the future;
- Create a draft and final report drawing together the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The report is split into two sections. The first section investigates the context/ external environment of what has changed since 2003. The second section evaluates and assesses the changes seen in the nine Conservation Areas since 2003.

The work was undertaken between December 2014 and March 2015.

#### Llŷn AONB Management Plan

In the original Management Plan (2005-2009), reference is made to the condition of the conservation areas with recommendations regarding their boundaries.

*Table 1*

SETTLEMENT	CONDITION	RECOMMENDATION
------------	-----------	----------------

Aberdaron	On the whole, it is well maintained	No Change.
Nefyn	Varied	Designate an extension
Porthdinllaen	Unique	Designate an extension
Llangian	Maintained extremely well	Additional Protection
Llanengan	Maintained well	Additional Protection
Llainestyn	Maintained well	Additional Protection
Trefor	Maintained fairly well	Designate an extension and additional protection
Llanaelhaearn	Maintained fairly well	Designate an extension and additional protection
Clynnog Fawr	Special character but some developments impairing this	Additional Protection

The current Management Plan (2010-2015 Plan) measures the progress made with implementing the previous plan. The extensions have been approved for Nefyn, Trefor and Llanaelhaearn. Steps were not undertaken to include additional protection for the specific settlements in question.

Although this project undertakes the inspection of the conservation areas, the work of drawing up management plans and implementing them are yet to be achieved.

### Status

The importance of conservation areas have, in one sense, increased since 2003. They are recognised as part of the family now known as 'heritage assets' that contribute towards:

- Economic vitality and culture;
- Civic pride and quality of life;
- A resource for generations to come.

Heritage assets are also recognised as a tool in terms of economic regeneration.

### Legislation

In terms of legislation concerning Conservation Areas, there has been no specific change in the field.

However, some changes in the planning field were identified that may have an impact on conservation areas including some changes to permitted rights on domestic and non-domestic land. There have also been some changes to Building Regulations concerning energy efficiency. The Planning and Heritage Measures also offer changes to the legislative context

Although not a direct part of the legal framework, the European Union and the individual states have supported the instrument of the *European Convention on Landscape*. This includes important obligations in terms of the status of conservation areas as landscape.

## National Policies:

Section 2 of Planning Policy Wales reinforces the Local Development Plan's status when determining planning applications and emphasises the need for these plans to be clear and concise.

Section 6 of Planning Policy Wales states that "conservation area designation is the main instrument available to local planning authorities to give effect to conservation policies for a particular neighbourhood or area". It recognises that the positive management of conservation areas is necessary if their character or appearance is to be protected and enhanced. Local Authorities are expected to establish consistent criteria against which existing and/or new conservation areas and their boundaries should be reviewed.

Technical Advice Note 12 on *Design* issued in July 2014, contains generic advice on good design. It stresses the need to evaluate the context (including "the area's natural and human history").

## Local Policies

The relevant planning policies have been included in the Unitary Development Plan. No Conservation Area Appraisals, Conservation Area Plans or Action Strategies have been published since the deposit plan was published in 2004.

## Drivers for Change

The drivers for change in the current Llŷn AONB Management Plan, were assessed when discussing how the historical environment has been influenced in the period up to 2015. Table 2 summarises that assessment.

In terms of positive impact, the period of economic austerity has meant that the investment in improving and converting historical buildings has been comparatively low. Therefore the mindless damage to the appearance and character of the majority of the conservation areas were few. On the other hand there has been a significant reduction in public investment to maintain and improve these areas. Some new developments have had a negative impact on some of the conservation areas or settings of these areas. Where there have been housing improvements there is a suggestion that property owners (often unknowingly) continue to use unsuitable materials or designs.

What was not predicted was the scope and level of public investment in heritage sites or buildings over the last ten years. The total is in excess of **£30 million**.

Nevertheless, there is hardly any or only a little in the urban environment - and specifically the Conservation Areas. There is therefore an argument that there is a risk that the lack of investment in these Conservation Areas would undermine the efforts to increase the value of the 'product or offer' in Llŷn and this in turn would undermine the benefit that comes from substantial investments.

## Conclusion

As a result of strengthening the status of the built environment as 'special landscapes' and as 'heritage assets' it is necessary to review their contribution locally to the wider life of the AONB. The need to undertake this is reinforced by the proposal of the Panel on the Review of Designated Landscapes to re-name areas of outstanding natural beauty in Wales as national landscapes and to give them the same status as landscapes as national parks.

A summary of the full description of the individual assessments has been included in Section 2 of the report.

The assessment of the nine conservation areas in Section 2 suggests that the condition of the areas on the whole continues to deteriorate. This is mainly due to defective design and inappropriate use of materials by property owners.

What is common to many of the Conservation Areas is the need to improve the following:

- Architectural details – doors and windows in an unsuitable design and colour installed in many of the buildings;
- Many of the windows installed in the incorrect place in the corner of the opening;
- The roof line and details of the eaves and soffits.
- Finish of external walls e.g. remove pebble dash and replace with the original finish;
- Quality and design of the roads and public spaces;
- Order of street furniture including bus shelters;
- Condition and appearance of commercial buildings;
- Untidy sites within the urban conservation areas;
- Unsuitable design with a number of recent developments outside the Area causing deterioration in the Area's setting.

Although there is some awareness and recognition locally of the importance of maintaining and improving the heritage assets, this awareness and recognition has not filtered down to wider public and private life. Therefore there is a need to increase awareness of the responsibility and contribution of owners of domestic and non-domestic property to maintain, retain and improve. We suggest that the communities themselves have a key role to play in this learning process.

Based on these assessments, we recommend that it is necessary to strengthen the protection of these areas by introducing control on permitted development rights in parallel with the educational programme to ensure compliance with the regulations and development conditions.

Evidence also suggests that it is necessary to review the attention and importance given to conservation area designations when assessing applications for new developments or close to the boundaries of those areas.

Investment is also needed in public spaces in the key conservation areas in order to support and add to the substantial investments in individual heritage buildings and the natural environment.

Investment is required in a programme to develop and improve heritage skills in order to increase capacity and keep the benefits locally.

In light of the threats and alleviation measures that come as a result of climate change, it is necessary to get to grips with the best way to prepare conservation areas to cope specifically with

rainfall and more regular and stronger storms and keep an eye on how residents respond to these changes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Recommendation 1: 'We recommend that the next Llŷn AONB Management Plan has an important role with leading the way to put specific management plans and the strategy in place for the conservation areas in the Llŷn AONB taking into consideration the need to ensure that the areas are "fit for purpose" as a result of the climate change challenges.*

*Recommendation 2: To stage a conference for stakeholders to consider how it is possible to ensure that the Conservation Areas play their part fuller in the contribution to the area's heritage assets towards their regeneration.*

*Recommendation 3: Work and support residents and the business community to identify buildings of local heritage importance and to draft Guidance to Good Design for their Local Conservation Area;*

*Recommendation 4: Commence a programme to educate and train development managers and caretakers of public spaces regarding the importance of protecting and improving the appearance and character of conservation areas and their importance especially to the heritage and economy of the Llŷn Peninsula.*

*Recommendation 5: Consider setting aside a portion of current funds / or establish a new specific fund to further encourage owners and occupiers of houses and properties to invest and use more suitable windows, doors, wall and roof materials and communication technology equipment and lighting;*

*Recommendation 6: Encourage local residents and businesses to install solar panels, wind turbines and other sources of sustainable micro energy to less prominent roofs and gable-ends where they have no detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.*

*Recommendation 7: Follow the Instruction in Article 4 (2) to restrict rights to cover, paint and render walls, re-roof and extensions, commencing with the buildings and streets that are important in terms of the setting of other buildings and structures of heritage and economic importance.*

*Recommendation 8: Collaborate with statutory contractors to establish a joint-understanding on methods to control the public spaces in the conservation areas including the rationalisation of use of structures not needed or replaced by more suitable materials where appropriate.*

*Recommendation 9: Collaborate with the Highways and Planning Services to draft street scene plans in the key areas of those Conservation Areas that are important in terms of the setting of other buildings and structures of heritage and economic importance.*

A number of specific recommendations address the situation in individual Conservation Areas and these are listed in full in Section 2.