

4.0 THE LLŶN PENINSULA – A SPECIAL PLACE!

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The Llŷn Peninsula was one of the first areas in Britain to be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty back in 1956. To the present day, there are only five AONBs in Wales - the others are Anglesey, Clwydian Range, Gower Peninsula and Wye Valley.
- 4.1.2 The main basis for designating part of the area as an AONB in 1956 was the natural beauty of the landscape and coast, wide-ranging views and the undeveloped nature of the area. These features continue to make the area special, but for the purposes of the Management Plan, it is important to attempt to make a more detailed analysis of the area's special features and define all of its qualities.
- 4.1.3 When we refer to "qualities", this is a reference to the feature or element of the area's character that is special, unique or "valued". After identifying and defining the special qualities, we can proceed to measure the size and condition of these features (and the resources that are part of them), including measuring what changes have occurred over time and continue to happen.
- 4.1.4 Some of the area's qualities will continue to be relatively unchanged, such as the beautiful landscape and varying coastline as they are based on the area's geology and vegetation. However, in the case of some qualities there has been some deterioration over time, such as a reduction in the size and quality of habitats, wildlife and historical buildings.
- 4.1.5 A number of conservation designations have been made in different parts of Llŷn. These acknowledge the high value of the landscape, coast, geology, wildlife and habitats, remains and historical buildings. Additional information regarding these designations has been included in the assessment of the area's condition. The most important tier of designations is the European designations such the Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar sites. Following this, we have the National designations, then regional designations and then local designations. The key designations are ones that are based on legislation (statutory), whilst more local or regional designations are usually non-statutory.

4.2 The Special Qualities

- 4.2.1 Considerable attention was given to identifying and defining the special qualities of the area in the original Management Plan and that work remains relevant. The work included considering various sources of information and evidence base including the views of local people and visitors. In brief, these were the main sources considered:

- Conservation designations;
- LANDMAP Landscape Assessment;

- Professional views of different officers and experts;
- Public opinion of both locals and tourists;
- Sources of inspiration for literature and poetry.

4.2.2 Based on this work, it was concluded that a number of qualities were relevant to Llŷn with a series of features contributing towards each specific quality. For example, if the beauty of the landscape is the quality, the features that contribute to that include geology, vegetation, field boundaries etc.

4.2.3 When reaching conclusions regarding the qualities for the purpose of the Plan, an attempt was made to be specific and clear in terms of the Llŷn AONB rather than including broad headings that could be relevant to any area. Therefore, for the purpose of this Management Plan, the following were defined as the special qualities of the Llŷn AONB:

- Landscape and coast
- Tranquillity and a clean environment
- A wealth of wildlife
- The Historic environment
- The Welsh Language and Culture
- People and close-knit communities
- Local produce and rural businesses
- Rights of way and access

4.2.4 To follow, there is an outline of the area's qualities according to the above-mentioned categories illustrated by examples to demonstrate why these features are special. More facts and information about the AONB's resources is available in the Review of the Condition of the AONB.

4.3 Beautiful Landscape and Coast

4.3.1 Llŷn is an area of beautiful coastal and rural landscape that offers striking views. The landscape varies from fertile lowlands to igneous hills that are dotted around the area such as Garn Fadrun, Garn Boduan and Foel Gron. The vegetation creates a strong visual impact by creating a colourful picture that changes from season to season.

4.3.2 From the hilltops, excellent views are to be had to every direction and the coastal nature of the area is obvious. The Llŷn landscape is divided into a patchwork of roads, streams and rivers such as afon Desach, afon Geirch, afon Daron and afon Soch. Traditional field boundaries, mainly cloddiau and stone walls are also a prominent feature in the landscape and a very important historical resource.

4.3.3 The coast forms an important part of the appearance and character of Pen Llŷn. It varies greatly – parts of the northern coastline are rocky but sandy beaches are to be found here and there such as Nefyn, Towyn and Whistling Sands. Larger beaches are to be found on the southern

coastline and sand dunes are to be found in the Abersoch area. The features include high cliffs, caves, stacks and islands, promontories and stone and sandy beaches with interesting local names.

- 4.3.4 Traces of people's habitation on the landscape contribute to the visual character of the landscape. The most rural parts are characterised by small houses and cottages and individual farms – similar to parts of south-west Ireland. Because of the lack of other developments, there is a strong feeling of an unspoilt, natural landscape to Llŷn. Small, dispersed villages are also characteristic of the area. Because of their compact nature and the traditional building materials, they usually blend naturally into the landscape.
- 4.3.5 As a result of its striking natural beauty, Llŷn has made an impression on artists, including local artists such as Elis Gwyn Jones, Emrys Parry and Rob Piercy, along with some who came to the area for a period of time to practice their craft. Pictures of the striking views of Llŷn are very prominent in the work of artists, with views of the sea, sunset, various landscapes, the coastline, cottages and local characters frequent themes.

4.4 The Changing Sea

- 4.4.1 The sea is never far away on the Llŷn Peninsula and has greatly influenced the area's character. The Sound (*Swnt*) that lies between Bardsey Island and the mainland demands respect – it can be raging and dangerous as many currents meet here.
- 4.4.2 The sea gave subsistence to generations of Llŷn people and a number of coastal villages grew in the area as a result of the fishing industry. Small ports were developed in a number of areas along the Llŷn coast in the seventeenth century and Nefyn was one of the busiest. Agricultural produce would be exported through the ports and goods such as pepper, cloth, crockery, vinegar etc. were imported. Coal was also imported to many small ports in Llŷn and coal yards or the remains of coal yards can be seen in many places today, such as Porth Ysgaden, Whistling Sands and Aberdaron. Lime kilns were developed near some of these ports, and their remains can be seen in several places such as Abersoch and Porth Ysgaden.
- 4.4.3 The construction of sailing ships developed to be an important industry in Pwllheli, Nefyn and Porthdinllaen throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As a result of this industry, a tradition of seafarers developed in the area and a number of men from the area, in particular from Nefyn, succeeded to become captains. A Maritime Museum has been established in Nefyn to keep the relics of the period and to record the history.
- 4.4.4 Piers were developed in order to serve the quarrying and mineral industries, such as for exporting granite in Trefor, Porth y Nant and Carreg y Llam and in Hell's Mouth and Porth Ysgo for vessels which carried

manganese from the Rhiw area. The remains of some of these structures can still be seen on the beaches today.

- 4.4.5 Naturally, the sea has played a prominent part in the area's culture. A number of shipwrecks have occurred along the shores and there are many stories collecting bounty off the beaches and even about attracting ships to difficulties. There are also tales of smuggling and pirates associated with Llŷn. Descriptions of the sea are obvious in the work of poets also and tales of seamen, ships and shipwrecks are common.
- 4.4.6 In the present day, the sea is a valuable economic resource in terms of pleasure boats, jet-skis, fishing etc., and the beaches attract thousands of locals and tourists in the summer.

4.5 A Clean Environment and Tranquillity

- 4.5.1 The Llŷn Peninsula, in particular at its western point, is one of the few areas where peace and tranquillity can be found. Something like this is a "feeling" or impression of a place and it is difficult to identify and measure it clearly. Despite the changes that have occurred over time and the fact that places are busier, parts of Llŷn continue to be very rural and peaceful in their nature. The poet, J. Glyn Davies has given a very vivid description of Llŷn that refers to this feeling of tranquillity:

*Heulwen ar hyd y glennydd a haul hwyr, a'i liw
Ar y mynydd,
Felly Llŷn ar derfyn dydd,
Lle i enaid gael llonydd" - J.Glyn Davies*

- 4.5.2 A number of different elements, not just a single thing, contribute to creating this tranquillity. The types of things that contribute are the absences of large scale developments (houses or industry), few motorists and traffic, very little traffic to disturb the peace, very few things moving and little light to disturb the darkness of night. The distant and peripheral nature of the area has again been a key factor in terms of creating and maintaining this quality.
- 4.5.3 In addition to being peaceful, levels of pollution are low here in Llŷn. Again, due to the remote nature of the area, there haven't been many significant developments and industries here, traffic levels are low apart from during the main holiday periods. The quality of the soil, air, water and seawater continues to be very high here.

4.6 Wildlife and Habitats

- 4.6.1 A wealth of wildlife lives in various habitats in the Llŷn Peninsula. Over time, the rural and agricultural character of the area, as well as the calm and non-polluted nature of the area, has contributed to the continuation of a number of species that are now considered rare in the British Isles.

- 4.6.2 Nowadays, natural or semi-natural vegetation, namely unimproved and uncultivated land such as heaths, wetlands and woodlands are rare in the United Kingdom. Despite the fact that they are in decline, heaths are a prominent and important feature in Llŷn and wet, dry, low and coastal heaths are to be found here. They contribute not only as a habitat and a landscape feature, but also on a historical and cultural level and as a leisure resource (many of the heaths in the area are common lands). The heaths sustain a wide variety of interesting pastures and plants in addition to the heather and gorse that are so colourful during August and September.
- 4.6.3 Another important feature in Llŷn is the coastal habitat including cliffs, slopes, coastal land, beaches and sand dunes. The cliffs and slopes maintain a variety of vegetation that is slowly developing into coastal pastures and heaths and they are also home to a variety of sea birds as well as a habitat for hornets and some rare invertebrate creatures.
- 4.6.4 Due to the importance of a number of marine habitats and species seen in the Llŷn a'r Sarnau area, for example the reefs and the estuaries, the area has been designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the Habitats and Species Directive. The reefs support a wide variety of flora and fauna communities including a variety of seaweed forests, sponges and sea squirts.
- 4.6.5 The grey seal is common to the area, along with otters, harbour porpoises and bottlenose dolphins that can be seen in the seas on the southern coast. Also, the location and special features of the bay is a suitable habitat for the Risso's dolphin.
- 4.6.6 Due to its rural landscape a varying coastline Llŷn is a habitat for a large variety of land birds and sea birds, some of them being rare species. Among the rare birds is the chough that is used as the AONB's logo. In 2002, there were 67 sites and pairs in Gwynedd with a vast number of these in Llŷn. Other bird species of European importance are to be found here also, including: the Puffin, the Guillemot and the Manx Shearwater.

4.7 Historic Landscape

- 4.7.1 People have lived in Llŷn for thousands of years. Archaeological remains, from individual sites and monuments, to the broader landscape with its distinctive field and settlement pattern, link today with the distant past. They remind us that Llŷn is an ancient place where generations of people have lived.
- 4.7.2 The earliest evidence for human occupation dates from around 10,000 years ago, a period known as the Mesolithic. Chipped stone and flint have been discovered and tools such as knives and scrapers. From the Neolithic period (4,500-2,500 BC) there are burial chambers and standing stones and also of significant importance from this period, there is an ax factory on Mynydd Rhiw.

- 4.7.3 The most striking remains from early civilisation in the area are the Iron Age hill forts located on many hills in the area such as Garn Boduan, Garn Fadrun, and Penarfynydd in Rhiw. The largest fort is Tre'r Ceiri, 460m above sea level. This was an important defence fort and any oncoming threats could be seen from afar. It's fascinating that much of the fort is still standing – the main defence wall is clearly seen as well as the remains of about 150 circle huts.
- 4.7.4 Religion along the ages has left its mark on Llŷn – in terms of the landscape, its history, the society and the culture. In terms of historical remains, a number of stones with inscriptions on them dating back to the Early Christian era (5th Century) have been discovered in Llŷn, for example, with the names of the priests VERACIVS and SENACVS that were discovered near Capel Anelog, Uwchmynydd. Also, from the same era, monk training schools, small churches (*llan*) that developed into prominent church sites were established, such as in Clynnog Fawr, Llanaelhaearn and Aberdaron. A number of these early sites were named after the Celtic Saints such as Beuno (Clynnog, Pistyll and Carnguwch), Hywyn (Aberdaron) and Cwyfan (Edern and Tudweiliog).
- 4.7.5 From a more recent era, remains of former industries of Llŷn such as the granite quarries and mineral mining, survive. Associated with them are the inclines, stages and docks used to export these raw materials, many of which can be seen clearly to the present day. In this period, before mass transport, communities grew up around industries forming settlements and villages in places such as Trefor, Llithfaen and Nant Gwrtheyrn. The granite quarries provided the stones for building many of the buildings in Llŷn in this period and the majority of the traditional and listed buildings of the area have been built from local granite.
- 4.7.6 Some other historical structures of interest are to be seen in Llŷn such as the remains of two old windmills and transport related structures – such as bridges, stone stiles and milestones.
- 4.7.7 Even though there are no Roman remains in Llŷn (as far as we know) there are many other archaeological remains over a long period of time found here. Llŷn is unique in that sense and this is reflected in the fact that the area is included on the Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historical Interest in Wales prepared by Cadw, the Countryside Council for Wales and ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) 1998. The register notes that Llŷn possesses: *“a great and unparalleled wealth and diversity of, most often, smaller scale archaeological and historic features, which together form a cohesive and integrated whole, demonstrating both the continuity and territorial unity of Llyn from possibly prehistoric times onwards.”*

4.8 Historic Buildings

- 4.8.1 The ordinary people of Llŷn lived in cottages – and usually, these were built in a simple way and in very little time. Those that have survived have been

re-roofed with slate and the best examples have been listed by Cadw. Traditionally, many of the small cottages that are part of the Llŷn landscape have been based on “*tai unnos*” (one night houses). These cottages were built with the materials that were closest to hand, namely soil, stones and mud.

- 4.8.2 A significant number of interesting farmhouses and agricultural buildings are to be found in Llŷn, as a thriving agricultural area. There are some small farmhouses, whilst others are substantial and are connected to prominent families of noblemen such as Bodwrdda, Meillionydd and Castellmarch. Many farmhouses and buildings were developed by the Estates, such as Glynllifon, Nanhoron and the Faenol.
- 4.8.3 Many historical religious buildings are to be seen in Llŷn as religion has played an important part in the development and culture of the area from the Christian period onwards. Remains of a Monastery from the 6th Century are to be seen on Bardsey Island, whilst ancient churches on the pilgrims’ path are to be seen in places such as Clynnog Fawr, Llanaelhaearn, Llangwnnadr and Aberdaron.
- 4.8.4 Chapels were built on a wide scale in Llŷn as a result of the development of Nonconformity from the mid seventeenth century onwards. The first Congregational chapel, namely Capel Newydd Nanhoron, was built in 1769 and following this, a significant number of chapels were built by various other denominations across the area.

4.9 The Welsh Language and Culture

- 4.9.1 Llŷn is one of the heartlands of the Welsh language which is one of the oldest languages in Europe. Here, the Welsh language is a live language and is used daily in the home, chapels and churches, in school, shops, the workplace and on the street. Also, the language is visible everywhere on signs, posters and in the local paper: “Llanw Llŷn”. Agricultural fields and places in Llŷn have Welsh names, as well as most of the farms and houses.
- 4.9.2 Not only is the Welsh language a communication language for life and business on a day to day basis, but it is also the language of literature and poetry and is part of the special culture of the area. Other important elements of the local culture are the anecdotes, legends, superstitions, sayings, characters and place names.
- 4.9.3 Religion continues to play an important part in the culture of the people of Llŷn. In times gone by, the saints were very prominent and regular pilgrimages were made to Bardsey Island. A vast number of local churches were dedicated to the early saints. Later on, chapels were established by different denominations across Llŷn, however, audiences have decreased greatly. Linked to the chapels came the *Eisteddfod* tradition that still continues to this day.

4.9.4 Local characters also contribute to the culture of Llŷn. Amongst the famous historical characters were Dic Aberdaron – who could, apparently, speak 15 languages, and the old medicine woman of Bryn Caniad, Uwchmynydd who cured every type of condition with home-made medicine and ointment.

4.10 People and Communities

4.10.1 In Llŷn there are close-knit communities that have been developed over a long period of time. As with all areas there have been changes within the communities over the years – people from outside the area moved in for work purposes, to retire or in order to change their lifestyle.

4.10.2 People have also moved out of the area – mainly in order to obtain education or to find work. To date, the local communities have been able to absorb these developments without a major change in its character and structure and no excessive impact on local culture and use of the language. Measures such as the Council's Welsh language education policy have also been important in this respect.

4.10.3 The local people and the communities they form have maintained the Welsh language and the special Welsh culture. Customs, anecdotes and information have been passed down from one generation to the next.

4.10.4 Because the community contributes to the area's character, it is important to try and ensure that the well-being of these communities. Therefore, there is a need to address people's needs in terms of housing, services and facilities, leisure, employment and jobs.

4.11 Economy and Skills

4.11.1 Traditionally in Llŷn, emphasis has been placed on work that is linked directly to the environment – namely the primary industries. Farming and fishing have developed since very early times and they continue to be important to this day as they maintain families, provide local produce and maintain other industries. In addition, a special culture is linked to these activities – full of customs, anecdotes and colourful characters.

4.11.2 In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the quarries and mineral mining industries became important industries. These works provided work for a vast number of people and a number of quarrying villages grew, such as Trefor, Pistyll and Llithfaen. The remains of the industries are to be seen on the landscape of the area today – mining remains, old buildings and equipment and waste heaps. Two stone quarries continue to be active in Llŷn, namely Nanhoron and Trefor, and they provide stones for local industries.

4.11.3 Many other local businesses are important to Llŷn's economy. There is a tradition of being self-employed in Llŷn and in the olden days there was a high proportion of joiners, blacksmiths and farm workers here but today, many builders, electricians, carpenters etc. are to be found. In addition to

providing work, a number of small rural businesses also maintain skills that are ways of maintaining historical features in the area, such as *cloddiau*, stone walls, historical buildings, etc.

4.11.4 In the absence of any major built attraction the tourism industry in Llŷn is mainly based on the special qualities of the area – the beauty, the beaches, the clean environment and the peace. The industry provides jobs and helps maintain local businesses and contributes substantially to the economy, but there are some negative impact on some of the special qualities as well. The aim must be to manage the industry in order to benefit the area; however, it must be ensured that this is not done to the detriment of the features that create the special character and charm of the area.

4.12 A Place to Roam

4.12.1 There are many opportunities to roam and enjoy the natural beauty and historical features of Llŷn. Public footpaths were an important way of getting about in the past and they were frequently used in rural areas like Llŷn. The County Council and Community Councils maintain and protect the network of paths because of their importance in terms of walking and enjoyment.

4.12.2 As well as the network of public footpaths, there are a myriad of small rural lanes that weave their way along the peninsula and connect areas together. On the whole, the roads are relatively quiet and there are opportunities to walk, cycle and ride horses along them also.

4.12.3 The paths along parts of the coast, are the old paths by Pilgrims who walked along the shore towards Bardsey, stopping at churches such as Clynog and Llangwinnadl. Developing a National Coastal Path has been a great benefit. With money and resources, parts of the original route have been improved and new sections that run near the coast have been added.

4.12.4 There are substantial areas of common land in Llŷn, such as Mynydd Tir y Cwmwd, Foel Gron and Mynydd Rhiw – these lands provide an excellent opportunity to roam more informally and view and enjoy wildlife, different plants and striking views. The common lands have not been improved agriculturally and many of them are unimproved heaths – a habitat that is now scarce on a national level.

4.12.5 One of the main attractions of Llŷn are the wonderful beaches along the north and south coast. There are gravel and pebble beaches but also beaches of fine sand in areas such as Nefyn, Porthdinllaen and Whistling Sands. Some beaches are well-known and therefore busy in the summer, but there are more secluded and tranquil beaches also – ideal locations for some peace and quiet.