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Park Update

MARCH 2005

KEEPING YOU IN THE LOOP

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority – changing today to meet tomorrow’s challenges

By Chris Gledhill

I would like to let you know about some changes that are currently taking place within the National Park Authority.

The NPA has recently approved a staffing restructure which will help us to deliver a better service. This restructure will result in twelve posts being cut (two of which are currently vacant) six posts being redefined and nine posts being created. Naturally, the decision to lose posts was not taken lightly, and where suitable cross-over skills exist, it is hoped that displaced staff can be redeployed into some of the new posts being created.



*BBNPA's Chief Executive,
Christopher Gledhill*

Why does the National Park Authority need to change?

Over the course of the past 18 months the Authority has undertaken a major review of how we deliver our services in accordance with our statutory obligations and duties. This process has meant scrutinising every aspect of our current work and considering whether or not each element is moving us towards achieving our aims.

After wide consultation with Members and staff, our document *Future Directions* was produced last year, giving us our vision and clear strategic aims linked to our corporate and improvement priorities. *Future Directions* was singled out by the ACiW as “a significant milestone in terms of developing a more holistic, top down approach to improvement”. During the year, with the help of a focus group, we were able to further refine *Future Directions* and this helped us develop our key strategic objectives to guide our work over the next three years.

As we progressed it became apparent that, in order to achieve our aims, we had to start doing things differently and better focus our resources on service delivery and looking after our own land and responsibilities.

This exercise ran in parallel with a raft of inspections and audits, principally carried out by the Audit Commission in Wales (ACiW). Our Performance Management Review Team and Whole Authority Analysis Task and Finish Group have indicated that there are still areas where we are not delivering performance at the required level. We are improving, but by too little and too slowly.

In order to take forward the hard work carried out by the Authority over the last two years, and if we are to be judged 'fit for purpose', there are some key issues that need to be addressed. If we want to make significant progress and strive for excellence, then it is essential to better target our resources, skills and knowledge to prioritise the activities necessary to deliver our vision and aim.

No organisation can redesign its vision, corporate goals and focus without then challenging its structure and changing it to create the conditions for success.

Does this mean that the National Park is moving away from its duty towards conservation?

No. This restructure - even taking into account those conservation posts which are being made redundant - does not mean that the NPA is moving away from its primary purpose of conservation.

We plan to alter our approach - NOT our commitment - to the way we manage and resource our conservation work. This will include a review of our current relationships with outside and partner organisations with a view to maximising their value to the National Park Authority.

In response to modern environmental challenges, such as sustainability and climate change, ecology is now to be adopted at a more strategic level.

To this end, it is intended that the post of ecologist be redefined as a Senior Policy Advisor with the post-holder working closely with the Assembly and our partner organisations, guiding BBNPA's policy and ensuring that the Park's ecology is at the heart of everything we do. In addition, our Local Biodiversity Action Plan Officer post will be redefined as a Conservation and Biodiversity Officer, building on the achievements of the last two years.

The Brecon Beacons National Park owns more land than any other NPA. One of our key objectives over the next three years is demonstrate the ecological benefits of sustainably integrating farming, forestry, access and conservation practices.

Rural Communities

Agriculture faces enormous challenges in the 21st Century, and these can no longer be seen in isolation from other rural issues. The Foot and Mouth crisis brought home to all of us that rural issues need to be far more integrated than were previously appreciated.

To help our communities meet the challenges they face today, a new post of Rural Practice Surveyor is being created to work closely with rural communities. This new post will enable the NPA to adopt a more strategic approach to the management of its own land holdings, as well as providing advice on agricultural and forestry issues.

Delivering a better service

With more front line help where we need it most - within our Warden Service and within Development Control - we'll be getting the work done on the ground and improving our service delivery to the public.

Angela Magee, Communications and PR Officer, introduces PARK UPDATE, a new monthly newsletter that lets you know what's going on in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

PARK UPDATE will be packed with useful information, such as National Park News, as well as details of our guided walks and events.

If you have any comments, or would like to suggest items which would be of further interest, please feel free to telephone me or my colleague Sam Games, on 01874 620420.

Alternatively, you can send us an e-mail at:
communications@breconbeacons.org



Angela Magee, BBNPA'S
PR & Communications Officer

NATIONAL PARK CHAIRMAN TO WALK FROM THE HOLY MOUNTAIN TO BETHLEHEM TO WELCOME CROW



Our Chairman, Meirion Thomas, will be leading a sponsored walk for Cancer Research Wales during May.

Meirion will set out on 21st May, giving himself just eight days to complete a tough new 98 mile official trail.

Devised by the Brecon Beacons Society using existing rights of way and common land, this new route spans the entire length of the National Park.

Since it was founded in 1966, Cancer Research Wales has raised millions of pounds and has played a significant part in the treatment and diagnosis for the people of Wales.

The end of the walk coincides with the launch of the CROW Act.

More details in the next edition of Park Update.

NATIONAL PARK WARDENS AND POLICE CLAMP DOWN ON OFF-ROADERS



National Park Authority wardens and Dyfed Powys Police caught 10 scramble bikes in well-planned operation in February.

Police Officers and National Park Wardens carried out the exercise after months of careful planning by the National Park Authority. This involved monitoring over several months by wardens, who liaised closely with the local farming community and passed all information they gathered to the police. The bikers were stopped by the National Park Wardens and Police, who were tipped off about their presence by ‘spotters’ positioned at key observation points.

Assistant Area Warden, Sam Ridge did not want to give away too many details: “We plan to repeat this process on known trouble spots over the coming months, so naturally we don’t want to give too much detail about this operation. However, we would like to stress once again that there are legal routes within the National Park, which both bikers and 4x4 drivers can use, and we’re always willing to talk to the public about these routes”.

It’s not just visitors who are affected by the nuisance and damage caused by off-roaders, more often it is residents who suffer most. Just the day before the operation, the Brinore Tramroad Forum complained to police about £500 worth of damage to a bridleway gate on the route of the Brinore Tramroad. Chairman of the Forum, John Jones, thinks the damage may be related to the illegal use of this bridleway by off-road motor vehicles. He said: “It is very sad that a very few people wish to destroy things provided to enhance both our heritage and countryside, for the enjoyment of many”.

Sgt Andrew Geeson of Crickhowell Police said: “We receive complaints about off-roaders every weekend from residents and those visiting the Park for quiet enjoyment. All ten bikers were reported under Section 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, which makes it an offence to ride over common land. They also received a warning under section 59 of the Police Reform Act which means that if they are caught anywhere riding illegally over the next 12 months, their bikes can be seized and taken away. In addition several riders admitted to not having insurance for their bikes and were subsequently reported for this offence.

“Our advice to those thinking of illegally scrambling within the National Park is ‘don’t do it!’. These operations will continue throughout the summer, and it’s just not worth getting a police record for or losing your bike over”.

Atlantic Salmon is the overall winner the National Park's Biodiversity Oscars

In a recent vote, the public were asked to choose their favourite plant, bird, fish, mammal, reptile and amphibian. We will then adopt the most popular choice from each category will then be adopted as Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) species for action.



Participants had 21 species to choose from in 5 species groups:

The winner in the category of

Amphibians & Reptiles: **Adder**

Birds: **Barn Owl**

Fish: **Atlantic salmon (and overall winner)**

Mammals: **Hedgehog**

Plants **Bluebell**



Hedgehog beat the Badger... by a whisker.

Sustainable Development Fund

By Clare Parsons, BBNPA's Community Development Officer

The Sustainable Development Fund - now in its fifth year - has been a tremendous success in the Brecon Beacons National Park. After a positive independent review of the programme, the Welsh Assembly Government announced a second three-year funding round worth £750,000 taking the scheme to March 2006.

Grant applications are considered by a Grants Advisory Panel of public, private, community and voluntary bodies and are assessed on their ability to deliver environmental, cultural, social and economic benefits to the community.

Since June 2000, the Fund has been supporting local communities and businesses to develop projects that demonstrate in a practical way what it can mean to live more sustainably. Below are a selection of the recent grants awarded:-

Brecon Design Centre for Wales - Business Plan

£6,000 towards a business plan. The Centre aims to attract more high quality independent retailers, offer better IQM training for retail staff, and provide visual arts and cultural industries with a much needed Mid Wales venue. Training will use "Design" to aid diversification and innovation of traditional and new skills. It aims to become self-sustaining through the design shop, website, office and incubator lets.

Brecon Beacons Solar Club Grant Scheme – Phase 3



Solar panels in situ

£3,935 towards continuation of the work of the Brecon Beacons Solar club by administering a further 10 £300 flat rate grants towards installation of solar thermal systems and providing networking and support.

Powys County Council Youth Services – Teenscheme

£675 towards adventure days for disadvantaged young people from the Brecon Area, normally unable to take part in such activities and aiming to broaden support their transition into adulthood.

Brecon Advice Centre - Centre Co-ordinator

£8,052 towards a centre co-ordinator for this important advice service. A continued open door policy is vital for the most disadvantaged in the community.

David Murray - The Welsh Mountain Hill Pony Grazing Characteristics and Breed Profile

£2,000 towards researching hill breeders' knowledge of the Welsh Mountain Hill Pony and relating to new information from conservation grazing schemes to consider the viability of the breed's use for conservation.

Talgarth Information and Resource Centre - Relocation Feasibility

£500 for a feasibility study on relocation to the ground floor of the Town Hall building in Talgarth, as a basis for an "Article 33" funding bid.

Talgarth Information & Resource Centre - Centre Coordinator

£3,522 towards co-ordinator costs until end of March 2005.



Talgarth Information & Resource Centre

Appointments to the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

Minister for Environment Planning and Countryside Carwyn Jones, recently announced the appointment of two new members to the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.

Following an open selection exercise, the Minister has decided to appoint Mrs Irene Evison and Peter Seaman to the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.

Irene Evison, 36, of Llanymynech, Powys, is Director and Senior Consultant with Resources for Change (incorporating Rural Resources) based in Welshpool Powys, working across Wales and England. She has a background in environmental forestry, specialising now in community development and sustainable rural development. She is a keen Welsh learner, who competed in the National Eisteddfod and Powys Eisteddfod last year. She is married with two young children, and enjoys cycling and hill-walking.

Peter Seaman MBE, 58, of Brecon, has a professional background in the police service. Following retirement from the service in 1996, he worked until 2003 for a local charity providing rehabilitation services to offenders and young people facing difficulties in their lives. He is Clerk to Talybont on Usk Community Council. His work for the police in connection with new strategies for dealing with domestic burglary was recognised by the award of an MBE. He is married with 4 sons, and has interests in the environment and community action.

BRITAIN'S SMALLEST NATIONAL PARK JOINS THE FAMILY

The 350 square mile New Forest National Park – one of Britain's most ancient landscapes has become a formal member of the National Parks family. With a proposed budget of £3.5 million for its first year, the new National Park Authority is due to be appointed and operating by 1 April 2006.



Pony passports

Paul Sinnadauri, BBNPA Ecologist reports



As some of you will know already, the “Horse Passport (Wales) Regulations 2005” come into force on 28 February 2005. As you will also know, we have for a while now been offering assistance to the breed societies to help conserve the semi-feral Section A Welsh mountain pony. Part of this assistance included all the Welsh parks, as well as the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) asking that this breed be offered an exemption from requiring a passport whilst the animals remained on the hill or

common of their birth. Carwyn Jones AM, Minister for the Environment in Wales recently held a one day conference and workshop to discuss this issue and to find out whether such an exemption might be possible, in the form of derogation, i.e., a local organisation assumes the responsibility for issuing the passports provided certain conditions are met.

Well, this issue was never discussed in any detail. Instead, the short term issues dominated the day. These include the likelihood that owners (where there are known owners) will continue to gather and sell off the ponies rather than deal with the hassle of passports or even abandon or dump unregistered ponies on other people’s land and commons and the need to find out how many ponies there are especially on the high number of small commons without active commoners’ associations. The main solution for the day was that the WAG might need to work closely with the passport issuing organisations in order to ease the burden of the passports for breeders and farmers, as well as to persuade them that there’s no avoiding this requirement in future.

The NP Ecologist and CCW each gave presentations to the conference stressing the benefits of this breed for nature conservation, not least of all as a consequence of decoupling and the Single Farm Payment, where there will be an increased requirement for equines to help to keep rough pasture open now that suckler beef payments are being cut back.

Brecknock and Beacons Grazing Initiative

For those of you who are members of the Brecknock Wildlife Trust you will be aware already that the Trust is leading on the development of a local grazing scheme, under the auspices of the Grazing Animals Project (see <http://www.fact-group.org/pilot1024.php?detect=true>). Together with other organisations such as the National Trust and CCW, the BBNP is a member of the (as yet informal) project group. The aims of a local grazing scheme are to match wildlife-rich sites that require suitable grazing with graziers with the suitable livestock, especially where this involves hardy breeds. For the time being we are likely to focus our attention on enclosed sites rather than the open common, where we have yet to understand how the Single Farm Payment will affect commons grazing. In the immediate future, we are hosting an all-Wales meeting (invitation only) to discuss how Wales might develop a Wales GAP, with its own co-coordinator. More on this in future.

Research commissioned by the 3 Welsh Parks, Pembrokeshire CC and CCW

We hope shortly to be able to report on the findings of a research project commissioned by the 3 Parks together with Pembrokeshire CC and CCW, on what best practice exists on conserving bats within a fragmented landscape. The project was undertaken in order to find out whether current advice and practice on bat conservation actually works or not, whether it's based on evidence of success or just on the assumption that it will work. Whilst we haven't yet read the final conclusions, as you may have guessed by now there are too many assumptions being made about bats, with too little information either sought or actually available to know whether bats benefit from the decisions we make and actions we take on their behalf. We have also discovered that there is a lack of up to date information on bat ecology, largely as a result of the people involved not publishing their work or making unpublished work available.

There is some good practice out there and the report will summarise this. We hope to be able to use the information to inform supplementary planning guidance (see below), as well as decide whether further more detailed practical research is needed in future.

Supplementary planning guidance – draft – best practice in biodiversity and geodiversity conservation in the planning and development sectors in the BBNP

With a grant from CCW, we have commissioned consultants to prepare this draft guidance, which will supplement policy advice in the NPA's Unitary Development Plan (UDP) once the plan is adopted. The guidance makes the link between the local biodiversity action plan (LBAP) and the UDP, in response to the requirement in Planning Policy Wales for LBAPs to be treated as supplementary planning guidance.

I am just beginning to organise a seminar to disseminate the results of both the bat research project and also the SPG. I hope that I'll be able to report on a successful outcome from this in future. I hope that I might also hear from any colleagues who might be willing or given permission to help me put the day together!

Practical conservation work– cutting things down

Well, we have been busy this year. For those of you who've been up to Ffawyddog Common or Mynydd Illtyd or Pen y Crug or down to Llangasty during the past year, you may have noticed a change in appearances. Well, we've made a successful start this year to managing some of the Park's priority habitats, by clearing them of scrub and rank grassland. Each of these sites includes habitats that should best be maintained by large livestock – cattle or ponies – but these aren't available in sufficient numbers so we've had to intervene with machines. Heathland, species-rich grassland and reedswamp will turn into woodland if left to their own devices. Good I hear you cry but this isn't so good for the species that depend on the heathland, flowers and reeds.

We have every intention of continuing this work in future – whilst also developing other initiatives like the local grazing scheme (see above) to provide the ultimate habitat managers – livestock – as well as another string to a farmer's bow.

Paul Sinnadurai, Ecologist

MARCH EVENTS

Listed below are the National Park events for March. There are many more events going on around the National Park; community and agricultural shows, exhibitions, concerts and more. For more information, telephone the National Park Visitor Information Centre on 01874 623366 or visit our website at www.breconbeacons.org

If you have organised any events you'd like us to publicise, email our Communications Team at communications@breconbeacons.org or call them on 01874 620420, and they'll be pleased to help.

Friday 25 March 09:30 - 17:00

event

Easter Art Exhibition

Start/Meet: National Park Visitor Centre (National Park Area: central)

The work of eight local artists will be on display, with pictures available to buy. Parking charge.

Friday 25 March 11:00 - 16:00

walk/activity

Easter Puzzle Trail

Walk level: easy Walk length: 1.5miles / 2.5 km.

Start/Meet: National Park Visitor Centre (National Park Area: central)

A self guided discovery trail around the grounds with prizes for correct answers. Call in at the Centre any time between 11am and 4pm to get your puzzle sheet. Suitable for families. 50p plus parking charge.

Saturday 26 March 09:30 - 17:00

event

Easter Art Exhibition

Start/Meet: National Park Visitor Centre (National Park Area: central)

The work of eight local artists will be on display, with pictures available to buy. Parking charge.

Saturday 26 March 09:30 - 16:30

walk

Beacons Horseshoe

Walk level: strenuous Walk length: 13miles / 21 km.

Start/Meet: Lay by east of Pencelli on the B4558, grid ref: SO094247 (National Park Area: central)

Discover the outstanding landscape of the Brecon Beacons with spectacular views from the mountain tops. Bring: Packed lunch.

Saturday 26 March 11:00 - 16:00

walk/activity

Easter Puzzle Trail

Walk level: easy Walk length: 1.5miles / 2.5 km.

Start/Meet: National Park Visitor Centre (National Park Area: central)

A self guided discovery trail around the grounds with prizes for correct answers. Call in at the Centre any time between 11am and 4pm to get your puzzle sheet. Suitable for families. 50p plus parking charge.

Saturday 26 March 11:30 - 13:00

walk

Welcome to Craig-y-nos

Walk level: access for all Walk length: 3miles / 5 km.

Start/Meet: Craig-y-nos Country Park Visitor Centre (National Park Area: west)

Come and find out all about the fascinating wildlife and history on this leisurely stroll. Parking charge.

