

Report of Beach Wheelchair and Outdoor Access Coordinator

Subject: Beach Wheelchair and Outdoor Access Pilot Project

Purpose of Report

To communicate the activity of the Beach Wheelchair and Outdoor Access Coordination Post and the findings of the pilot project.

Introduction/Background

Beach wheelchairs have been made available by the PCNPA working in collaboration with local businesses and partners for over 12 years. The work was done by Anthony Richards the Authority's Rights of Way Manager initially and more recently by Hannah Buck the Authority's Health and Wellbeing Officer.

The beach wheelchair system was paused over the Summer 2020. Ad hoc availability was achieved with pick-up and drop-off at Llanion.

Furlough and business closure/shutdown along with increased safety considerations meant that to get the beach wheelchair fleet back up and running for availability during Summer 2021 and beyond would require a significant amount of focused work. There was a need to rebuild or develop relationships with local businesses/communities to host the chairs with 'covid safe' procedures.

A part-time 6 month post was initially created to:

- Develop opportunities for people with disabilities or health conditions to have access to a beach wheelchair so that they can enjoy a day out at the seaside.
- Develop information and resources to supplement the beach wheelchair project working with local businesses, organisations and communities to develop the project.

This post has now been extended for one year on a part-time basis.

Context

Social inclusion is identified by the Welsh Government as an essential factor in improving the health, well-being and overall quality of life for people living in Wales as an integral part of the Welsh Government's priorities linked to The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and supporting the well-being goal of an Equal Wales. Beach Wheelchairs and other access solutions help support this aim.

The Authority is in the process of reviewing its Well-being Objectives following the agreement of new priorities for the Authority by the NPA in July 2021, focused on Conservation, Climate, Connection and Communities. As the Authority develops activities to deliver these priorities it is important that it considers how it continues to deliver positive outcomes in terms of health, well-being, equality and social inclusion.

Comparisons

Activity has involved speaking to representatives of other areas, including Cardigan and the Isle of Anglesey to share ideas and experiences, and there is the potential of creating a network from these relationships in the long term. Efforts were also made to gain knowledge of and learn from similar projects happening in other areas – from places as close as Swansea, and as far afield as New Zealand. To date we are not aware that any other National Parks offer a Beach Wheelchair service, although some do offer equipment for hire such as Trampers, Mountain Trikes, and Mobility Scooters.

Options

The Beach Wheelchair and Outdoor Access Coordinator role has recently been approved for another twelve months, building on the momentum of the work developed so far and also exploring other solutions to support improved access within the National Park.

Financial considerations:

- This post initially relied on a long standing reserve in the Health and Tourism budget.
- The extended contract has been supported by the savings from the salary of the reduced hours of the Health, Well-being, Recreation and Tourism policy Officer who oversees the role and originally had responsibility of the beach wheelchairs.
- An annualised hours contract will be issued for one year working on an average basis of 2 days a week to reflect the seasonal and ad hoc nature of the post.

Risk considerations

As the Authority develops activities to deliver its new priorities and wellbeing objectives, it is important that it considers how it continues to deliver positive outcomes in terms of health, well-being, equality and social inclusion. Improving access to the National Park adds value to all investment by meaning more people can reach and benefit from it.

Summer activity involved assessing and reducing risk and putting new processes in place that can now be built upon. A key task will be improving access to and information about mobility equipment, such as scooters.

Politically, finding ways to ensure the National Park is as accessible and inclusive to disabled people supports equal opportunities and reduces the extent to which the environment is disabling.

Compliance

The role highlights and supports activities carried out by National Park Authorities to comply with their Public Sector Equality Duty, the Socio Economic Duty and the Well-being of Future Generations Act and delivery of Park Purposes.

Human Rights/Equality issues

The role thoroughly supports the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority commitment to equality and ensuring all service users, customers, volunteers, members and employees of the Authority area treated with respect, fairness and dignity.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

'Landscapes for Everyone', which this project supports, contains no activity that is likely to result in a negative impact on biodiversity in the National Park. Broadly speaking delivering 'Landscapes for Everyone' will result in an increased awareness of biodiversity in Pembrokeshire (amongst new audiences) and involve participants in positive actions which support biodiversity. The content of this Statement is derived from Plans such as the Management Plan, the Local Development Plan and the Equalities Plan which themselves have been subject to rigorous assessment in relation to these issues.

Welsh Language considerations

All work developed by this project will be done in accordance with the Authority's commitment to the Welsh language.

Wider implications

The project has been developed in line with the 'Experiences for All' project, and supports other initiatives that promote accessibility and inclusion in Pembrokeshire through dynamic consultation and collaboration with stakeholders – including service providers and service-users. There is now the opportunity to work with Visit Pembrokeshire on their Welsh Government Funded Project, 'Pembrokeshire Open to All' and develop the accessibility for as well as local care support and provision agencies and community groups.

Conclusion

Beach wheelchairs were successfully rolled out over the Summer 2021 and many continue to be available through the Winter. Activity continues to develop the momentum extending to new stakeholders and improving wider access, inclusion, and equality within the National Park.

Recommendation:

Members are asked to note the report as set out in Annex 1 to this report.

Background Documents

Landscapes for Everyone [31/20 National Parks Wales: “Landscapes For Everyone” Our Approach to Social Inclusion and Child Poverty’](#). [Revised version to be taken to NTA 15th December 2021]

Valued and Resilient

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/areas-outstanding-natural-beauty-national-parks-2018-report%20.pdf>

Wellbeing of future Generations Action (Wales) 2015

<https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>

A More Equal Wales. The Socio-economic Duty, Equality Act 2010, Statutory Guidance: WG42004 A More Equal Wales The Socio-economic Duty Equality Act 2010 (gov.wales)

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Sarah/consulted with Hannah Buck, Tourism and Wellbeing Policy Officer, PCNPA; Graham Peake, Discovery Team Leader, PCNPA; Sam Evans, Walkability Officer, PCNPA; Anthony Richards, Access Officer, PCNPA

Beach Wheelchair and Outdoor Access Coordinator Report

For the Operational Review Committee Dec 2021

Sarah Beauclerk: Beach Wheelchair and Outdoor Access Coordinator
13 October 2021

JOB TITLE:

Beach Wheelchair and Outdoor Access Coordinator

6 month project working on the basis of 22 flexible hours per week. Van and uniform provided.

REPORTS TO: Health, Well-being, Recreation and tourism policy Officer (Park Direction)

To develop opportunities for people with disabilities of health conditions to have access to a beach wheelchair so that they can enjoy a day out at the seaside. The post holder will develop information and resources to supplement the beach wheelchair project and will work with local businesses, organisations and communities to develop the project.

Background



Beach wheelchairs have been made available by the PCNPA working in collaboration with local businesses and partners for over 12 years.

In the past, hosts have operated a very informal system. Visitors could arrive, fill in a form, and borrow a beach wheelchair if one was available.

Hosts charging for beach wheelchair hire insured the equipment in their care. For all but one host (Whitesands, St. David's), PCNPA insured chairs that were made available for no charge. Donations were communicated as welcome with proceeds going towards the management of the beach wheelchair system.

Some hosts allowed pre-booking and others did not.

Given the limited resources available to focus on this aspect of the Authorities work, this system was very light touch, and whilst forms were collected for insurance purposes, little analysis was done into access needs and take-up.



The beach wheelchair system was paused over the Summer 2020 as a result of the pandemic and the beach wheelchairs were collected and stored at the Gwaun Valley Depot. Ad hoc availability was achieved in approximately five cases of people requiring beach wheelchairs who were able to pick up and drop off from Llanion House.

Furlough and business closure/shutdown along with increased safety considerations meant that to get the beach wheelchair fleet back up and running for availability during Summer 2021 and beyond would require a significant amount of focused work. There was a need to rebuild or develop relationships with local businesses/ communities to host the chairs with 'covid safe' procedures.

There were also questions surrounding 'access for all', and a hope that coordinating the project would lead to new conclusions about the challenges and opportunities for new access solutions.

With many people having experienced a deterioration in mobility over the lockdown and indoor environments being less safe due to Coronavirus risks, supporting outdoor access experiences was more essential than ever before.

As a result of this and increasing awareness about the positive impact of access for all, increased opportunities were becoming available to fund resourcing this aspect of the Authority's work through grant funding.

Anticipated Challenges:



CHALLENGE 1:

"Ensuring that an appropriate risk assessment protocol is applied to all accessible beaches in time for the beach wheelchairs to be put to use over the summer."

All beaches were re-assessed for safety and beach-specific safety information to support people to assess which beach would be best for them was provided with online booking information.

One beach that had a beach-wheelchair originally scheduled for Summer 2020 - Amroth - was removed as a possible host location due to deteriorated conditions, in agreement with the Amroth Council.

A Coronavirus decontamination cleaning system was established and cleaning buckets, complete with COSHH forms, supplied. This meant that the people borrowing the beach wheelchairs were responsible for decontamination before and after use - an essential process it would not have been viable for the busy hosts to manage.

The Online booking form (tinyurl.com/bwcsignupform) incorporated safety information and loan agreements so that hosts could be sure that everybody who had booked had confirmed suitability and read and signed to agree to all the necessary information.



CHALLENGE 2:

"Developing a booking system that is able to gather GDPR compliant user information that works for service users; business partners; volunteers and enables the beach wheelchairs to be put to use with maximum benefit."

A booking system was sourced, Data Protection Impact Assessment was completed and approved, and the project was launched and project managed.

Enquiries from people wishing to book a beach wheelchair to ensure they would be able to access one on holidays, and last minute enquiries, led to the decision that a launch was needed ASAP.

The role began on 23rd May 2021, and the Beach Wheelchair online system was launched, by the sending out of a press release, on the 22nd July. Before the system was launched, a variety of families were able to access the beach wheelchairs by the Coordinator delivering to and collecting from them.

The booking system crucially allowed bookings to be arranged flexibly around different host opening and busy times, and for changes to availability to be made quickly and easily.

The booking system was an essential aspect of the beach wheelchairs being made available as hosts were too busy to make and manage bookings. Instead they only needed to check a ticket to confirm a reservation.



CHALLENGE 3:

"Building a team of volunteers to help with the beach wheelchairs."

The biggest challenge of the project was to source local businesses willing to host the beach wheelchairs over the Summer on a volunteer basis when they themselves were facing a cornucopia of challenges; from staff shortages, to coronavirus measures, to increased demand.

The engagement of the hosts who made the beach wheelchairs available, either through storage or checking tickets, despite the many pressures upon them, made the project possible.

They have now been joined by a team of three (so far) volunteers who have supported the project by helping to maintain the beach-wheelchairs and supported people to access the beach. These volunteers were sourced by the Volunteer Manager who has provided a huge amount of support in establishing volunteer systems and processes.

We have entered all above volunteers for volunteer awards in the hope that their generosity can be acknowledged.



CHALLENGE 4:

"Being able to work flexibly and adapt to changes in circumstance such as volunteer absence, wheelchair maintenance, requests from the public."

Being available to answer calls on an ad hoc basis throughout weekdays and weekends where possible meant that a number of people could access the beach wheelchairs last minute, or have their enquiries answered in order to book as needed. Also, beach wheelchair deliveries and pick-ups on weekends maximised the time people on holiday could enjoy the beach wheelchairs.

Flexible working also meant that hours could be allocated to the project in order to meet deadlines most effectively, to get the project up and running as soon as possible, and to ensure busy weeks could be focussed on and events delivered to the best of their potential.



This graph shows how the allocation of hours per week has been arranged to need. This system suited both the project and the coordinator very well. The first peak reflects the setup time, and then less hours were worked later in the project to balance the time. Hours are now increasing again to reflect maintenance management, end of season coordination and to meet wider outdoor access needs such as introducing the push trike to Carew Castle which involves adding a new area and new agreements to the online booking system.

Setup and Development:

May 23: Project Start. Systems and Processes Established

- All **beaches visited** and initially risk-assessed.
- **Relationships built** with potential hosts. Individual needs discussed in order to ascertain what a new system would need to achieve.
- Past **booking forms and host agreements** reviewed and updated.
- Talks held with **community practitioners and groups** and individuals wishing to book the beach wheelchairs to determine whether a pre-booking system would meet user-needs.
- Substantial work was involved in **sourcing a booking system** that would be able to manage resources, facilitate flexible booking slots that varied between hosts, establish bespoke account and booking forms, and include welsh translations. The website chosen was fully supported by the Communications Team who were interested in ways they might compare a new booking system with those already in place in other areas. Tomos Jones was a huge support in helping facilitate translations.
- System incorporating facility for people to read and agree to **Safety Guidelines, Loan Agreement, and Cleaning Instructions** to ensure Covid Decontamination between uses was established.
- The online booking **website was fully programmed** and populated, and forms created, by the Beach Wheelchair

Coordinator. The *Data Protection Impact Assessment* was completed with guidance from Mair Thomas and Data Protection Officer Sarah Burns.

- **Ad hoc bookings** were made and new enquiries and enquiries that had been made earlier in the year were followed up.
- **Hosts were confirmed**, new agreement forms were created and completed (with seven beaches of the nine in total confirmed by the official launch date).
- *In a few cases considerable time was spent exploring host agreements that could not be confirmed due to safety or logistical considerations. Tailored agreements were organised where necessary. Such as for Good Trails who required a facility to take bookings in person.*
- First **Beach Wheelchairs were delivered** with Cleaning Buckets and COSHH sheets.
- The Online Booking System was **soft launched and piloted** with new enquiries.
- Communication by the Communications Team via **press release** was distributed to Newspapers, direct introduction to community groups and healthcare professionals, and via Social Media.

July 23rd. Online Booking System Launched



Whizz-kidz event. Guests enjoying the Sandpiper children's beach wheelchairs.

"Just to let you know that this afternoon we had a gentleman come in to us to say how wonderful it was that we had the beach wheelchair service. His daughter is 15 and wanted to go to a beach and when he saw that we offer the service, it made the decision to come to Pembrokeshire for a holiday. They have enjoyed their time and

the gentleman wanted to pass on his appreciation and to say that his daughter's smile was worth the holiday." *Emyr of Oriel y Parc*.

Beach Wheelchair Locations



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Please note that the full interactive ARCGIS map with locations, hosts, volunteer and availability details and booking links can be viewed by visiting <https://tinyurl.com/pembsmap>.
This view will shortly be displayed on the National Park Website as a tool for people to view locations and book through.

Please note that fewer beaches were confirmed in North Pembrokeshire as the terrain tends to make access more difficult in this area.

"It was truly amazing to have the opportunity to take our little boy to the beach, he loved every second of it. The process was easy and the lady was very helpful" *Survey Response*.

Coordination

- Managing visitor enquiries. Whilst a 48 minimum notice period was required (created following consultation with the Pembrokeshire County Council Access Officer), last minute bookings were arranged when possible. Reception was inundated with last-minute enquiries with sometimes as many as five urgent enquiries coming through per day. These reduced immediately through making sure the minimum amount of booking time was stated very clearly on the website. This does beg the question of whether a reduced minimum booking time would facilitate a good deal more bookings. Still, during the busy season perhaps five enquiries per week were serviced, and where possible bookings were made.
- For accessible beaches without a host beach wheelchair, such as Broadhaven Beach, ad hoc hirings were facilitated for bookings for a few days or more by delivery and pickup from that beach.

- A service was made available (and made use of once) for people not able to book through the internet.
- A service was made available (and made use of once) for people wishing to make enquiries and book in Welsh.
- A service is being made available (in development, and currently having been used once) for people who need a helper on the beach.

"I hope the photos also came through ok and gave a flavour of just how well the wheelchair transformed our holiday from segregated activities to inclusive family fun." *Email*

Volunteering

In addition to the host volunteers, three volunteers trained and now active on four beaches, checking the beach wheelchairs for maintenance issues and also ready to support people on the beach when needed.

Events



- The **Whizz-kidz** Event supported three families of young wheelchair-users to enjoy a day at the beach. Children had the opportunity to trial Mountain Trikes which were a great success. We are now working with Whizz-kidz to access training processes for the Mountain Trikes to facilitate improved access to difficult terrains.



- The **Versus Arthritis** Event supported four families living with Arthritis to enjoy an afternoon at the beach.
- Richard the Ranger supported Beach Wheelchair journeys to the sea-line which introduced the idea of using a Beach Wheelchair to people who can benefit from their availability.
- Like the event with Whizz-kidz, this event was considered a first stage in a long-term collaborative relationship that can grow and develop.



- **Ad hoc** events included facilitating the use of Beach Wheelchairs at a beach-wedding, providing additional beach wheelchairs for care homes wishing to provide an experience for more than one Resident, and a supported session for a frail family.

- Relationships with schools were developed leading to an **accessible foraging event**.
- The Beach Wheelchair and Push Trike also featured at two **Roots to Recovery** Events making it possible for people with mobility and mental health conditions to take part in the activities available.
- A **Walking for All Conversation** was launched working in collaboration with Hannah Buck and Walkability Offer Sam Evans to explore ways to best support accessible walking opportunities and two of three co-production events have been held so far.

There is so much more that can be explored in terms of events - and this could be a key feature of Spring 2022

"Utterly magical that you offer the loan of a Beach wheelchair! I take my hat off to those that pushed this fantastic initiative to allow disabled people to join their friends and families on Welsh beaches." *Survey Response.*

Troubleshooting Pressure-points:

- Hosts having to close without notice due to staff shortage or Coronavirus measures.
- Ensuring cleaning equipment was consistently being put out with the Beach Wheelchairs.
- Managing expectations when needs could not be catered for; from transfer requirements, to booking slots.

"I found it very good and I really relied on it for my mum as otherwise she would not have got on the beach let alone managed to dip her feet in the water." *Survey Feedback*



On Newport Beach

"It was great! Managed to get my 84 year old Auntie, recovering from a fractured pelvis all the way along North Beach and down to the sea. You made a frail old lady - and her not so old niece very happy!" *Survey Response.*

Key Figures:

- 141 Slots Booked Online (not including registered cancellations) by 65 Individuals, averaging approx. 9 Booking Slots Taken per week. This includes slots booked over a period of a days and repeat bookings.
- *Crwst* at Poppet Sands was the most popular host, with 23% of bookings.
- Almost 80% of bookings were by and for people living outside of Pembrokeshire.
- The majority of beach wheelchair borrowers heard about the system online, and also through the local paper, friends and relatives, the Council, and Access Holiday recommendations, as well as through hosts and when visiting the beaches.
- Approximately 30% of borrowers required assistance from the Coordinator, varying from support to book last minute, to accessible beach information, to delivery and pickup of the chair involving a special location.

"Thank you very much for sorting out the beach wheelchair for our son Lloyd. It made his and our holiday brilliant." *Email*



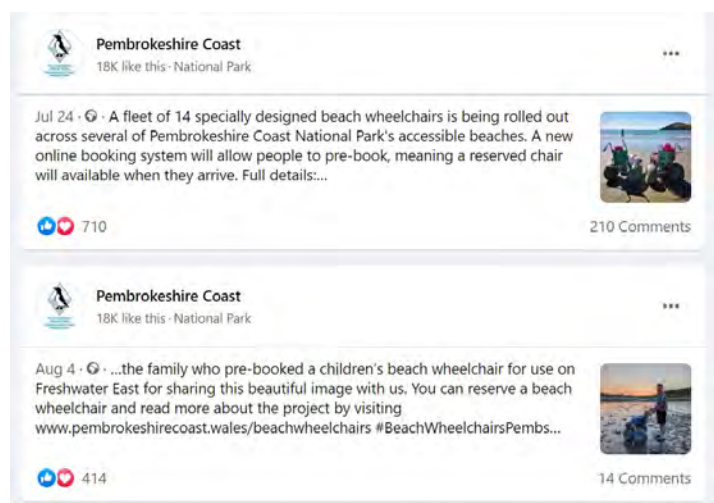
The image sent by a family who used the Beach Wheelchair at Freshwater East for a week.

The Beach Wheelchairs acted as Ambassador for the National Park throughout the season.

The Social Media Press Release received 2.4k shares on facebook, which was the largest amount of shares ever from a post that wasn't a paid promotion, and an image sent by a visitor was liked 414 times.

These popular posts, with a combined reach of over 500,000 and engagement of over 36000 showcase how interested people are in accessible solutions being provided within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

There were also 1073 Twitter Engagements and print press to a publicity value of £677.52.



The beach wheelchair also featured on the S4C Dechrau Canu Dechrau Canmol (as organised by Medi), and S4C have

requested another feature in collaboration with Whizz-kidz for a newspaper.

"Absolutely amazing! I wish every beach had access to one. It meant my daughter could go further out and round the beach to explore. We are usually limited to how far we can take her because she walks for short distances and gets tired. Her normal Chair doesn't get across the sand easily. Great!" *Survey Response.*

Findings:

- It is more important than ever to improve access to natural landscapes, now so many indoor spaces pose a risk to people with underlying health conditions.
- The large percentage of Beach Wheelchair use by visitors—many of whom said that they had booked their holiday on the basis of a beach wheelchair being available and most who planned to use the service again—shows the benefit of providing the accessible services to draw visitors to Pembrokeshire.
- At the same time, the small percentage of local beach wheelchair users, when considering the demographic of a large percentage of older people, many of whom will have conditions affecting their mobility, show that there is much more work to be done. Lack of uptake does not mean lack of demand - and suggests that more work needs to be done to connect effectively with the people who could be making use of the service. The target could be closer to a 60% usage by visitors over the Summer, raising to an 80% use by locals in quieter times.
- Whilst Winter will inevitably be quieter, access needs do not end in the Autumn. A number of hosts will remain open throughout the year and make the beach wheelchairs available on hopefully seven accessible beaches.
- The project raised many questions in terms of what is needed to improve access. Areas that could be explored include improved transfer solutions for the beach wheelchairs, equipment and facilities, improved processes and communication to facilitate the best use of the equipment that is available, and improvement of information people can refer to before and during their visit to the beach and other natural landscapes.



The Whizz-kidz Event

Experiences for All:

- Despite that the majority (85%) of participants were under 65, almost 30% of individuals in the survey reported restricted mobility, and 33% of Under 25's reported a long lasting health condition. This reflects a need for a range of accessible services for a large proportion of the public. *In terms of the access needs for older adults, in May 2021 Age UK reported that of the 42% of over 60's in the UK who had difficulty walking short distances outside reported that the activity had become more difficult since the first lockdown.*
- 13% of all participants reported physical or mental health as barriers to accessing the National Park, and 20% of those with poor health and/or wellbeing.
- Promisingly, the majority of those with poor health and/or wellbeing did report that they spent time every day in green and natural spaces.

"Please keep up this scheme and give disabled people the opportunity to go in the beach and enjoy the water and be part of the family fun."

Survey Response.



The all terrain Mountain Trike Push will shortly be available at Carew Castle and available to book through the booking system along with the site's currently under-utilised mobility scooter.

Next Steps:

The role has been extended for another twelve months working an average of two days per week over the year.

The following activities will build upon the momentum established through Summer Activity and will be particularly focused to enhance the Landscape and Experiences for All objectives:

- Update Risk Assessments and establish whether any other beaches that might be suitable for a beach wheelchair.
- Continue to coordinate and promote Beach Wheelchair availability to locals who could benefit from the project.
- Service enquiries for people wishing to book holidays during the Winter for Spring/Summer 2022 and to pre-book slots or to organise special arrangements where appropriate.
- Work with hosts to secure and set-up early 2022 availability, along with a stronger coordination of the campaign.
- Set up Beach Wheelchair events for early Spring in collaboration with service providers and care homes.
- Visit care homes with a beach wheelchairs (and potentially a virtual beach experience on a headset) so that people can feel confident about using the equipment when they visit the Beach.
- Work with colleagues to improve outdoor access to, and virtual access and information about, all wilder terrains.

This might involve developing processes and offering support to make equipment such as Mountain Trikes and other equipment such as scooters and the Push Trike easily accessible, creating new material to support the communication of accessible facilities within the National Park, and developing the volunteer roles.

"Let's talk next year about how we can help promote the wheelchair access through our website, google listing, social media etc. Meanwhile, if there is anything we can do to help, please just let me know." *Simon of Cafe Mawr (Host)*

Personal Note:

The project has taught me that access is about so much more than numbers - hearing the actual stories of experiences the beach wheelchairs have enabled, and seeing the positive difference they make has been both a revelation and inspiration. Surely a project about improving access should not only be judged on the merits of its standalone value, but as a way to improve access and therefore add value to all the good work happening within the National Park. Now the foundation has been laid—and we have the booking system up and running, hosts, and volunteers—there is the opportunity to build relationships, increase use from a local as well as a visitor perspective, and find new solutions to pioneer a true 'access for all' approach.