

**REPORT OF HEAD OF PARK DELIVERY &
ACCESS AND RIGHTS OF WAY MANAGER**

SUBJECT: Progress on implementing the recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Panel with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority on Management of Public Rights of Way.

Purpose of Report

For information – to make members aware of progress in taking forward recommendations of the Report of the Scrutiny Panel regarding the management of public rights of way.

Introduction/Background

At the last meeting of the Recreation and Tourism Review Committee, held on the 19th March 2012, Members discussed the recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Panel regarding the management of public rights of way by both the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA). At this meeting Officers outlined the main outcomes highlighted in the report and their implications for the delivery of public rights of way (PROW) services.

The scrutiny review of public rights of way was welcomed as a timely appraisal of the National Park Authority's engagement in the management of public rights of way. In common with BBNPA we have prioritised the management of the network of public rights of way in recognition of the fact that they present the best way to gain access to and enjoy the special qualities of the National Park and wider countryside.

This report provides an outline of progress in the implementation of the Scrutiny Panel recommendations as detailed below. Key officers of the two National Park Authorities are to meet at Brecon in August, following the postponement of a meeting planned for early July, to explore in greater detail comparative expenditure on PROW and comparative management regimes. It is hoped that this will evolve into a regular review process that, over time, may also include Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA).

Report Recommendations

Some of the 22 recommendations are common to the two National Park Authorities (PCNPA & BBNPA) while others are specific to just one and it is fair to say that some recommendations have greater or lesser relevance, depending on progress made by the respective National Park Authority in that particular field. A prioritisation for implementation of the recommendations is also included at the end of the report.

Recommendations 1-7 deal with the scrutiny process. Recommendations 10, 11, 20 - 22 are specific to BBNPA. Key recommendations for the delivery of the PCNPA service are identified as follows:

- **Recommendation 8 - health and well-being; walking prescriptions.**
 The Walkability Project Officer is making great progress in this field, with a view to initially dispensing walking prescriptions from Solva GP surgery as a pilot scheme. Over the 12 months of the project to March 2012 there have been 116 countryside access events involving 1,580 participants from a range of groups and organisations with six regular groups having been established. The project is supported by Sport Wales, Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC) and Hywel Dda Local Health Board.
- **Recommendation 9 – Review access opportunities in light of the new Equalities Act duties.**
 PCNPA continues its work to reduce barriers to participation notable recent examples include updating the ‘Walks for All’ publication and a continued commitment to reduce the number of stiles throughout the National Park, with a specific focus on the Coast Path (e.g. the section between Pembroke Dock and Penberi, near St David’s, is completely stile free). This work will continue with an appraisal of access opportunities being applied to our maintenance and improvements work so that all reasonable adjustments can be made where resources permit.
- **Recommendation 12 - Urgent review of our Delegation Agreement with Pembrokeshire County Council.**
 Prior to the Scrutiny review we had met with Pembrokeshire County Council to discuss amendments to the existing PROW Delegation Agreement and the possibility of preparing a new Delegation Agreement. Much of the work has now been completed in terms of identifying PROW which do not have a value in delivering park purposes; identifying routes that cross the Park boundary which the Authority would wish to manage in their entirety and an update of statutory powers and duties since 1997. A more detailed report regarding this issue is in preparation and the issue of a funding contribution from Pembrokeshire County Council is yet to be clarified.
- **Recommendation 13 - common methods of recording voluntary sector input.**
 This will be discussed in more detail at the meeting with BBNPA in August with a view to agreeing a common method of recording voluntary sector involvement. We need to ensure that the change of staff structure which has taken the Rangers out of the area teams where rights of way work is planned, does not adversely affect the identification of PROW work suitable for volunteers.
- **Recommendation 15 - adoption of jointly agreed criteria for network condition.**
 The Scrutiny Review demonstrated that the two National Park Authorities were using different criteria to measure the condition of our respective networks. BBNPA were using criteria that relate to the National Best Value Performance Indicator and included the issue of alignment of the walked path to the registered route. This Authority was using criteria that did not make reference to the alignment to the registered route as we do not have the same delegated powers to influence this issue and instead used criteria that reflected the accessibility of the network to help monitor key outcomes of the Corporate Strategy. Consequently we were recording 87% of the network as being accessible. This figure would include routes with substandard furniture, absence in part or whole of signage but acknowledged that the path was still accessible with the aid of an Ordnance Survey map or local knowledge. As a result of the scrutiny exercise we were able to agree common criteria by which

to compare our respective networks. PCNPA will now use criteria that reflect more the aspirations of visitors in that all signage must be in place and all access furniture in a condition that is fit for use with the route being well defined and easy to use. Under the new jointly agreed criteria it was estimated that 70% public rights of way classed as open. Since March 2012 we have been surveying the network and have begun a work programme of signage improvements. It is becoming apparent from our survey of PROW that we may well have under-estimated the proportion of PROW deemed satisfactory under the new criteria. Therefore a combination of more accurate recording and new signposting should lead to significant progress in this task.

- **Recommendation 18 – data collection on usage of PROW including user satisfaction surveys.**

The Authority will continue to record trends in volume of use on the network by means of its 14 electronic counters on the Coast Path and wider network of PROW. The Authority has undertaken a range of surveys relating to user satisfaction on PROW, notably for preparation of its Rights of Way Improvements Plan and will continue to contribute PROW questions to the Pembrokeshire Citizens' Panel Survey. We also intend to install a post box for questionnaires at the recently established multi-user path network at Pantmaenog forestry.

- **Recommendation 19 – establishing a clear process to assess the costs of improving and maintaining promoted routes.**

This matter will be progressed at the meeting with BBNPA in August with a view to agreeing a common method of recording voluntary sector involvement.

- **Recommendation 20 – Action plan to address the recommendations.**

An Action Plan is required within six months of the publication of the report and is currently in preparation and will be completed following the meeting with BBNPA officers in August.

Comparisons

The Access Manager has been able to make some other comparisons of costs with other counties and National Parks though figures are surprisingly hard to obtain and once obtained are not always comparable. The visit to Brecon will be useful if we can confirm that the comparisons of costs are based on comparable measures and that we find that the quality of the work on the ground matches what we would expect within Pembrokeshire.

Options

The options to be taken depend very much on the Brecon visit. It may be that there are good reasons for disparities in costs and that different ground conditions or different requirements of users justify the PCNPA present approach. It may be that we need to change management arrangements or standards to reduce costs to a comparable level – though the recent reorganisation may well have already introduced a more flexible management structure since the survey figures were collected.

Financial considerations

The Rights of Way service results in significant expenditure, if we can make changes either through a review of the delegation agreement or through changes in approach or standards, that may well bring opportunities for savings.

Risk considerations

There is an element of risk in reducing footpath expenditure – particularly in relation to safety and the quality of the walking experience. We have seen in recent years, the importance of the footpath network to a wide variety of users, both local and visiting. It will be important to maintain a high reputation for quality in access, especially at a time when other Welsh counties are developing their walking opportunities.

Compliance

The scrutiny of PROW between Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities was part of a pilot to examine the benefits of joint scrutiny of key services.

Human Rights/Equality impact issues

This item has no human rights outcomes.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

While the management of rights of way needs to take into account both biodiversity issues and environmental sustainability, these issues are not covered in this report.

Welsh Language statement

None

Conclusion

The process of scrutiny has generated a series of recommendations which are being followed up in conjunction with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA). Some changes are already underway (as detailed above) and further changes will be forthcoming following meetings with BBNPA. As part of the recent restructuring we have also put in place a new way to commission work from warden teams and to record the time and costs of work.

The integration of teams should mean that some work can be done at a lower cost and the recording systems should make it easier to identify actual costs and any potential savings. The integrated warden teams enable more staff to be applied to rights of way at key times of year and more flexible working. The new structure also provides improved access to a wider range of machinery and equipment.

Recommendation

To note the content of the report.

Background Documents

Report of Scrutiny Panel - Report No 02/12

Report of Access and Rights of Way Manager 28th March 2012 02/12

*(For further information, please contact *)*

Author: Charles Mathieson Head of Park Delivery or Anthony Richards, Access & Rights of Way Manager, Direction Team