

REPORT OF ACCESS AND RIGHTS OF WAY MANAGER

SUBJECT: TO OUTLINE PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEMBERS' JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL WITH THE BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY REGARDING THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

Purpose of Report

To ask Members to recommend to the National Park Authority to approve the attached Action Plan to take forward key recommendations of the Report of the Scrutiny Panel regarding the management of public rights of way. To update members on progress in taking forward the recommendations of the Report.

Introduction

At the last meeting of the Recreation and Tourism Review Committee, held on the 18th July 2012, Members were updated on progress in implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Panel regarding the management of public rights of way (PROW). A number of issues were outstanding, namely:

- the preparation of an Action Plan;
- a meeting with officers of Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) to investigate in more detail comparative management and expenditure on public rights of way
- review of the Public Rights of Way Delegation Agreement with Pembrokeshire County Council.

Action Plan

One of the key recommendations of the Report was to prepare an Action Plan to address the implementation of recommendations. The Report stipulated that an Action Plan is required within six months of the publication of the report. The Action Plan was prepared by officers in August and is contained in the annex to this report. The Action Plan recommendations are prioritised in accordance with the Scrutiny Report.

Meeting with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA)

A meeting with BBNPA officers postponed from early July took place at Brecon on 31st August 2012. The purpose of the meeting was to agree implementation of some joint recommendations; to ensure that both Park Authorities were accounting for the same expenditure on PROW and to share knowledge and experience in the management of PROW. This was a very productive meeting followed by a field visit to view some typical paths and a visit to one of the BBNPA depots.

An approach to the implementation of two joint recommendations was agreed, which relates to common methods of recording voluntary sector input and establishing a

clear process to assess the costs of improving and maintaining promoted routes (Recommendations 13 & 19).

In comparing expenditure on PROW management, it became evident that the National Park Authorities had used slightly different methodologies in calculating labour costs, specifically warden costs. It became apparent that certain components had not been fully accounted for by BBNPA. To further investigate this matter we have agreed to cost a typical PROW task, for example to survey a path and install a signpost, a stile and gate; and spend two warden days cutting vegetation. This will provide a more accurate comparison of the costs of maintaining PROW in the two National Parks and is likely to reduce disparity between the two Authorities.

Another issue that has a significant bearing on comparative costs is the degree to which BBNPA engage in vegetation cutting on PROW. There is significantly less vegetation cutting being undertaken on PROW in the Beacons due to the differences in landscape and land use, with unimproved land and sheep grazing predominating. Cutting was limited to 20 individual PROW, with four seasonal part time wardens brought in on Tuesdays and Thursdays to cut paths. This must be compared to the deployment of all ten wardens in the former Recreation Management team from May to September cutting an extensive network in PCNP. The landscape character of Pembrokeshire with its improved agricultural land, lanes and high growth rates necessitates regular vegetation cutting throughout the growing season.

The materials used by BBNPA for access furniture (stiles, signposts, gates) also differed from PCNPA and have a bearing on costs. BBNPA do not use oak for access furniture. Stiles are made from treated softwood, sawn to size and nailed together on site. This results in reduced time for installation as only two post holes need to be dug and there is no morticing. BBNPA signposts are also softwood and are purchased from Forestry Commission Wales (but more expensive than our oak signposts). Gates are of galvanised steel rather than timber. PCNPA uses oak for stiles and signposts and predominantly larch and oak for gates.

Other useful information to arise from our discussion related to the organisation of PROW surveys and inspections and the use of IT applications for databases and surveys.

It became apparent that there were few registered PROW on the uplands and waterfalls areas of BBNP. Here access was provided by a large network of permissive paths and considerable time and money (not accounted for in the Scrutiny Report) is spent on the management of these routes by BBNPA and the National Trust.

Following the meeting we are now confident that we can account for the significant differences in management costs, which to summarise are mainly due to an underestimate of labour costs by BBNPA; a modest saving in materials and the significant difference in our engagement with vegetation control.

PROW Delegation Agreement

The Director of Delivery and Discovery wrote to Pembrokeshire County Council on two occasions (17th August and 23rd October 2012) to formally resume discussions

on the review of the Delegation Agreement, however, at the time of writing this report the Park Authority has not received a reply or acknowledgment. Detailed proposals of the main changes have been enclosed with this correspondence, citing the importance attached to the exercise by the Report of the Members Scrutiny Review and it is unfortunate that no progress has been made to date.

Comparisons

The visit to Brecon was extremely useful as we now have more accurate comparisons with regard to costs and PROW management techniques.

Options

The meeting at Brecon provided officers with an opportunity to review the use of oak for access furniture and the merits of using treated softwood as alternatives. Oak is roughly three times more costly but considered more durable than treated softwood and provides a good use of Welsh timber from sustainably managed sources. The consistent use of timber on the Coast Path in particular complements our natural landscape. A reduction in costs by not morticing stile posts could be achieved.

Financial considerations

The management of PROW results in significant expenditure, a review of the Delegation Agreement could achieve efficiencies and savings. Changes to our approach or standards could also bring opportunities for savings, however, these have to be considered against the quality of visitor experience and sustainable use of local timber.

Risk considerations

There is an element of risk in reducing PROW expenditure – particularly in relation to safety and the quality of the walking experience. The importance of the PROW network to local residents, visitors and the local economy is evident and a major consideration when allocating resources.

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 PROW needs to take into account both biodiversity issues and environmental sustainability, these issues are not covered in this report.

Welsh Language statement

None

Recommendation

That Members recommend to the National Park Authority to approve the attached Action Plan and note progress in implementation of the Report recommendations.

Background Documents

Report of Scrutiny Panel

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

Report of Access and Rights of Way Manager 18th July 2012

(For further information, please contact Anthony Richards 4849)

Author: Anthony Richards, Access & Rights of Way Manager, Direction Team

Recommendations for the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority arising from the Public Rights of Way Scrutiny Study March 2012

Recommendations are prioritised in accordance with the Report of the Scrutiny Panel; high (within six months), medium (within one year) and longer term (within four years).

ACTION PLAN

REC NO.	RECOMMENDATION	PRIORITY	TARGET DATE	LEAD OFFICER/S	ACTION	PROGRESS
10	PCNPA should urgently review its Delegation Agreement with Pembrokeshire County Council with a view to negotiating a financial contribution and/or a reduction in duties.	HIGH	13/12/2012	Access & Rights of Way Manager; Director of Direction; Director of Delivery	AR to prepare report to National Park Authority; AR to prepare schedules to Delegation Agreement; JP & AR to meet PCC re funding	Draft Committee Report circulated for comment; schedules completed; meeting with PCC to be arranged
14	Future decisions affecting any aspect of the ROW network management should include an input from the respective warden services prior to any final decisions being taken.	HIGH	Immediate	Head of Delivery; Warden Managers; Access & Rights of Way Manager /public rights of way officer	Former Rec Man team fully integrated warden service with PROW work decision making. Under new structure systems/procedures have been established to ensure continuity of communication between officers and warden service.	Completed. Absorbed into current practice.
5	It is recommended that the following criteria be applied in the next financial year and onwards for any comparative purposes. 1. Is the right of way signposted from a metalled road? 2. Is the right of way passable? (i.e. the surface condition and vegetation growth do not impede passage) 3. Is the furniture on the right of way in a satisfactory condition? (i.e. is it fit for purpose)	HIGH	Immediate	Access & Rights of Way Manager; Public rights of way officer; Warden Managers	Database being updated to record new Performance Indicator. Surveys ongoing to record condition of network. Work programmes being generated from survey with priority for implementation in 2012/13	Report to be prepared in March 2013 once initial surveys completed. Meeting with BBNPA in August 2012 to determine comparative costs.

REC NO.	RECOMMENDATION	PRIORITY	TARGET DATE	LEAD OFFICER/S	ACTION	PROGRESS
	It should be recognised that while this comparison can offer a 'fair' picture, it should not be regarded as 100% accurate.					
19	There should be a clear process in place when the promotion of any particular area is considered to address any ROW issues within the proposed areas prior to any funding bids being undertaken and appropriate maintenance resources included as part of the project budget.	HIGH	Immediate	Access & Rights of Way Manager; Head of Delivery; Warden Managers	All PROW improvements and promotion schemes will continue to be fully appraised for their sustainability in terms of maintenance. As competing tasks for Warden time are developed e.g. an increase in conservation land management targets, there will need to be a decision from management team on reallocation of resources which may reduce engagement in promotion of access opportunities.	Completed. Absorbed into current practice.
9	In the light of the new Equalities Duty the NPs will need to re-assess the ROW network in each NP area to explore options for improving access both physical and intellectual within the current budgetary constraints.	MEDIUM	13/06/2013	Access & Rights of Way Manager; Public Rights of Way Officer; Warden Managers	This approach is embedded in Coast Path management and ease of access improvements continue to be achieved. With regard to the wider network of PROW all improvements incorporate the least restrictive option though this can be difficult to influence across land in private ownership. Potential to review web	Applications for public path order are subject to Equality Act screening. Physical barriers will be removed or altered where that is practicable and where the agreement of the landowner has been secured. Work with PAG to update their promoted routes.

REC NO.	RECOMMENDATION	PRIORITY	TARGET DATE	LEAD OFFICER/S	ACTION	PROGRESS
					walks (short walks) for accessibility improvements. Promotion of access for all opportunities has been updated and revised. Promotion of such opportunities is under resourced at present as staff are fully occupied with the maintenance and improvements of infrastructure. A greater role for Discovery in this field is therefore required.	
13	Methods of recording volunteering input into the NPs should be regularised. This would serve to highlight the contribution volunteers make to NP work and also provide valuable information in the future when volunteer time may be required as proof of community involvement and match funding.	MEDIUM	Immediate	Head of Delivery; Ranger Manager	Rangers will continue to record volunteer work but the annual reports will need to separate public rights of way work from other work.	Meeting with BBNPA will ensure we account for same work.
8	Where appropriate NPs should work with partners to develop and promote walks within the PROW network as useful 'Walking Prescriptions'.	MEDIUM/ LONG TERM	31 st March 2013	Walkability Project Officer ;Access & Rights of Way Manager	Pilot walking prescription being established with Solva GP surgery by Walkability Officer.	Will roll out depending on appraisal of staff time spent on set up and uptake/referrals.
18	Network usage is seen as a major factor for gauging priorities for future investment in PROW network. Each NPA	MEDIUM/ LONG TERM	13/06/2013	Access & Rights of Way Manager; Head of Delivery	Coast Path and PROW counters; Citizens Panel questions; Post box user	Continue monitoring through counters and Citizens Panel questions.

REC NO.	RECOMMENDATION	PRIORITY	TARGET DATE	LEAD OFFICER/S	ACTION	PROGRESS
	will need to consider how it might wish to collect data on usage in the future. Opportunities to extend the provision via contractor of current counters in PCNP could be investigated as a monitoring option for BBNP. In addition the extension of user satisfaction surveys should be investigated.			Communications Team	surveys. Pembrokeshire County Council Tourism Survey.	Need to introduce new post box survey in conjunction with Delivery.
16	Each NPA addresses the issue of anomalies on their respective networks using the priorities identified as a result of the ROWIPs.	LONG TERM	Immediate	Public Rights of Way Officer	Anomalies are already being addressed through work programme of diversion orders. An inventory of the location and type of each anomaly is being continuously reviewed.	Diversion order work programme will continue. Any evidential anomalies will be referred to Pembrokeshire County Council.
17	The use of visitor payback schemes should be investigated as part of any programme to increase resources for the management of the PROW in the National Park.	LONG TERM	2013 -2016	Director of Delivery and Discovery; Health and Tourism officer.	Visitor Payback schemes in other National Parks to be reviewed and appraised to see if there are opportunities for the cost effective introduction of similar schemes in PCNP.	H&T officer to lead.