

Peak District Local Access Forum

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Item: 12

Title: DCC Countryside Service
Recent work on Equalities Impact Assessment

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Introduction

The Countryside Service has undertaken work in support of Derbyshire County Council's bid to attain level 3 of the National Equalities Standard for Local Government. The main area of work has been an Equalities Impact Assessment on aspects of the Countryside Service's work as well as assisting with the external assessment of the Council bid.

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Equality Impact Assessments are a process for reviewing the way we deliver a service or carry out a function or policy. In effect we look through an "equalities lens", so we can improve our services and make them more accessible and appropriate to our customers.

This means we look at our policies, procedures and services to decide whether or not they are meeting the needs of all our customers. Where it is clear that services don't meet the needs of certain customer groups we propose changes to the service which should help improve access for those groups.

An important part of the assessment is consulting different customer groups and seeking their opinions on;

- the service as they use it now (or not as the case may be!);
- the proposed changes to the service and whether these will give the identified customer groups better access to an improved service.

The information given to us in the consultation will guide whether we have reached the right conclusions about the service and whether the changes will have a real impact on access to our services.

What services are we looking at?

We are currently looking at our cycle hire centre at Middleton Top, our network of cycle routes (Greenways) and any health promotion activities we are involved in.

Cycle hire at Middleton Top was set up in 1976 to promote the use of cycling as a means of exploring and accessing the countryside. The site connects to the High Peak Trail which offers 18 miles of traffic free cycling. There is a charge to use the bikes and it is mainly marketed at tourists because the site is close to the Peak District National Park.

Derbyshire County Council has been developing its network of cycle routes (Greenways) over the last thirty years to provide safe and enjoyable access to the countryside. There are now a significant number of Greenways across the county, totalling a distance of over 280km of traffic-free routes.

The Countryside Service has become involved in many areas of wellbeing work over the years as it is seen as complimentary to countryside aims and objectives or it has helped to secure resources to develop projects and activities. Projects have included walking for health groups, practical work with learning difficulty clients from social services centres, horticultural therapy projects with social services centres and mental health charities and general volunteering and placements for individuals and groups interested in personal development and well being.

Initial Findings

Cycle Hire

- We have no data on who uses our cycle hire facilities at Middleton Top other than the postcodes for visitors
- The centre is isolated and visitors need a car to get there
- The High Peak Trail has two steep slopes that make it difficult to use with adapted cycles for disabled visitors
- Our promotion of the site is mainly aimed at tourists because we share advertising with the Peak District National Park Authority
- The costs of hiring bikes is expensive and could be a barrier for some groups wishing to use the service

Cycle Routes (Greenways)

- We collect data on the number of users on routes through electronic counters but we have no data on the individuals and groups who make up these users
- Remoteness of some routes and the trees and bushes along the trail could put some users off because of safety concerns

- To prevent illegal use by motorcycles we install barriers at access points and these may prevent some mobility scooters using routes. We try to provide RADAR gates at these points but it is not always possible
- The network is in development and not all routes are joined up. This means some parts of the network are not accessible if you don't have a car and may involve the use of on road sections
- We need to do more promotion on the routes and the network

Health Promotion

- We don't collect and collate data on who uses our well being activities
- There is no overall policy in Derbyshire County Council on wellbeing and health promotion that would help guide our work
- It is not always possible to incorporate disabled volunteers into the practical conservation tasks programme, however where possible tasks are tailored to individuals and deliver meaningful work and projects
- We don't promote the opportunities we offer for individuals and groups to be involved in well being activities very well

How do we propose to change the service?

Cycle Hire

- Undertake monitoring of cycle hire users in 2009/10 financial year
- Ensure that existing group hire services accommodate the needs of different groups
- Undertake a feasibility study of introducing mobility scooter hire to Middleton Top
- Improve website information on cycle hire services
- Explore opportunities to use cycle hire or the cycle fleet to promote cycling in Derbyshire.(This should include a survey of potential partner organisations and departments)

Cycle Routes (Greenways)

- Continue to monitor best practice and standards in community safety and Greenway design and ensure these are implemented by Consulting and Contracting Division
- Promote newly completed Greenways and update information on DCC website
- Liaise with disability access groups to collect data on wheelchair and mobility scooter designs in common use on Greenways
- Liaise with disability access groups to discuss the feasibility of developing new access control designs to accommodate most types of wheelchairs and mobility scooters currently in use

- Identify resources to employ an additional Greenways Officer to speed up development of the network

Health Promotion

- Review and protect existing funding for health promotion and wellbeing projects supported by the Countryside Service
- Develop new promotion material on health promotion for distribution from DCC Countryside sites
- Create new pages on the DCC website detailing health promotion activities on countryside sites
- Promote the need for a corporate policy on health and wellbeing across DCC
- Develop a countryside service policy on health and wellbeing once a corporate policy has been produced

Consultation

The consultation process for the report is drawing to a close and involved a wide range of groups and forums across Derbyshire including representatives of both LAFs with interests in disabled access. There have been some excellent responses which will help us to review these services, revise our proposals and finalise the action plan.

Finalising the EIA

The last steps to completing the EIA are to review the comments from the consultation process and incorporate suggestions or proposed alterations to the actions as appropriate.

We will also develop a timeframe for the implementation of the actions from the EIA, along with a review process to ensure that where additional research work is suggested, the information it derives is used to further shape the delivery of the service. The final step is to formally adopt the EIA and publish it in a variety of formats.

NB If any member of the LAF would like a full copy of the draft EIA it is available as an electronic document.