

Peak District Local Access Forum

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Item: 9

Title: Access Update

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on issues related to the management of access in the Peak District.

Brexit & the Future of Farming

In March 2014, the Forum received an update on agricultural reforms. Annual payments for the provision of permissive access would no longer be available and existing agreements would continue to be funded for the remainder of their term only. The Authority carries out a rolling review of these permissive access arrangements to seek their continuation by other means.

LAF members have emphasised the importance of recreation and tourism to the rural economy and that National Parks make a significant contribution to national prosperity and wellbeing. In January, the Access Sub-group met to consider the interrelationship between farming, the environment and access and to emphasise the importance of ensuring its viability post-Brexit.

The effect of Brexit on the future of farming is being considered by a National Parks England member-led working group to provide advice on strategic priorities to ensure environmentally sustainable farming with public benefit and the pursuit of National Park purposes. The group has sought to paint a high level picture of how National Parks might be involved; their working draft is being reported to the Authority meeting on 17 March 2017 (www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/committees).

The National Park Authorities' England Agriculture and Rural Development Working group is also contributing to this with comments from the Access Working group. A separate report from the Access Workgroup outlining opportunities and risks for access post-Brexit is attached in Appendix 1.

Donations

In December 2016, the Forum received reports on the operation of the [Access Fund](#) and heard from the Authority's Leadership Team about future approaches to fundraising.

At the Authority meeting on 17 March 2017, the proposal to develop a charity vehicle to support fundraising will be considered. The report sets out in principle the charitable purposes which will include the benefit of communities, visitors and the general public, the enhancement of the Park's special qualities and its alignment with the Management Plan. It is proposed that a further detailed report be provided later on in the year. It should be noted that setting up a charity will allow for gift aid and tax relief on donations which is not presently available to the Authority-led schemes. The report is available at www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/committees.

Details of donation schemes are at www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/donate. The Forum's support for the Access Fund and the opportunities it provides for access improvements in the National Park is very much welcomed. At the last meeting of the Access Sub-group, the potential for donations to go towards promotion of access opportunities, such as by leaflets or mapping, was discussed with an agreement that this could be used to complement new access.

Miles without Stiles

Accessibility training of National Park staff on Miles without Stiles took place at the end of January 2017. Further training on route assessment and selection will be carried out this month with work then progressing to the compilation of suitable routes and the identification of any works to the route required as part of this. Over the next few months, we will also be encouraging detailed input from accessibility groups with the potential for a workshop to develop the routes and needs further.

Recommendation

- 1. That the report be noted.**

Appendix 1

Brexit and Access National Park Authorities' Access Workgroup

Introduction

National Parks are important not just for their iconic landscapes and as part of our national identity, but as thriving rural economies contributing to national prosperity and wellbeing through their special qualities. 90 million people visit National Parks and surrounding areas each year spending more than £4bn and supporting 65,000 jobs with returns typically accruing to local communities and underpinning opportunities for diversification, particularly in upland areas.

The environment and access to it are interlinked and mutually dependent elements of the rural economy. The inter-relationship between farming, landscapes, biodiversity, access, and communities contributes to ecosystem services such as health and well-being. Recreation and tourism and the mental and physical health benefits of exercise and access to the countryside are vital to the rural economy and for the sustainability of communities.

Benefits from the value of continuously improving the access and rights of way network through legislation and agreements for conservation and access has supported tourism and recreational needs as they have continued to evolve. For example area access under CRoW, introduced 12 years ago, was supported at the time through an access management grant and coastal access is now being rolled out.

Funding

The withdrawal from Europe will result in changes to funding but can also at the same time provide for the opportunity to identify resources to enable delivery, additionality and the management of access.

This could relate to agri-environment schemes which have the potential to deliver multiple objectives whilst also facilitating the production of high quality food through sustainable farming systems. The added public benefit of access could make a stronger case for payments for conservation and one-off payments could be made to secure access in perpetuity.

Examples of access improvements include dedication of rough grazing land as access land, provision for access points and maintenance of routes on access land, proposals for positive access management to lessen impacts on sensitive areas, improving the accessibility of routes for less-able users, upgrading routes for cyclists and horseriders, link routes to access land and to enhance the rights of way network, and schemes for access to water and riversides.

There are also a significant number of existing agri-environment agreements which include permissive paths and permissive access land which contribute to the access offer in an area and which will be lost without a mechanism or the resources for their retention.

As well as considering agri-environment schemes, there is a need for an analysis of the impact of EU funds on activities in National Parks. Funding which brings together public, private, academic and voluntary sector interests and which ensure a focus on priority rural areas can strengthen the links between the environment and access.

The loss of EU programmes such as EAFRD, Interreg and LEADER will impact on rural businesses, including those which support visitor activities. For example, So Sussex a small company providing educational and fun outdoor experiences secured LEADER funding this year to set up a Green Business Hub in rural East Sussex, just outside the South Downs National Park boundary and visitor moorings on a river in the South Downs were funded approximately 5 years ago through LEADER.

There is also a potential impact on current applications to the LEP Growth Fund and LEADER which have access elements incorporating capital cycling projects or tourism projects including outdoor activity promotion. For the time being these are progressing.

Legislation

Legislation, policy and regulations are applicable and enforceable until the UK leaves the EU but careful consideration will be given to impacts arising for consenting regimes for infrastructure/access related works taking place in internationally protected habitats or which may affect protected species. This may result in changes to the process and timescales and habitats and species affected and for the adoption of a balancing approach which takes into account conservation and other ecosystem services to enable, for example, the integration and delivery of high quality access without discernible impacts on the integrity of habitats or species.

There may also be implications for projects and policies requiring Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment and regard will also be had to the Water Framework Directive and its interpretation in relation to the demand for access to water. Changes to authorisations and limits for emissions and discharges could also impact on the environment and hence the quality of outdoor access and the health and wellbeing arising from that.

Demand

There is a need to ensure the availability and management of high quality access and for the promotion of recreational opportunities to attract visitors including those from overseas.

Government Resources

A focus on Brexit is likely to compete with other Defra priorities and resources. The select committee could consider recreation in hand with biodiversity.

Cross-border

There may be future implications for cross-border working with the Scottish National Parks.