

## Peak District Local Access Forum – 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2016

### Agenda item 4

#### Update of the National Park Management Plan – further draft of the topic paper on Access and Recreation

##### Recommendation

To approve this draft access and recreation topic paper so that it can be further consulted on and developed by the National Park Management Plan Project Board and Advisory Group and Authority Members. A public consultation will then be undertaken in spring 2017 on a full issues and aspirations report which will include a refined version of this topic paper alongside papers on other topics such as Landscape, Biodiversity and Geodiversity, Climate Change, Communities, Business, Farming and Land Management, Sustainable Tourism, Transport and Inspiring generations.

##### FURTHER DRAFT

**Access and Recreation topic paper:** *Vision framework link W11-W14*

##### Description

Access to the Peak District National Park sustains mental and physical well-being. The National Park is easily accessible and attracts people from all ages and walks of life to benefit from escape, adventure, enjoyment, inspiration and reflection in a high quality landscape, and to make life-long connections.

The extensive areas of access land and the public rights of way network encourages participation in a range of activities as well as simply 'getting away from it all'. They allow exploration of spectacular scenery, tranquillity and opportunities to connect with nature and the cultural heritage of the landscape alongside helping to deliver wider social and economic benefits to rural and urban communities.

Activities on offer all year round for all abilities and ages include the following:

- Over 65 miles of traffic free trails – ideal for walking, cycling and horse riding across the National Park.
- World renowned climbing crags for the enthusiastic beginner through to world-class athlete.
- Huge variety of walks ranging from short strolls to long distance routes and challenging hikes.
- Favoured locations for paragliding and hang gliding.
- Caving and potholing are popular due to the numerous cave systems.
- Intrinsically good cycling offer – from recreational bike rides on traffic-free trails to challenging mountain bike routes and iconic road rides.
- Enjoying the varied landscape, ecology and geology.

##### Background

###### Overview

- The National Park Authority has a range of statutory duties and powers relating to access and recreation including managing the public right of open access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- The public rights of way network and access land provides the means to gain access to recreational activities as well as providing opportunities for physical and mental well-being. The seven constituent Highway Authorities who cover the National Park have the responsibility for the maintenance and improvement of public rights of way and are supported by the National Park Authority in its enhancement and promotion.
- The Highway Authorities are currently reviewing their Rights of Way Improvement Plans which plan strategically how they will improve the management, provision and promotion of a wider rights of way and access network.

- There are also other multi-use routes within National Parks such as unsurfaced unclassified roads and former rail tracks which form a valued part of the recreational network. By their nature these can offer accessible routes suitable for everyone no matter their level of ability, giving them the opportunity to take part and benefit. Together these routes can be promoted and branded as the National Park's 'Miles without Stiles'.
- Current level of provision for access and recreation varies across the National Park with some parts offering better provision than others.
- The majority of appropriate recreational activities can be accommodated but in some instances there is insufficient provision to meet demand e.g. for water sports.
- Popular areas require investment and the use of appropriate techniques to maintain and manage the infrastructure and meet visitor expectations.

### **Access & Rights of Way**

- There are over 3,000 kilometres (1,900 miles) of rights of way and a third of the National Park is open access land. Access land is extensive in the Dark Peak but is more fragmented in the White Peak and South West Peak. Rights of Way are concentrated in the White Peak and South West Peak but there are fewer routes available for those using the network on horseback, bikes or vehicles.
- Green lanes are historic tracks and routes used by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and motor vehicles. Some may have vehicle rights, others may not. Some routes have been identified as being in most urgent need of improved management. The National Park Authority has developed action plans for these priority routes. Traffic regulation orders on four routes have been made to prohibit access by recreational motorised vehicles and consultations on two more routes have been undertaken.
- Although there is little statistical evidence, it is generally felt that the vulnerability of many paths within the National Park has increased in recent years due to recreational pressure, climate change and a reduction in proactive programmes for maintenance.
- In summer 2014/15, 90% of routes passed the 'Easy to Use' survey, this has fallen since 2007 by approximately 7%.

### **Visitors**

- The National Park is very accessible to the surrounding conurbations with more than 16 million people being able to drive to the National Park within one hour.
- Collectively the English National Parks account for 90 million visitors a year. Within the Peak District estimates range from 11.75 million visitor days to 23.0 million visitor days each year. Half of these visitors (48%) make only short visits of less than three hours, but they are often frequent repeat visitors. Measuring leisure visitors, rather than tourists (who stay for more than 3 hours) is difficult.
- A visitor survey carried out in 2015 shows that half of all visitors state their main activity in the Park as walking 2-10 miles. Although it is expected that walking is the main driver for visits to the area, this sample may not be representative of recreation within the whole National Park.
- The impact of international events can inspire people to be more active and bring benefits to the economy eg Tour de France 2014 and Eroica Britannia Festival 2013 (for 10 years).
- Tranquillity / quiet enjoyment – tranquillity of the English countryside is recognised by the majority of people as one of its most important qualities and makes a significant contribution to the enjoyment of an area. It is important for our mental and physical well-being, and improves our quality of life. It is a key factor in maintaining the rural economy, being one of the main reasons why people head for the countryside to 'get away from it all'. Protecting this quality is a key priority.
- The National Park is a living, working landscape with a resident population of 38,000. Visitor pressure can create both opportunities and tensions. Helping to resolve such tensions is a key role.

### **Benefits of Outdoor Recreation**

- The Sport and Recreation Alliance and Liverpool John Moores University ["Reconomics" report](#) (June 2014) found that outdoor recreation provides the following.
  - Is the UK's favourite pastime - three in four adults in England regularly get active outdoors.
  - Drives the visitor economy - people spending their day enjoying outdoor recreation spent £21 billion in 2012/13; with overnight visits taken into account this comes to £27 billion.
  - Promotes a healthy nation - outdoor recreation can make a significant contribution to tackling the £10 billion cost of physical inactivity.

- Sport England's report, ['Getting Active Outdoors: A study of demography, motivation, participation and provision in outdoor sport and recreation in England'](#), examines the demand and supply of the outdoor activity market. The report shows that 18.2 million people not currently active want to take part in some form of outdoors activity, and 80% of people already active outdoors feel that it gets families happier and healthier. Sport England future funding opportunities are likely to be linked to getting people active in outdoors.
- Physical inactivity costs NHS England £1.8bn/year and the wider economy £8bn/year. The Government has a national ambition in England to bring about a year on year increase in physical activity and a year on year decrease in the proportion of those classed as inactive.
- There is a growing evidence base that highlights the role green space can play in better public health. Defra's 8 point plan for National Parks recognises the central contribution that National Parks can make to our national wellbeing. The Government has also committed to placing mental health on an equal footing with physical health. The Mental Health Strategy, No Health without Mental Health, makes clear that participation in physical activity is one of the 'Five ways to wellbeing'. The published implementation framework for the strategy outlines how local authorities can take a leading role in improving the mental wellbeing of people in their area, for example, by providing leisure facilities and green spaces.
- The Government's Vision and Circular 2010 for National Parks it refers to the connection between National Parks and health outcomes as they contain some of the last remaining tranquil areas where peace of mind can be achieved "in an increasingly busy society" (paragraph 105).
- Rights of Way Improvement plan reviews will provide strategic aspirations and action plans to shape management of the Rights of Way network in the National Park

### National Drivers

- The full impacts of leaving the European Union and the future in terms of regulations and funding are largely unknown. In the short term, this uncertainty is likely to continue to delay decision-making and make it difficult for organisations to plan ahead.
- The 2016 Cities and Local Government Devolution Act allows certain powers to be handed over from central government to some of England's cities, urban areas and counties, to permit the introduction of directly elected mayors for combined authorities and to remove some limitations on the powers of those local authorities. As such, devolution deals will alter the roles played by local authorities that operate within and close to the boundary of the National Park.
- The following were seen as key priorities in [Defra's 8 point plan](#) for National Parks:
  - Promote National Parks as world-class destinations to visitors from overseas and the UK
  - Promote innovative schemes for National Parks to serve national health.
  - Realise the immense potential for outdoor recreation in National Parks.
- [Sport England's strategy](#) looks to support initiatives for getting active outdoors and the infrastructure to facilitate it which includes a focus on: children and young people, walking for leisure, and outdoor settings.
- The Government's proposed Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy builds on the funding for Pedal Peak District and has the potential to provide iconic walking and cycling routes and which will have a key role to play in attracting and dispersing visitors.
- British Cycling has launched its first MTB focused [campaign](#) about getting more cycling access to the countryside and its rights of way in England and Wales, to mirror the situation in Scotland.
- Deregulation of the water companies through the Water Act may provide an incentive for them to increase their customer through providing an enhanced recreational offer.
- Growth of mobile phone apps using advanced augmented reality technology (ie. adding computer vision and object recognition) enabling the user to become interactive and active in the outdoor environment and could be used to build support for the National Park and provide quality new customer experiences.

### Regional recreation trends

- A summary of the research taken from the 2008 Recreation Survey and the Sport England Active People Survey results for Derbyshire highlights similar trends to national research, as follows.
  - Increased participation in active recreation, such as mountain biking.
  - Increased demand for organised events such as charity and challenge events.

- Walking and cycling are by far the most popular activities with more links to urban areas and good quality circular networks wanted.
- Running, artistic pursuits and photography, 4x4 and trail biking, wildlife study and climbing are the next most popular activities.

## Issues

### **Funding and resources**

- Changes in traditional funding streams - as highlighted above, there are changes in the availability of traditional funding streams and resources for managing access and recreation within the National Park. The success of existing Landscape Partnerships will improve Heritage Lottery Funding opportunities including the Better Outside and Roaches Gateway projects for the South West Peak and the proposed City to the Shore and Moor project for the Sheffield area.
- Donations from individuals, organisations and businesses have been made to the National Park's Access Fund for access improvements in the National Park. The funding for National Trails is secured for 2016/17 however funding for future years is uncertain and therefore benefits need to be promoted to ensure it continues to be available.
- The Government's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy provides the opportunity to take forward the development of cycling and walking routes.
- Department for Transport's Access Fund provides £60 million over three years to support the local economy by supporting access to new and existing employment, education and training; and to actively promote increased levels of physical activity through walking and cycling.
- Discover England provides £40 million funding scheme over three years with a focus on overseas visitors and proposed development of a web-based on line booking product for itineraries and tours.
- Sports England funding provides for investment identified in the strategy for infrastructure and outreach.
- Existing agri-environment schemes do not currently support the full benefits of providing access as a public good other than for mitigating the impact of visitors.
- It is important to continue to support existing partnership to combine resources and skills in a time when funds are limited.

### **Responsible visits**

- **Managing and education about environmental impacts** – management of the impact of a wide range of activities and a large number and variety of users on the environment and communities is needed to balance the needs of both recreation and conservation, requiring significant resources. It is felt that often people are not always aware of the damage or impact they are causing.
- **Shared use/ behaviour issues** - complaints arise from the behaviour of some users of rights of way, leading to demands for improved codes of conduct, policing and restraint.
- **Quality and suitability of access infrastructure** - there is a risk that reduced government funding for both NPA and Highway Authorities is impacting on Access and Rights of Way work through reduced staffing and capital. Grant schemes can improve the type and location of recreational opportunity but applications can be challenging in terms of deadlines and information requirements.
- **Managing large-scale recreation events** - Large scale events can cause disturbance to local residents, cause conflict with other users and increase recreation pressure on the area. Night-time events are also increasing and can be disruptive to wildlife and residents. It is essential that public access does not put landscape features at risk from over use or inappropriate use. The same applies to the impact visitor numbers can have on local residents and access to services.
- **Sustainability of routes** - although the majority of the network is in good condition, some routes across sensitive terrain have suffered from wear and tear and a lack of maintenance. Identification of sufficient resources to tackle these issues is difficult, and sometimes the solutions have not been welcomed as appropriate by some users. There is a range of perceptions about what makes a route suitable and sustainable and varies from site to site.

### **Widening Participation**

- **Accessibility** - ensure and promote access for the young, inexperienced, those with limited mobility, and health inequalities to overcome barriers to access. Balancing needs of different users as some prefer more challenging routes than others. Also ensure that there is sustainable and integration of transport designed to promote easy access.

- **Promoting recreational opportunity/ connectivity of the network** - some recreation groups are frustrated by a lack of provision for their activity. The mountain bike task group has identified a list of sites in the Peak District & Derbyshire for development but which are subject to resolution of conflicts. Horse riders are also developing promoted routes and are looking to improve the connectivity of the bridleway network. Access to water is limited.

## **Aspirations**

A more active, harmonious and accessible National Park - The Peak District will be a welcoming place offering outstanding experiences. There will be good access for all outdoor activities and facilities will be high-quality, well-maintained and well-connected. Everyone will have the information and opportunities to access and enjoy the National Park responsibly. They will be happy, healthy, confident, motivated and inspired by the outdoors. They will recognise and value the quality of the natural environment and will be willing to care for and support the National Park. The respect between participants and those managing the land and for the special qualities of the National Park will bring about understanding and enable conflicts and impacts to be readily managed in a balanced manner.

## **Payment for land management should directly support the cultural ecosystem services it provides**

- Lobby future agri-environment schemes/farming payment models to support up-keep of access, and reflect the wider recreation and tourism benefits that the land provides.
- Work with landowners to increase inclusive opportunities for outdoor recreation appropriate to the special qualities of the National Park.

## **Health and wellbeing**

- Promote the health benefits of outdoor recreation, including implementing a National Park programme of interventions for health and wellbeing.
- Identify areas where particular management measures are needed in relation to delivering a high quality visitor experience, safeguarding sensitive environments and maintaining the integrity of designated sites.

## **Promote responsible visiting**

- Promote informed, responsible behaviour in enjoying and managing access (including organised events) and a sense of common and shared responsibility for the national asset.

## **Maintain existing assets**

- Ensure a high quality functional network of connected routes for all users; ensure the tranquillity and quiet enjoyment of the Peak District is protected.
- Continue to support the important work of the Trails Management Plan and promote joined up links across the trail network. Recognise the need for major investment and maintenance to remain a priority.

## **Develop access and recreation opportunities**

- Develop green lanes as recreational assets.
- Identify opportunities to review access considering recreation opportunities at a landscape scale and developing partnerships with Sheffield Moors, Moors for the Future, South West Peak, water companies and other partners as opportunities arise.
- Legislate to provide equality of opportunities amongst recognised activities and to review rights of way legislation to meet modern demands.
- Identify recreation hubs and the opportunities to increase the range of recreational experiences and participation.
- Support skills progression in activities.
- Investigate opportunities with water companies to increase access to water.
- Influence planning proposals to give greater consideration for public amenity as an after-use for quarries.
- Deliver cycling strategy work and opportunities for the wider Peak District.
- Seek opportunities to ensure sustainable and integrated transport.

### **Resources and funding**

- Develop opportunities for giving to help pay for an enhanced recreation offer and benefit the community and place.
- Work with partners to seek funding to maintain existing routes and create more integrated network of trails, providing easy access, multi-user routes into and within the heart of the Peak District.
- Work with event organisers to manage events sustainably to benefit the National Park and the local economy and enhance the visitors' experience.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for volunteers to monitor and repair paths.

### **Less represented audiences**

- Work with partners to seek opportunities for improved access to the National Park for less represented audiences.
- Promote access for the young, inexperienced, those with limited mobility, and health inequalities to overcome barriers to access.
- Incorporate and develop the network of 'Miles without Stiles'.

### **Listen and respond to visitor needs**

- Ensure opportunities are available for visitors, residents and partners to contribute to decision making process in a transparent way.
- Ensure visitor/customer surveys and feedbacks continue to influence policies and recreation provision.
- Work towards a sense of common and shared responsibility for a national asset.
- Continue to work closely with the Peak District Local Access Forum to provide this link.