



Datganiad Sefyllfa

"Social exclusion is a term used to describe the experience of individuals who are unable to play a full part in society because of the range of disadvantages they face - be it through a lack of employment, low skills, poor health or discrimination. Often particular groups are more likely to experience these problems, for example people from minority ethnic communities, older people and people with disabilities."

the 3rd Annual Report on Social Inclusion in Wales "Promoting Social Inclusion" (Welsh Assembly Government)

"We will foster a sense of public ownership in relation to National Parks and the wider countryside, recognising that many socially excluded groups do not currently enjoy their social, cultural and health benefits."

National Parks Wales: Champions of Social Inclusion

Introduction: The National Parks of Wales

The three Welsh National Parks cover 20% of the land surface of Wales and are of vital importance to the environmental, social and economic health of the nation. The Brecon Beacons, Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia are internationally important examples of how working landscapes can be protected. The concept of a living landscape - a protected area within which people live and work - is of increasing importance in global conservation terms.

National Parks are 'national' in the sense that they are of special value to the whole nation. They are breathing spaces that enable millions of people to experience, appreciate and derive benefit from special outdoor environments. The iconic landscapes and heritage sites within our National Parks attract visitors from the UK and around the world.

National parks have two statutory purposes:

- to conserve and enhance their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage; and
- to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks by the public.

Position Statement

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National Park Authorities (NPAs) work to fulfill the two purposes. They also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social prosperity of local communities within their area. Local communities are valued for the role they have defining and shaping the landscape they have lived in over generations.

A general duty (s62, 1995 Environment Act) is also placed upon any 'relevant authority', such as the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities, public bodies and public utilities to have regard to the National Park purposes when operating in relation to or within the National Parks.

Sustainable Communities, Sustainable Development

The concept of Sustainable Communities, lies at the heart of much Government thinking on sustainability and how it can be realised at the local level. The creation of sustainable communities that function effectively and deliver sustainable development locally, is a key principle that all public bodies in Wales must pursue. Creating sustainable communities requires us to integrate the delivery of social, economic and environmental goals, to take a co-ordinated approach to delivering public services that work for everyone, including the most disadvantaged, and to think strategically for the long term.

For our part, the National Park Authorities have a duty to foster the economic and social well being of local communities in ways which are compatible with National Park purposes. This duty requires the Parks to consider how issues such as affordable housing, diverse employment opportunities and provision of local services can be met. The Parks can only fully achieve this duty by working closely with local authorities and other public bodies.

Welsh National Parks and Social Inclusion

The "*Social Inclusion Audit of the Three Welsh National Parks*" was undertaken in 2005 to address the recommendation of the National Parks Review to "consider the social inclusion role of the Parks for the whole of Wales – communities inside the Parks, on their borders and more distant urban communities." The recommendations of the Audit formed the basis for developing a strategy with actions for the three NPAs to deliver over 2006-2008. An updated Strategy and Action Plan was agreed in 2009.

The National Parks' contribution to the health and wellbeing, and education and lifelong learning agendas within Wales is substantial, socially excluded groups should be able to benefit. Funding is a barrier to some excluded groups, preventing them from reaching and enjoying the National Parks. The unique and outstanding landscapes of the National Parks have proved an inspiration to generations and now can provide excluded groups with low cost, inspiring and safe settings in which to experience and try new activities. Innovative approaches and partnerships are continually deployed by NPAs to address this barrier and other barriers to participation.

Through their staff the NPAs collectively possess many years experience of reaching out and supporting socially excluded groups to access and enjoy the National Parks. Staff are skilled in information interpretation; education and outreach work, and able to lead activities for groups visiting National Parks.

The social inclusion work of NPAs is strongly associated with other statutory obligations that NPAs have a duty to observe, such as the Disability Discrimination Act 2006, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and various provisions within planning legislation to secure improved community involvement in the preparation of Development Plans. NPAs are also committed to strengthening the involvement of previously excluded social groups in the management of the National Parks.

Benefiting Wales

Social inclusion projects undertaken by NPAs aim to deliver the “triple bottom line” of economic, environmental and social benefits associated with sustainable development. The benefits extend far beyond National Park boundaries:

- Increased **appreciation of the local environment as a resource** worthy of sustainable use and improvement.
- Addresses **“Health Challenge Wales” target areas**: particularly food and fitness; mental health, and well-being through increased physical recreation that enhances the experience of the natural environment,
- **Rural regeneration**: Provides opportunities for skills development in areas for local employment e.g. conservation, activity leadership
- Increased and improved **environmental education** through the enhanced understanding of the natural environment, climate change and sustainability
- An **inclusive land use planning** process
- **More accessible National Parks**: addressing physical, information and perceptual barriers facing excluded groups
- **Making the Connections**: citizen focused delivery - engaging with a wider cross-section of Welsh society and developing strategies & programmes in response to this process.
- **Addresses “Climbing Higher” target areas**, such as the use of the natural environment for outdoor activity and outdoor adventurous activities:

Promoting Social Inclusion

The Welsh NPAs promote social inclusion through close collaboration with each other and through partnership work at the local, regional, national, and even international, level (e.g., collaboration projects such as EQUAL)..

It is our view that proactive and sustained efforts in the following areas will, over time, do much to address many key social inclusion issues:

- Recognise the complex and multi-dimensional nature of social exclusion, its presence within and well beyond National Park boundaries, and seek to promote social inclusion in all aspects of the Authorities’ work, internally within the Authorities and through the outward-facing work with the general public;
- Broaden the concept of National Park access to encompass everyone within Wales and beyond. Individuals and groups may be excluded from accessing the special qualities of the Parks as a result of the many and diverse barriers that exist
- Ensure that the planning functions of the National Park Authorities (particularly local development plans and National Park management plans) address the wider socio-economic issues facing National Park communities;
- Continue to deliver the Social Inclusion strategic action plan, agreed by the three NPAs;
- Deliver a range of initiatives across all three National Parks and actions that are relevant and sympathetic to a specific National Park;
- Contribute to the work of relevant Local Service Boards and to input directly into the emerging Community Strategies and Plans across Wales;
- Identify and deliver joint projects (with themes common to all 3 Parks) that promote social inclusion; that promote National Parks to a wider cross section of society and promote the work of the National Parks to national and local organisations responsible for the promotion of social inclusion, health and wellbeing agendas;
- Continue to share best practice and experience between the National Parks in Wales and beyond;

- Foster the economic and social well-being of local communities and seek to reduce social exclusion, specifically working with excluded groups and with partner organisations to meet this end;
- Work with local visitor services and businesses to sensitively increase opportunities and links with excluded groups;
- Continue to identify additional partnership and funding opportunities to benefit socially excluded groups;
- Contribute to promote and commission research regarding the barriers to accessing National Parks and the wider countryside.

Case Studies

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Brecon Beacons NPA-Brecon Youth Diversionary Project

The project was brought together to benefit young people who are at risk of becoming involved in crime or anti social behaviour, identified by Powys Youth Offending Service's Youth Inclusion Support Panel (YISP) program. It provides them practical and theoretical knowledge in biodiversity, countryside development, and conservation, and through this an opportunity to develop their team building and social skills to assist future employment, training or education.

Individuals learn practical countryside management skills for one day a week for the duration of the project, working alongside BBNPA Wardens. This also enhances a sense of "ownership" of the National Park.

The project has been a learning experience for all involved. For example, the practical days benefitted from:

1. reduced staffing levels, to avoid perceived "over-supervision", and maximum group sizes of 6.
2. provision of breakfast to participants, dramatically enhancing concentration and motivation.



The Project is funded by Countryside Council for Wales, Powys Youth Services, Dyfed Powys Police and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. Its success has led to partners continuing the approach through 2007/8, 2008/9 and 2009/10.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority "Voices for Choices" - Disabled Young People

Staff from PCNPA have worked with the "Voices for Choices" Group for well over a year. About 20 young people form a Pembrokeshire-wide youth forum, for ages 15-23, with a wide range of abilities, and varying difficulties.

They are a very enthusiastic group and have worked well with our staff on a range of projects, towards their John Muir Awards. A day was spent on woodland activities at Colby Woodland Garden (with the National Trust); a day experiencing the Iron Age at Castell Henllys; a day on the Castlemartin Army Range and a day at Whitesands Bay, making sand and rock sculptures, followed by a visit to Oriel y Parc Landscape Gallery in St Davids. All these activity days were thoroughly enjoyed and provided useful feedback for National Park staff.

After the field visits, the young people organised a presentation evening for parents, youth workers and local civic dignitaries to share their experiences of the National Park. They produced both a DVD and a calendar for sale. The images and comments very much focused on core National Park themes and values.



We believe that this project exemplifies clearly the benefits that can be acquired by a socially-excluded group through direct participation in a National Park inspired (and led) programme.

Snowdonia National Park Authority "Voice Trails"

"Voice Trails" are monthly organised walks for blind and visually impaired people. The impetus came from our Disability Equality Forum where one of the members who has a visually impairment commented on the lack of opportunities for blind people to access the countryside.

The project is a partnership between CCW; North Wales Society for the Blind and Gwynedd's Disability sport



development officer, with Snowdonia National Park being the lead partner and funding from Sports Council Wales. The walks are now in their second year - and seem to be going from strength to strength.

Comments received by participants:

"The great thing about these walks is being able to get transport from the centre of Bangor out to the countryside, because we couldn't do that by public transport. Also, finding our way around the trail without being able to see the notices would be very difficult, so having a guide is fantastic. It's great to have someone who really

knows his stuff and can point out interesting things about the history and the wildlife of the reserve".

"What I received today was priceless, being able to hand over the responsibility to somebody else, not having to constantly worry that I would stumble, or crash into something. There's no price you can put on the freedom to walk without fear".