

Brecon Beacons Visitor Management Plan

Adopted Report



Prepared by LUC in association with Catrin Ellis Associates, March 2015





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March 2015

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Executive summary

This Plan seeks to establish a sustainable approach to improving the way visitors to the National Park's countryside (who include local residents and people from other areas) enjoy its special qualities within the context of the statutory purposes of the National Park designation. It sets out the short and medium term actions to ensure that enjoyment of the National Park by existing and new visitors can continue hand in hand with the conservation of its natural beauty and the needs of local communities and businesses.

The Plan was prepared between March and August 2013 and involved extensive engagement and consultation with staff and members from the National Park Authority, conservation bodies, the Local Access Forum, Community Councils, tourism businesses, outdoor activity providers, commons graziers and large landowners.

What is known about visitors and their activities in the National Park

The National Park hosts a total of 4.1 million visitors who spend 5.1 million days in the Brecon Beacons each year. Compared to the other two National Parks in Wales, the Brecon Beacons is unusual in the high proportion of visits that last no more than a day (74% of visitor days) compared to staying visitors. This means that the total number of visitor days (a good measure of the contribution and impacts that visitors bring) is significantly less than the two other Welsh National Parks, and many in England.

The large number of day visitors is a reflection of the high proportion coming from nearby urban areas in Wales and the West of England. In contrast, a high proportion of staying visitors come from the South East of England.

Visitors perceive the National Park as a place of wild open spaces where they can experience peace and tranquillity and outstanding scenery and landscape. The most popular leisure activities in the countryside are walking along low level routes, closely followed by hill walking. More specialist activities such as cycling, fishing and water sports are carried out by a much smaller proportion of visitors. These patterns of activity are very similar to those experienced across Wales as a whole. A particular

feature of outdoor recreation in the National Park is the high number of organised group activities and recreational events.

In the absence of detailed data on visitor numbers at individual sites, the most popular areas are thought to include the northern scarp in the Central Beacons (including Pen y Fan), the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail in the Black Mountains and the towpath of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal.



The impacts of visitors

Lack of site-based monitoring data on visitor numbers and environmental condition means that a detailed spatial picture of visitors' impacts cannot currently be drawn. An exception is the condition of upland paths. A third of these paths are in bad condition (when visitor use combines with fragile soils and vegetation) and those in better condition are deteriorating.

Many people believe that the peace and tranquillity of the most popular fragile upland landscapes are being affected by high visitor numbers. Other negative impacts perceived by stakeholders, include peak time traffic congestion, illegal driving on green lanes and commons, disturbance of wildlife and heritage assets and littering. Farmers experience particular issues such as dogs worrying livestock and cars blocking tracks and gateways.

On a positive note, there is agreement that visitors to the countryside can make many constructive contributions to the special qualities of the National Park, such as by supporting conservation projects through volunteering and donations. The tourism sector is an important part of the local economy, accounting for 12-15% of employment. A survey in spring 2013 showed that the vast majority of residents of the National Park

welcome visitors and feel that the tourism sector should be supported, even when they receive little direct personal benefit from the tourism economy.

There are many popular 'honeypot' sites where visitors are being successfully managed or where there are opportunities to enhance facilities to contain negative impacts and improve experiences.

More evidence is needed to understand the contribution that recreational activity in the National Park makes to the environment. However, it would appear that there are relatively few sites where there are serious and lasting negative impacts. Traffic congestion and parking problems, and sometimes inappropriate behaviour, cause seasonal and peak time impacts and are more widely distributed. Left unchecked, it is likely that short-term problems will become more serious and entrenched long-term issues.

Trends and future drivers of change

The number of visitor days spent in the National Park rose by 40% during the five years between 2006 and 2011 but has been relatively stable since then. It is possible that numbers will rise again when the economy recovers. Spending by visitors continued to rise throughout the decade, suggesting that there is potential for the economic contribution of tourism to grow ahead of increases in visitor numbers.

Evidence from across Wales shows increasing numbers of trips to the countryside are made by people in family groups and active pursuits and wildlife watching are becoming more popular. More people like to travel to 'wild' places away from their homes, requiring increasing use of the car.

The Welsh Government is emphasising the role that access to the natural environment should play in improving people's physical and mental well-being. The Brecon Beacons' close proximity to much of Wales' urban population creates particular opportunities and challenges for the National Park. These will need careful management to realise potential benefits and contain negative impacts.



Recommendations for action

There are three high level themes for action leading to 35 separate recommendations specified in this Plan. These themes for action are as follows:

Theme One: Site-based Interventions

Local interventions are needed to better manage the impacts and experience of visitors at specific sites, distinguishing between:

- Honeypot sites which have the capacity to provide high quality experiences for large numbers of visitors where impacts can be managed within acceptable limits; and
- Environmentally pressured sites and routes where visitor activities are currently producing unacceptable impacts (often in combination with other causes) and where management interventions are needed to reduce or mitigate these impacts.

Agreement is needed over which are the most pressurised sites and routes and what are the critical levels of environmental disturbance that affect them. There is an ongoing need to address erosion of upland paths, using a hierarchy of interventions starting with early preventative action. Large investments are required to pay for path restoration and maintenance.

A new approach is recommended to conserving the tranquil nature of the most remote countryside in the National Park by focussing tighter control (using existing powers) on unsuitable activities on unenclosed land. At the same time, there are opportunities to work with businesses and communities in remote areas to improve visitor experiences and facilities in villages, such as toilets and places to buy food and drink during the day.

Peak time traffic issues can be addressed through the existing Visitor Transport Initiative, with additional involvement of local communities to develop traffic management interventions at problem locations. A Car Parking Plan should be prepared for the whole National Park.

Theme Two: Communication and Influence

A focus on marketing and promotion of outdoor recreation activities is needed to ensure that consistent messages are used to provide visitors with high quality experiences that support the conservation of the National Park.

The new Brecon Beacons brand will be an essential part of this. Key interpretation messages should be developed for each of the most popular 'honeypot' locations, based on their particular special qualities and conservation needs.

There are opportunities for closer working with the police to prevent illegal activities such as off-road vehicle use. A simple reporting mechanism should also be developed for farmers and landowners to report visitor management incidents to the National Park Authority. Agreement should be reached on the types of recreation that can take place on open access land before special licences are required of recreation providers. There are opportunities to extend to all parts of the National Park, the National Park Authority's new policy on liaison with organisers of large outdoor events. Further engagement should take place through the South Wales Outdoor Activities Providers Group with organisers of young people's activities in the upland areas.

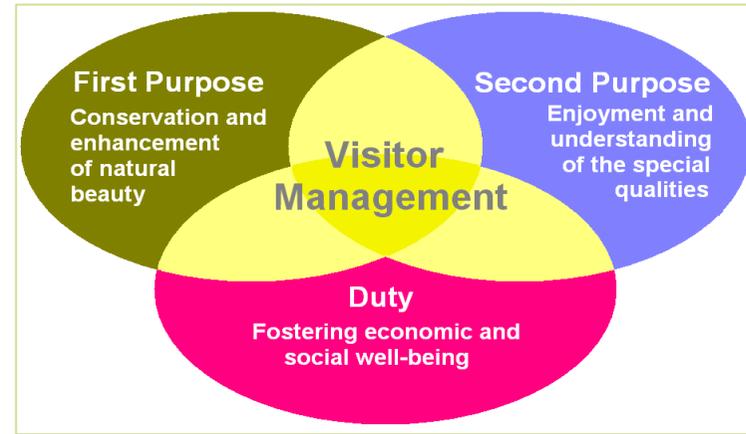
More generally, there are opportunities to promote, and make locally relevant, the existing national codes of conduct through training of tourism businesses and recreation providers, leaflets, links on webpages and signage at key sites.

There are significant opportunities to extend, in a more co-ordinated fashion, existing volunteering programmes. Work should continue to increase visitors' input to the local economy, particularly through an enhanced visitor gifting scheme.

Theme Three: Institutional Arrangements

Most of the actions described above will only be achieved on a multi-agency basis, requiring a focus on how organisations work together and how projects are planned and delivered. Strategic leadership will be needed to ensure co-ordinated delivery of this Plan. A decision is needed on how this advocacy role will be implemented in the context of the current Review of the National Park Management Plan, recognising that it should be a shared endeavour between conservation, tourism and community interests (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Visitor management sits at the centre of the National Park's Purposes and the Duty on the NPA and its partners



Continuing and new levels of engagement will be needed with communities in the National Park (including through Rural Alliances and Community Council Clusters) and in neighbouring areas (through the Valleys Regional Park and local inclusion initiatives) and with farmers and landowners (through regular meetings with the National Park Authority and other agencies). The National Park Social Inclusion and Child Poverty Action Plan 2012 to 2014 should continue to be used to break down barriers to access by a wider audience.

At a time of tight financial budgets, it will be important that resources are efficiently focussed on the highest priority projects. The revised National Park Management Plan provides the means to do this. Closer co-ordination will be needed between the National Park Authority and its partners and also between the Directorates of the Authority itself.

Finally, there is a need for improved evidence on visitors and their impacts to guide more effective management. Improved knowledge of environmental impacts should be used to set and monitor environmental thresholds, leading to targeted management at key sites. Better information on the origins and activities of day visitors and on the numbers of people using the most popular outdoor routes and sites will provide context to guide management. An appendix to this Plan proposes a set of visitor management indicators for use in the next State of the Park report.

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Plan seeks to establish a long-term approach aimed at improving the sustainability of the enjoyment of the National Park, especially in the context of tourism, and to set out the short and medium term actions that will deliver this. It has involved work with partners and other interested parties to agree the principles and approaches that will underpin visitor management, promotion and interpretation.
- 1.2 The document is split into four Chapters.
- This Chapter explains the background to the Plan and how it was prepared
 - Chapter 2 describes the types of visitors to the National Park and what they do
 - Chapter 3 examines the issues and opportunities arising from these visitors and their activities
 - Chapter 4 sets out a plan of action for addressing these issues and opportunities
- 1.3 A separate Annex provides more detail, considering each of the 15 landscape character areas in the National Park in turn.

What this Plan seeks to achieve

- 1.4 The Brecon Beacons National Park is a much loved destination, valued for its breath-taking scenery, wild open spaces and access to recreation in peaceful surroundings. There are signs that in certain places the impact of visitors, combined with the fragile state of soils and vegetation, is harming some of these special qualities.
- 1.5 There are also opportunities to enhance people's appreciation of the many different assets that the area has to offer, and improve the contribution that visitors make to local communities and the conservation of the National Park.
- 1.6 At a time of tight financial resources, there is a need for public bodies to be more efficient and effective in what they do, acting together and working with others to achieve more.
- 1.7 This Plan aims to present a well-evidenced assessment of the issues and opportunities for managing visitors in the National Park within the context of its statutory designation. It sets out a series of actions to address these issues and opportunities, for consideration by the National Park Authority and its partners, so that enjoyment of the National Park by existing and new visitors can continue hand in hand with the conservation of its natural beauty and the needs of local communities and businesses.



Young people learning to canoe on Llangorse Lake

The context of this Plan

- 1.8 The Brecon Beacons is one of three National Parks in Wales designated under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. These National Parks are classified as IUCN Category V Protected Areas¹, which emphasises their role as living and working landscapes shaped and enjoyed by people. The Environment Act 1995 gives the National Park designation two statutory purposes which apply to all public bodies operating in the National Park. These are to:
- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park; and
 - Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.
- 1.9 In carrying out these purposes, the National Park Authority also has a statutory duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities by working closely with the national agencies and local authorities responsible for these matters.
- 1.10 Visitors and their enjoyment of the National Park are thus central to the designation and what makes the Brecon Beacons special. The National Park Authority works with a range of partners to deliver the statutory purposes and its duty.
- 1.11 In 2011, working through the Sustainable Destination Partnership, the Authority commissioned a Sustainable Tourism Strategy² which is now being used to guide the promotion and management of tourism in the National Park. In 2012, the Authority commissioned a Landscape Character Assessment³ which sub-divides the National Park into 15 distinctive landscape character areas and summarises

the special features and issues, including those arising from recreation, facing each area. This Plan, which is a direct recommendation of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy, is intended to fit between these two documents by focussing on the relationships between visitors, their enjoyment of the National Park and their impact on its special qualities.

- 1.12 In 2011 the Welsh Government advised the three National Park Authorities, as part of its strategic grant letter, that they should prepare Recreation Audits. This Plan aims to fulfil this requirement and goes further by specifying the actions that should be taken to address the issues identified.
- 1.13 The National Park Authority is also starting to revise the Statutory Management Plan for the National Park and its State of the Park reporting. It has identified a need to reassess specific policies such as the approach taken to the protection and enjoyment of remote areas. This Plan seeks to feed into these processes.
- 1.14 Finally, the Authority, on behalf of the Sustainable Destination Partnership, has commissioned the development of a generic brand for the National Park that can be used to promote the Brecon Beacons as a destination by everyone with an interest in the National Park. That work has taken place parallel to the preparation of this Plan.

Acknowledgements

- 1.15 Funding for the development of this Plan has been provided by Interreg IVB NorthWest Europe through the COLLABOR8 project with match funding from the Welsh Government's Targeted Match Fund.
- 1.16 A steering group representing the National Park Authority, Natural Resources Wales and Brecon Beacons Park Society has provided invaluable advice to the consultants. Numerous individuals from a wide range of organisations have contributed to workshops and individual discussions. Their inputs are gratefully acknowledged.

¹ IUCN stands for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. These categories are recognised by the United Nations Environment Programme. See http://www.unep-wcmc.org/iucn-protected-area-management-categories_591.html

² See www.breconbeacons.org/the-authority/working-in-partnership/tourism-industry/sustainable-tourism-strategy

³ See www.breconbeacons.org/the-authority/planning/strategy-and-policy/landscape-character-assessment

How this Plan was prepared

- 1.17 The preparation of this Plan took place over five months (March to August 2013). As shown in **Figure 1.1**, it involved a number of different stages in the collection of evidence and engagement with key interests, before the process of drafting and consultation on the proposals in the Plan took place. Meetings and workshops were held with staff and members from the National Park Authority, land managers and conservation bodies, The Local Access Forum, Community Councils, tourism businesses and outdoor activity providers, commons graziers and large landowners.

Figure 1.1. The methodological approach taken to prepare this Plan



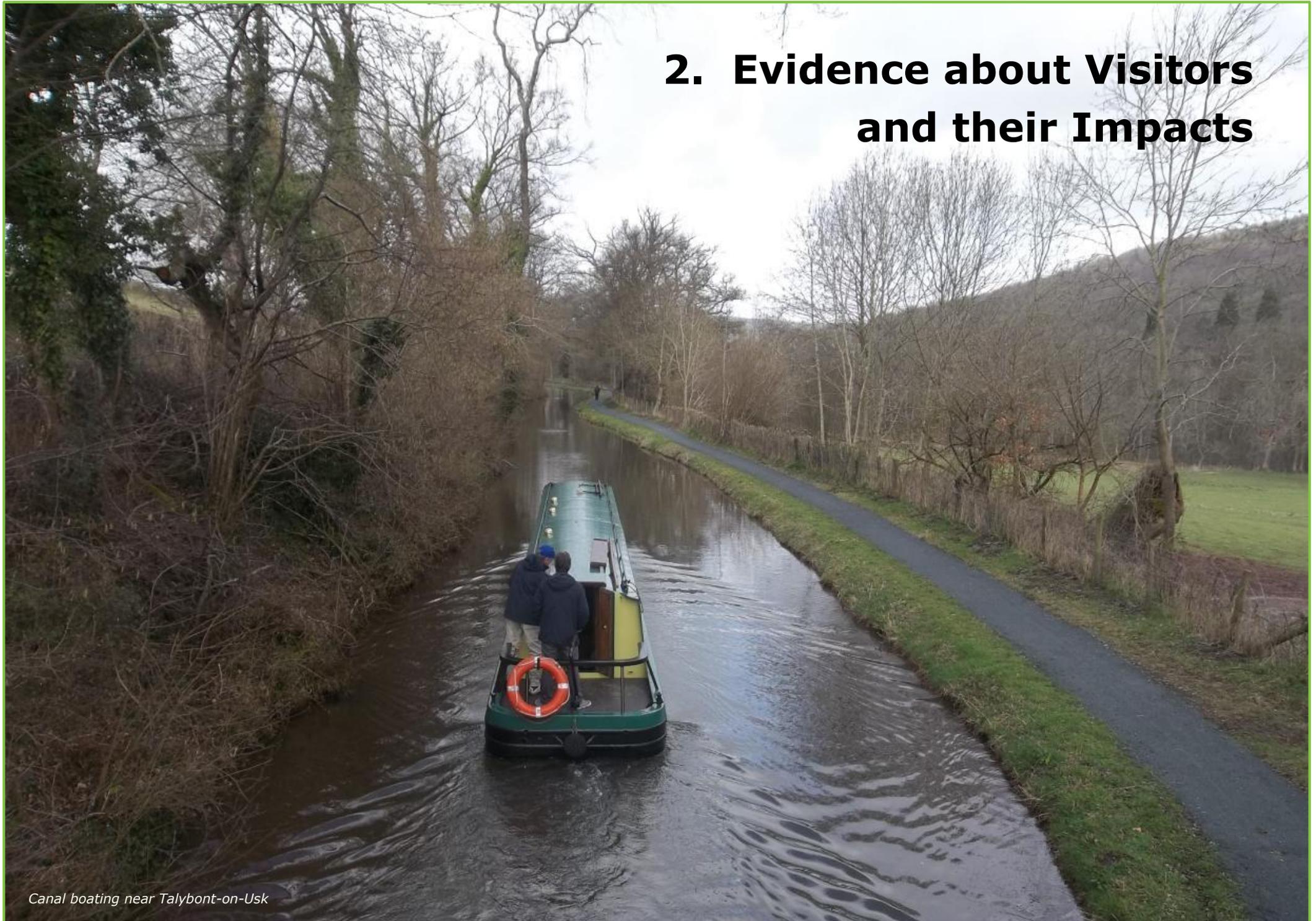
Definitions

- 1.18 The following terms are used regularly in this Plan. They are defined here for clarity.
- **Visitors:** This Plan uses the definitions from the Visit Wales Visitor Surveys 2011. These are that a day visitor is someone who is spending three or more hours away from home, including travel, and is not taking part in a routine appointment, shopping, business or study. A staying visitor is a visitor who stays at least one night away from home.
 - **Special qualities** of the National Park: The second statutory purpose of the National Park designation refers to the need to promote public enjoyment and understanding of the special qualities of the National Park. A set of ten special qualities were defined through a process of public consultation during the preparation of the current National Park Management Plan (2010-2015). These are summarised later in Box 2.1.



Archway at Llanthony Priory

2. Evidence about Visitors and their Impacts



Canal boating near Talybont-on-Usk

2 Evidence about Visitors and their Impacts

2.1 This Chapter summarises the information available from existing surveys and research on the nature of current visitors and their perceptions of the National Park, their activities and impacts. It identifies key trends and likely future drivers of change.

Types of visitors and where they come from

2.2 The following information is taken from recent visitor surveys and statistical analysis, including STEAM data⁴, 2012 surveys of staying visitors to the National Park and a large survey of visitors in seven popular locations undertaken in 2005.

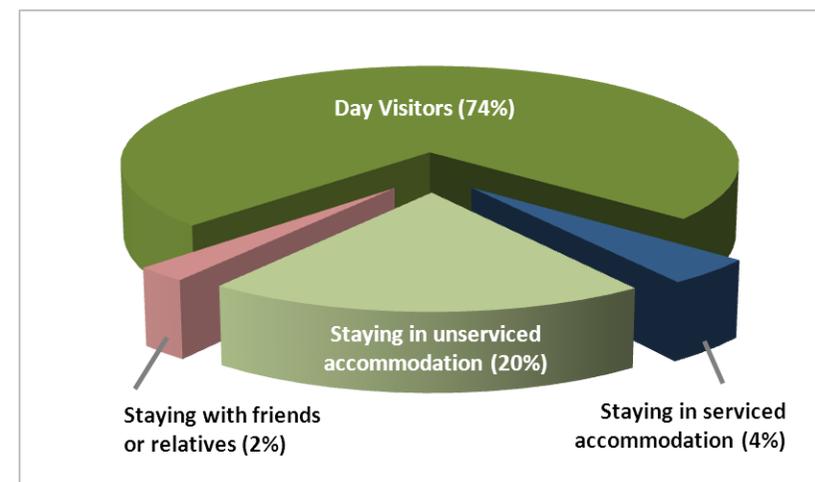
2.3 The National Park is estimated to host a total of 4.1 million visitors a year (STEAM 2011) who spend a total of 5.1 million days in the Park. This includes leisure trips in the National Park by the 33,000 people who live within its boundaries as well as day trips and longer stays by people travelling from outside the National Park. This number of visitors is likely to be significantly higher than that experienced by areas of nearby countryside but is broadly equivalent to the numbers experienced by the other two National Parks in Wales (Snowdonia and Pembrokeshire Coast)⁵.

2.4 Understanding the length of time spent by visitors in the National Park is important because it provides a better measure of the benefits they are likely to receive and the effects they may have (compared simply to the number of visitors). A large majority of visitors (around 9 out of 10) come for the day and day visitors account for around three quarters of the 'visitor days' spent in the National Park (STEAM 2011). This represents a high proportion of day visitors when compared to other UK National Parks. This means that the number of

visitor days in the Brecon Beacons is about half that in the two other Welsh National Parks⁶.

2.5 Most of the visitors who stay in the National Park use unserviced accommodation such as tents, caravans and self-catering cottages, with a minority staying in serviced accommodation such as hotels and bed and breakfasts, or staying with friends and family (**Figure 2.1**). Again, this is an unusual feature when compared to other National Parks where a higher proportion of people tend to stay in hotels and bed and breakfasts.

Figure 2.1. Breakdown of types of visitors, by overall visitor days, 2011



Source: STEAM 2011

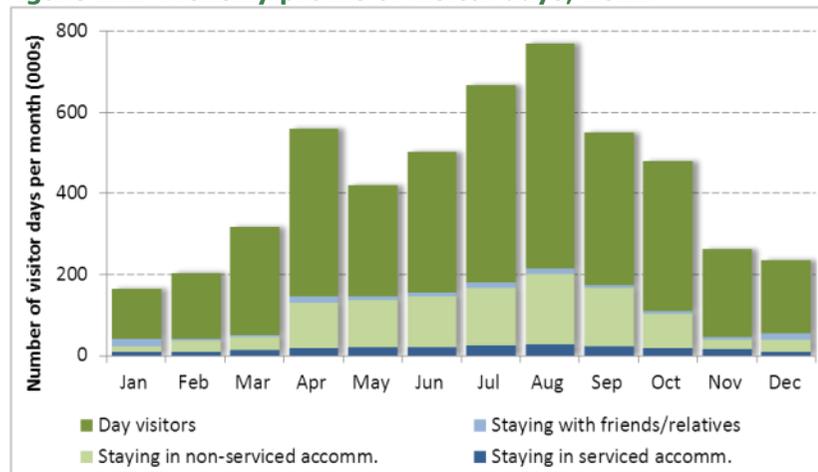
⁴ STEAM data comes from a statistical model (the Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) that uses locally-derived information to produce estimates of the number of visitors, visitor days, employment supported by tourism, and revenue generated.

⁵ <http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/press/factsandfigures.htm>

⁶ Ibid. The numbers collated by the Association of National Park Authorities are as follows: Brecon Beacons 4.1 M visitors and 5.0 M visitor days; Pembrokeshire Coast 4.2 M visitors and 13 M visitor days; Snowdonia 4.27 M visitors and 10.4 M visitor days.

2.6 Understanding the times of year when people visit is also helpful in understanding the concentrations of impacts and how peak periods fit with environmental and other pressures. Visits are strongly concentrated in the spring and summer months, particularly during the Easter break and the summer holiday period (**Figure 2.2**), with the main tourism season now extending over a period of around eight months. This pattern applies to all types of visitors with the exception of visitors staying with friends and relatives who are spread more evenly throughout the year. These patterns are typical of other National Parks and areas of countryside.

Figure 2.2. Monthly profile of visitor days, 2011



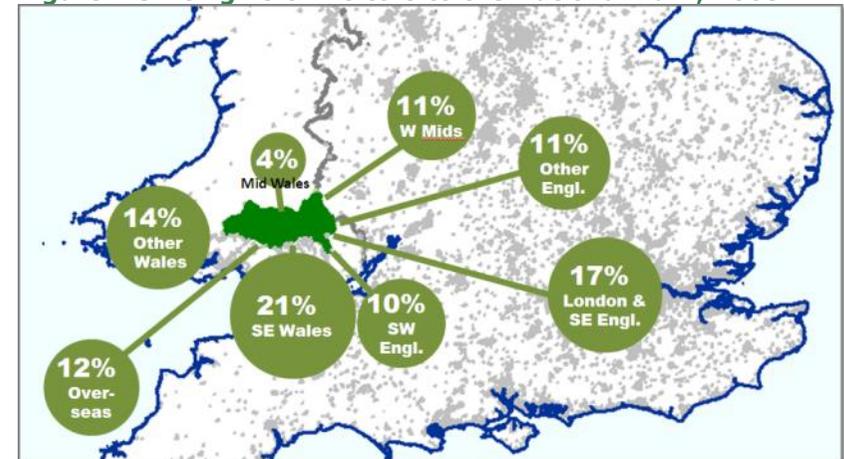
Source: STEAM 2011

- 2.7 The most recent evidence on the origins of visitors comes from the 2005 visitor survey of visitors interviewed at seven locations in the National Park. The results of this survey are now somewhat out of date and therefore not as reliable as other more recent data. However, they are the only source of information that includes day visitors as well as staying visitors (more recent surveys cover only staying visitors).
- 2.8 The 2005 survey shows that, from the sample of just over 1,000 people interviewed between July and October 2005, over a third (39%) of visitors were from Wales, with a fifth (21%) being from

South East Wales (including those living in the National Park). It is likely that the majority of these were day visitors. A sixth of visitors (17%) came from the South East of England (including London), 11% came from the West Midlands (the closest part of England) and 10% came from the South West of England (including Bristol). 12% were overseas visitors. These origins are illustrated in **Figure 2.3**.

- 2.9 More recent surveys of staying visitors reinforce the popularity of the National Park amongst visitors from the South East of England (for instance in 2010/11 45% of staying visitors surveyed were from this region). Ease of access along the M4 to one of the closest unenclosed upland landscapes may be a factor in this popularity.

Figure 2.3. Origins of visitors to the National Park, 2005

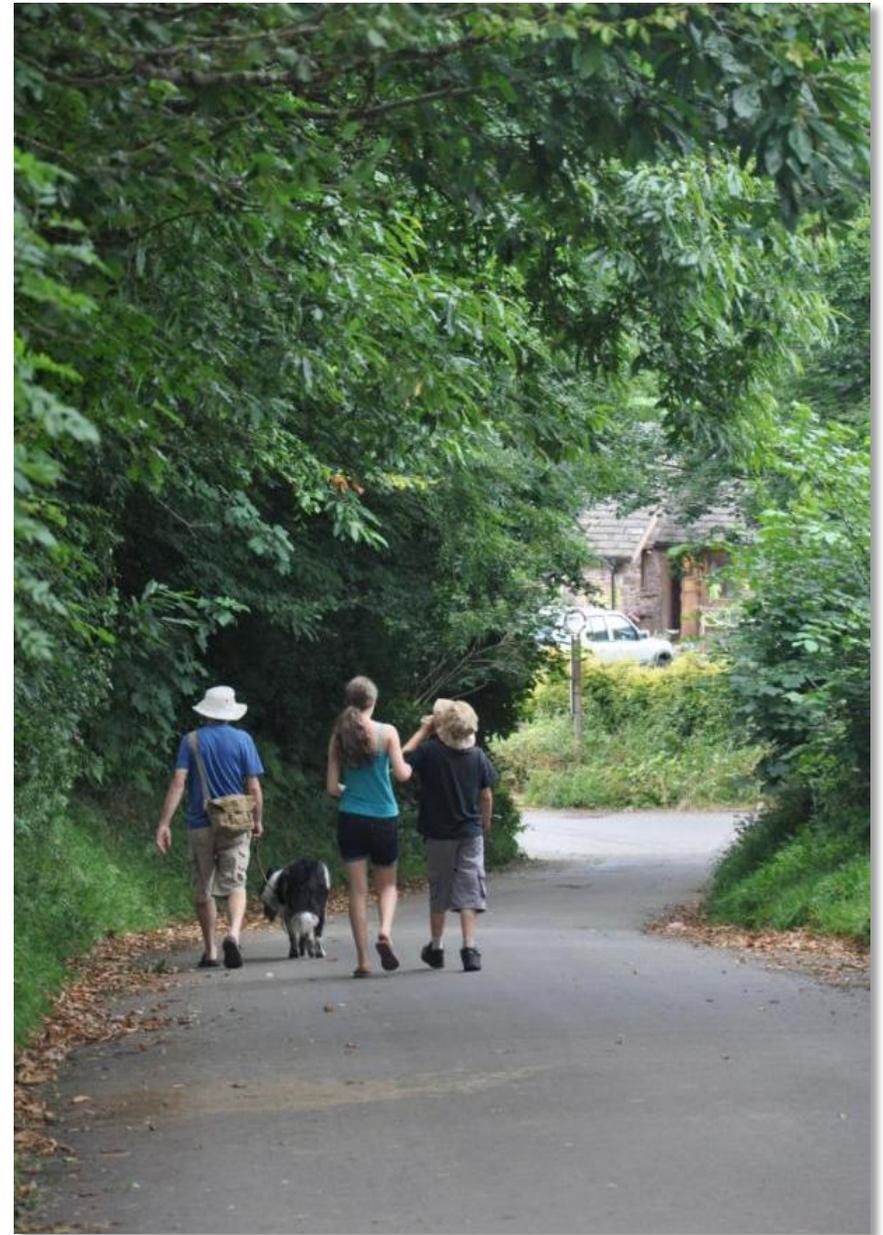


Source: Brecon Beacons Visitor Survey 2005

- 2.10 Evidence from the 2005 visitor survey suggests that they tend to be more prosperous than the general UK population. For instance, 68% of the people surveyed fell into the most prosperous ABC1 group compared to 54% for the UK population as a whole, and 11% were in the less prosperous DE group compared to 26% for the UK. The same is also true of residents in the National Park, who are relatively affluent compared to national averages. The prosperity of visitors and residents in the National Park contrasts with the high levels of deprivation experienced in many of the South Wales communities on the southern edge of the National Park.

2.11 The following key points summarise what is known about the types of visitors and where they come from:

- The National Park hosts a total of 4.1 million visitors who spend 5.1 million days in the Brecon Beacons each year. While the number of visitors is similar to the other two National Parks in Wales, the Brecon Beacons is unusual in the high proportion of visits that last no more than a day (74% of visitor days) compared to staying visitors. This means that the total number of visitor days is significantly less than the two other Welsh National Parks.
- The large number of day visitors is a reflection of the high proportion coming from nearby urban areas in Wales and the West of England. However, data on the origins of day visitors is now somewhat out of date (the most recent survey being in 2005).
- The Brecon Beacons is unusual among UK National Parks in the high proportion of staying visitors who use unserviced accommodation, particularly camping, camping barns and self-catering holiday cottages, compared to hotels and B&Bs. A high proportion of staying visitors come from the South East of England.
- Visits to the National Park are concentrated into an eight month season from March to October, with peak numbers occurring in April (Easter) and July and August (summer school holidays).
- Visitors (and residents) in the Brecon Beacons are relatively affluent, particularly when compared to the high levels of deprivation in communities south of the National Park.

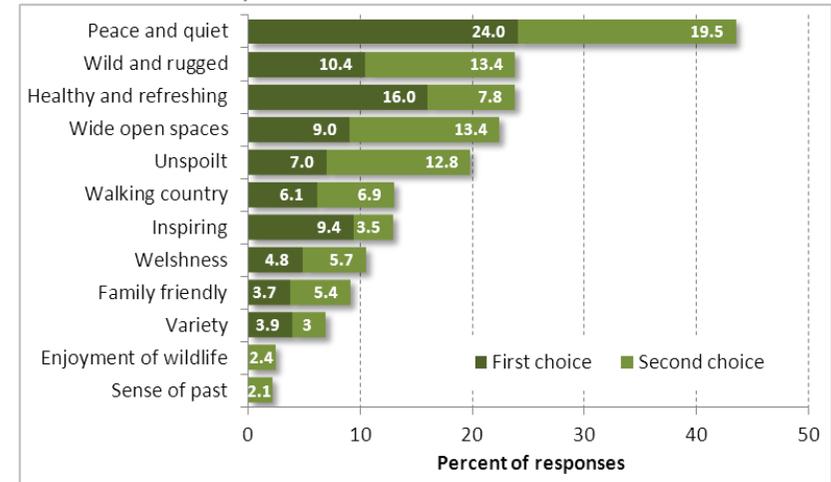


Walking along a quiet country lane near Llanthony Priory

Visitors' perceptions and expectations

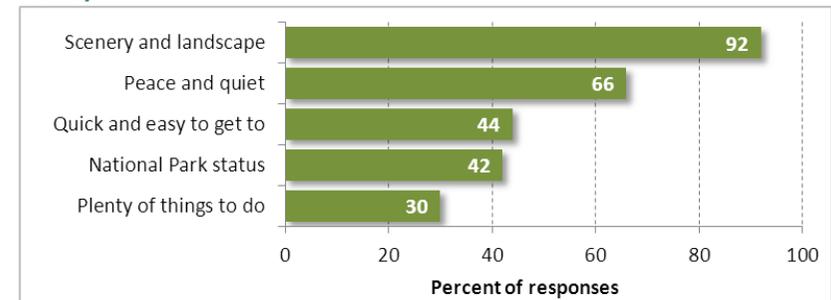
- 2.12 The understanding that visitors have of the National Park as a place to visit is an important consideration for this Plan because it shows what they expect to experience and what they might want to do during their visit. The evidence for this comes from a variety of sources but the findings are consistent. **Figure 2.4** shows the phrases which people interviewed during the 2005 survey chose to describe the National Park and **Figure 2.5** shows the reasons that staying visitors who completed a survey in 2010/11 gave for coming to the National Park.
- 2.13 Both these figures emphasise that it is the wildness of the scenery, particularly the rugged uplands, and the tranquillity that people can experience that are dominant perceptions and reasons for visiting. It is interesting to note that other special qualities of the National Park such as the Welsh culture, wildlife and historic environment feature much less strongly. This emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of the outdoor recreation experience, rather than on active pursuits or cultural qualities, is very similar to that found in surveys for Wales as a whole.⁷
- 2.14 The recent (spring 2013) survey of residents in the National Park showed that the high quality of the environment (such as green space and fresh air) was the most popular reason cited for people living in the Brecon Beacons, ahead of other reasons such as the quality of life, feelings of local community and employment or business opportunities.

Figure 2.4. Visitors' choices for "Phrases which describe the Brecon Beacons", 2005



Source: Brecon Beacons Visitor Survey 2005. Base: 1,032 respondents

Figure 2.5. Reasons for coming to the Brecon Beacons, 2010/11

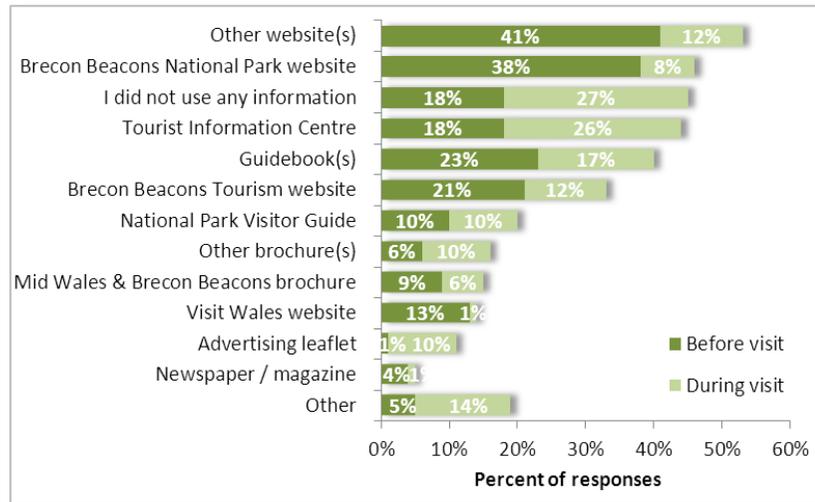


Source: 2010/11 Survey of staying visitors. (Combined bars exceed 100% because respondents could give more than one answer)

⁷ Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey 2011. <http://www.ccg.gov.uk/enjoying-the-country/welsh-outdoor-recreation-surve.aspx>

2.15 Visitors gain information to help them plan their trip from a wide variety of sources. **Figure 2.6**, which reports a survey of staying visitors in the autumn of 2012, shows that websites, including the National Park website (www.breconbeacons.org) and Brecon Beacons Tourism website (www.breconbeaconstourism.co.uk), are the most popular sources of information, particularly before their visit. During the visit, Tourist Information Centres and Guidebooks are popular sources. A significant proportion of respondents to this survey (45%) said they did not use any information. This is possibly because they are regular visitors.

Figure 2.6. Sources of information used by visitors



Source: Brecon Beacons Visitors Survey Autumn 2012

2.16 The following key points summarise what is known about visitors' perceptions and expectations:

- Visitors perceive the Brecon Beacons as a place of wild open spaces where they can experience peace and tranquillity and outstanding scenery and landscape.
- Other characteristics such as the Welsh culture, wildlife and historic environment currently appear to be less important to visitors.
- Visitors receive information about the National Park from a wide range of sources, with websites being a particularly important source when people are planning their visit. A significant proportion of people say they do not access any information about the National Park, perhaps because they are repeat visitors.

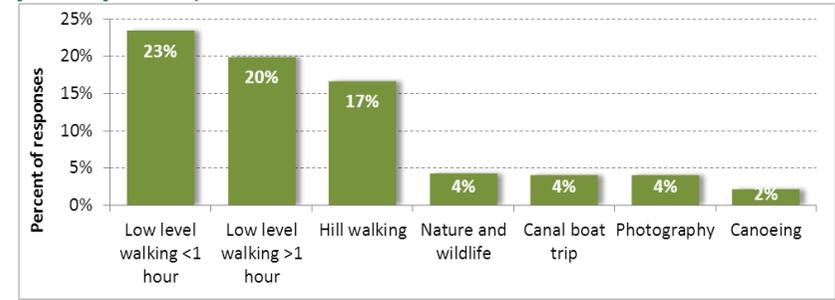


Enjoying the outstanding views from the Black Mountains

What visitors do and where they go in the National Park

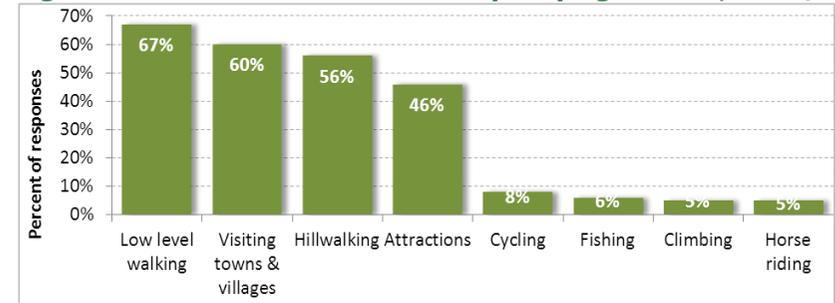
- 2.17 Again, evidence on what visitors do during trips to the National Park comes from a number of sources, which together provide a consistent picture. **Figure 2.7** shows the most popular outdoor recreation activities reported in the 2005 survey and **Figure 2.8** shows the most popular activities from the 2010/11 survey of staying visitors. **Figure 2.9** shows results from the 2013 survey of residents of the National Park.
- 2.18 All these figures show that walking in the low level countryside is the most popular activity, with hill walking following closely behind. (Visits to towns and villages and to attractions are the second and fourth most popular activity recorded in 2010/11 but do not feature in the 2005 survey, perhaps because they are not classified as 'outdoor' activities.)
- 2.19 In contrast, a significant number of other activities are undertaken by a smaller proportion of people. These include wildlife watching, cycling, fishing, climbing, horse riding, canal boating and canoeing. It is worth noting that, whereas many of the most popular activities may take up a short part of a day (for instance a one hour countryside walk), many of the minority activities are likely to take up a longer period (for instance a one day canal boat trip or half a day canoeing). The minority activities may therefore take up a larger proportion of total visitor activity than the charts imply.

Figure 2.7. Outdoor activities participated in or intended to participate in, 2005



Source: Brecon Beacons Visitor Survey 2005. Base: 1,032 respondents

Figure 2.8. Activities undertaken by staying visitors, 2010/11



Source: 2010/11 Survey of staying visitors. (Combined bars exceed 100% because respondents could give more than one answer)

Figure 2.9. Frequency of selected leisure activities undertaken by residents



Source: 2013. BBNPA Survey of residents. Question 6.

2.20 This pattern of activity is very similar to that experienced across Wales as a whole. The 2011 Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey showed that by far the most popular activity undertaken by respondents during their most recent visit to the outdoors was described as walking (73% of respondents), followed by wildlife watching (17%). Again, activities such as cycling, horse riding, water sports, and fishing were reported by fewer than 5% of respondents.

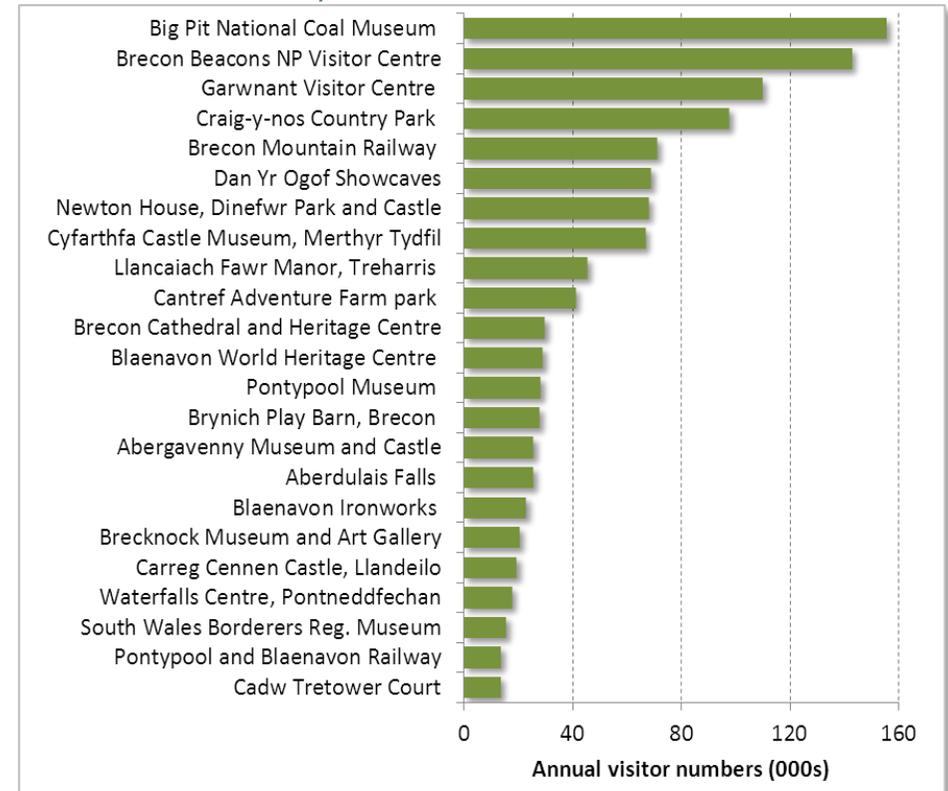
2.21 These figures relate mostly to informal recreational activities pursued by individuals or small groups of visitors. A particular feature of recreational activity in the National Park is the more organised group activities organised by schools (many of them from England but staying in education centres run by their local education authority), Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme groups (young people training for their silver or gold awards), Scout groups and recreational clubs (such as hill walking clubs, many of which camp or stay in camping barns or one of the four Youth Hostels in the National Park). Data on these groups and their activities is probably not well represented in the general visitor surveys. Anecdotal evidence suggests than many of these groups focus on hill walking using popular locations such as Pen y Fan, the Hatterall Ridge and the Beacons Way, linked to the location of activity centres and accommodation and the availability of clusters of activity.

2.22 There has been a significant increase in the number of organised one-off recreational events, which are often competitive. These can be motivated by charitable purposes (raising money for specific charities) or run by commercial businesses. They can involve walking, running, cycling and horse riding. Many hundred participants or competitors can take part.

2.23 Information on the most popular locations visited, which helps show the spatial distribution of impacts, is more limited. The most popular visitor attractions in or near the National Park, where numbers are recorded, are listed in the 2011 Sustainable Tourism Strategy, quoting visitor numbers from Visit Wales (**Figure 2.10**). This shows that sites providing access to outdoor recreation such as the National Park Visitor Centre near Libanus, the Garwnant Visitor Centre and Craig-y-Nos Country Park are all popular locations. However, there is no data on visitor numbers at other popular sites such as the various

walking routes up Pen-y-Fan in the central Beacons (particularly the one from the Storey Arms), Waun Fach, the Hatterall Ridge and The Skirrid in the Black Mountains, and along the towpath of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal.

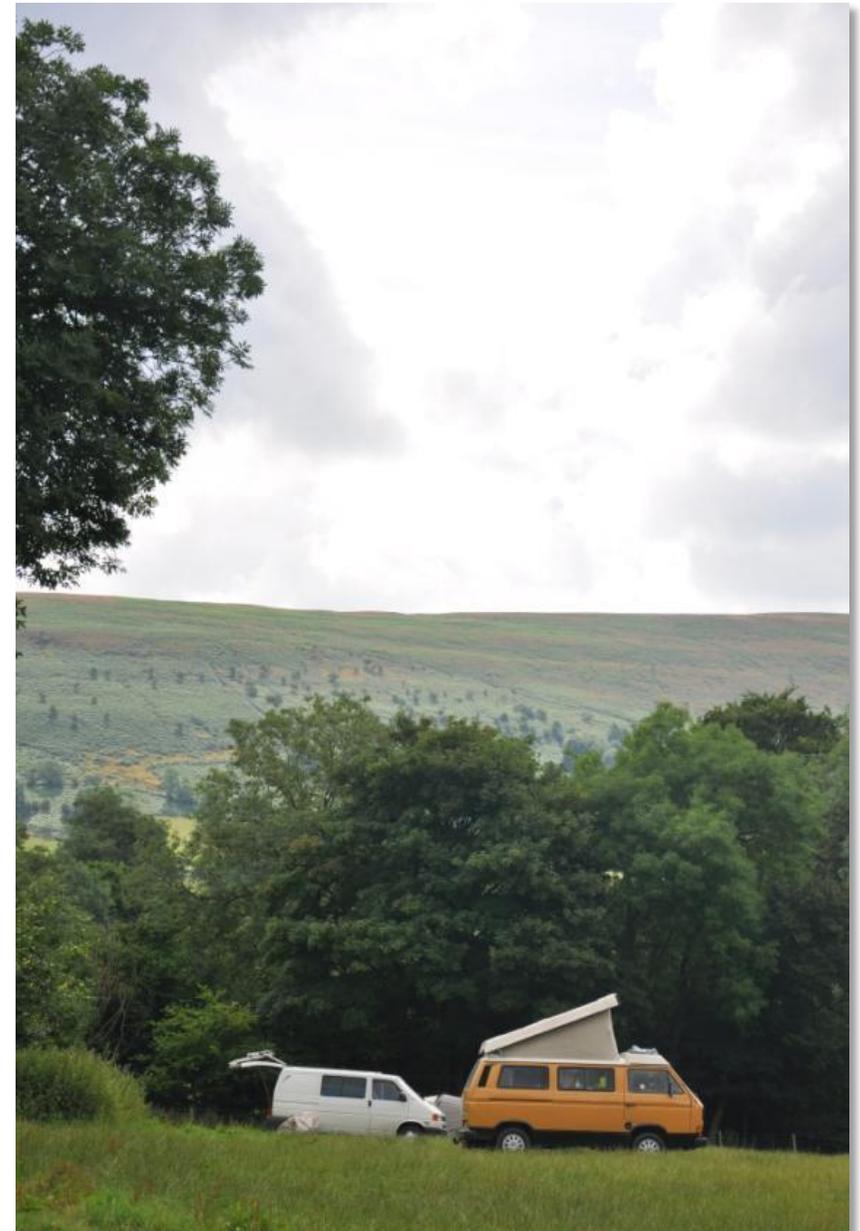
Figure 2.10. Visitor numbers recorded at popular attractions in or near the National Park, 2010



Source: Visits to Tourist Attractions, Visit Wales 2010

2.24 The following key points summarise what is known about what visitors do and where they go:

- The most popular leisure activity undertaken by visitors to the countryside in the National Park (including people who live in the National Park) is walking along low level routes, closely followed by hill walking.
- In contrast, a larger number of more specialist activities such as cycling, fishing, climbing, horse riding and water sports are carried out by a much smaller proportion of visitors.
- These patterns of activity are very similar to those experienced across Wales as a whole.
- A particular feature of outdoor recreation in the National Park, which is not well covered in visitor surveys, is the high number of organised group activities such as educational and Duke of Edinburgh's Award trips. Anecdotal evidence suggests much of this activity is focussed on hill walking in the Central Beacons and Black Mountains.
- Organised recreational events and festivals have become popular in recent years, with large numbers of people taking part. These are concentrated at specific locations for short periods of time.
- While there is good information on the numbers visiting specific attractions and sites, there is much less information on the numbers of people using different walking routes and areas of open country. The most popular areas are thought to include the northern scarp in the Central Beacons (including Pen y Fan), the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail in the Black Mountains and the towpath of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal.



Setting up camp in the Vale of Ewyas

The impacts of visitors

2.25 There is relatively little systematically collected evidence on the impacts (positive and negative) of visitors and their activities on the National Park. However, the experience of individuals and groups who were consulted during the preparation of this Plan and evidence of the situation that exists at a few high profile sites can be used to support conclusions. This section considers the impacts of visitors under three headings as follows:

- Impacts on the special qualities of the National Park
- Impacts on communities and businesses
- The spatial distribution of impacts

Impacts on the special qualities of the National Park

2.26 The second purpose of the National Park designation makes clear that recreation should be promoted where it is consistent with the area's special qualities (para. 1.8). These special qualities are also a useful way of defining the characteristics that should be conserved to deliver the first purpose. Considering the impacts that visitors have on the special qualities is therefore a helpful way of assessing their impact on both of the purposes of the National Park designation.

2.27 As noted earlier (para. 1.18), the special qualities of the National Park were defined through a process of public engagement during the preparation of the current National Park Management Plan. These 10 qualities are summarised (shortened and re-ordered) in **Box 2.1**. They include the **aesthetic qualities** that people appreciate such as peacefulness, feelings of vitality and sense of grandeur; the **functional qualities** that the National Park provides such as a living and working environment and accessible location for recreation; and the **cultural qualities** that include the historic and cultural character of the National Park. This approach to grouping the special qualities reflects the ecosystems approach that underpins the Welsh Government's Living Wales policy and the work of Natural Resources Wales.

2.28 The National Park Authority has collected data on a range of indicators for its State of the Park report covering issues such as the biological condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the number of locally held cultural events and the proportion of public rights of way that are easy to use. Unfortunately, very few of these indicators are suitable to assess the impact of visitors on the special qualities and the data are somewhat out of date (many being last reported in 2006).

2.29 Two issues for which evidence has been prepared are the condition of upland paths in the National Park and the vulnerability of habitats to disturbance caused by human activity including recreation. This evidence is reviewed below.

Box 2.1. Summary of the special qualities of the National Park

• Peace, tranquillity & spiritual renewal	}	Aesthetic
• A feeling of vitality and well-being		
• Sweeping grandeur & outstanding natural beauty		
• A working, living patchwork of land uses	}	Functional
• Accessible countryside for many activities		
• Rugged & challenging landscapes		
• Diversity of wildlife & richness of habitats	}	Cultural
• A sense of discovery - hidden secrets & history		
• Sense of place and cultural identity - 'Welshness'		
• An intimate sense of community & hospitality		

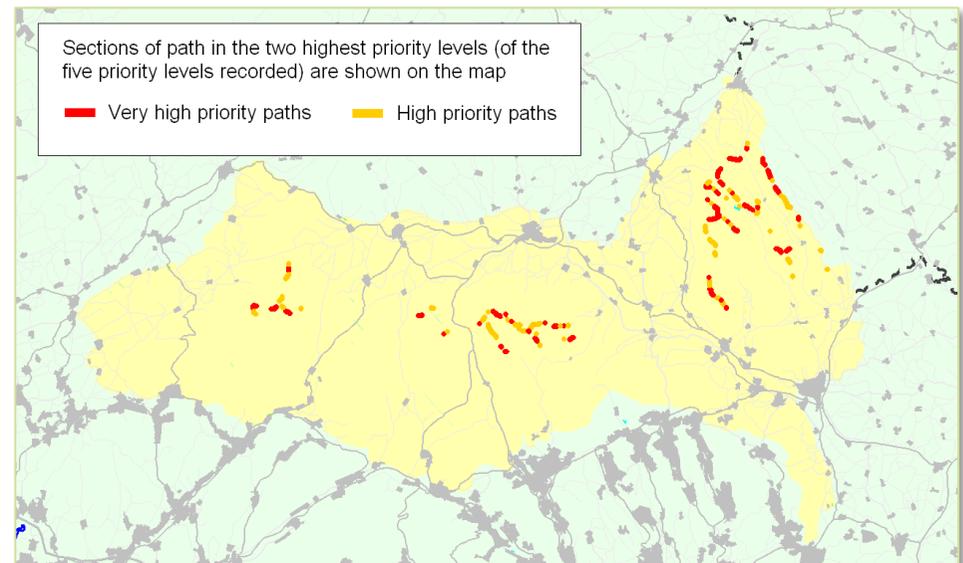
Source: Brecon Beacons National Park Management Plan 2010-2015. Qualities summarised and grouped for this Plan.

The condition of paths

- 2.30 The poor condition of many of the most popular paths in the National Park, particularly in the upland areas, has been of concern for over twenty years. This concern arises from the visual impact ('scarring') on the landscape, the damage done to wildlife and soils and the difficulty it causes to recreational users.
- 2.31 Significant amounts of path management and restoration work are undertaken by the National Park Authority (for instance on the Offa's Dyke path and Beacons Way) and the National Trust (such as in the northern scarp in the Central Beacons and on the Skirrid and Sugarloaf in the Black Mountains) using employed staff, contractors and volunteers. These organisations have advanced levels of knowledge and skills on techniques for maintaining paths in the Brecon Beacons. However, a lack of resources (mainly manpower) has meant that, in many areas of the National Park, work has not kept up with the declining condition of paths.
- 2.32 In 2006 and again in 2010, 154,850 metres of upland path were surveyed by the National Park Authority using a recognised survey methodology. Half of these were in the eastern part of the Park (mainly the Black Mountains), a third in the Central Beacons and the remainder in the western part of the Park. The survey classified each length of path into one of five condition categories. Overall in both 2006 and 2010, 30% of paths (by length) were in the worst two condition categories. There was a reduction in the length of paths in the best condition category from 40% of paths in 2006 to 30% in 2010, with an equivalent increase in length of paths in the medium category.
- 2.33 The reasons for the poor condition of upland paths are often complex. Although high levels of use by walkers is a key factor, damage from other less frequent users such as horse riders, mountain bikers or motorised vehicles can exacerbate this (depending on the classification of the path, these uses may be illegal). The fragility of vegetation and soils which have been affected by historic periods of atmospheric pollution ('acid rain') from industry in South Wales and agricultural management (grazing levels higher than currently practised and heavy burning) is also often a factor. A lack of funding to anticipate and repair damage has contributed to the problem.

- 2.34 The locations of sections of upland paths in the worst condition in 2006, and therefore greatest priority for improvement at that time, are shown in **Figure 2.11**. These sections are located widely across the National Park although paths in the Black Mountains tend to be in poorer condition than those in the Central Beacons and western areas. The cost of repairing all upland paths classified in the worst two condition categories in 2006 was calculated at £1.8 Million (rising to £2.6 Million for all upland paths). The National Park Authority's Upland Paths Strategy describes the necessary works and costs in detail. The survey of upland paths is due to be repeated in 2013 providing updated information on the condition of paths.
- 2.35 It is important to note that upland paths currently classified as being in moderate or good condition may deteriorate if footfall or other factors increase in future. Paths underlain by peat soils are particularly susceptible to trampling pressure so that information on the distribution of peat (which is recorded in the upland paths survey) needs to be taken into account in plans for future promotion of routes. It can be expected that changes to more extreme climate conditions will put further pressure on fragile soils and vegetation.

Figure 2.11. Highest priority paths for repair from the 2006 Upland Paths Survey



- 2.36 Information on the condition of lowland paths can be extracted from Park-wide surveys of all rights of way made by the National Park Authority to support the Brecon Beacons Rights of Way Improvement Plan. An annual survey is undertaken of a 5% random sample of the rights of way network, the majority of which exists in the lowlands. The survey is based on several criteria that measure the condition of furniture and surface; the existence of signposting and waymarking; the quality of the Definitive Map; and the presence of obstructions and other access problems.
- 2.37 The results of the survey since 2005 show a steady improvement in the condition of the rights of way network over time (bearing in mind that such a small 5% survey can generate quite varying results between years). Generally, compared to upland paths, fewer paths are judged to be in a poor condition because of their more robust physical characteristics (for instance gentler slopes, better drainage, less fragile soils and vegetation) rather than because of lower levels of use. As a result, it is considered likely that the impacts on the landscape, biodiversity and users are less serious.
- 2.38 However, the lowland network does suffer from localised problems associated with erosion which are often due to poor drainage and the effect of inclement weather. The lowland network also requires intensive management in terms of vegetation control and the repair and maintenance of furniture.



Erosion caused by a combination of vehicles, walkers and fragile vegetation affected by historic atmospheric pollution

Vulnerability of habitats and species to the impact of recreation

- 2.39 Workshops with stakeholders during this study identified disturbance and damage to habitats from recreational activities as potentially causing significant harm to wildlife, particularly sensitive habitats such as wetlands and species such as ground nesting birds. However, there is no data from the National Park to show whether this risk is significant. Recreation is just one of the factors affecting wildlife and it is difficult to distinguish this from other factors such as agricultural management and atmospheric pollution.
- 2.40 National research commissioned by the Countryside Council for Wales⁸ has used data from a variety of sources to map the theoretical vulnerability of habitats (looking at soil types, habitats and species) to a range of impacts caused by recreational access, one of which is disturbance by people (including, but not exclusively, recreational activities). It is important to note that this research has not attempted to map the actual levels of disturbance at individual sites, nor does it attribute impacts to different types of disturbance such as recreation, farming or traffic. The results of this theoretical assessment of potential vulnerability are therefore of limited use to this report. However, they are considered here because they suggest where further work may provide clearer information.
- 2.41 Analysis of the maps prepared for that research suggests that there may be relatively few species locations in the National Park that are highly vulnerable to disturbance, with a potentially lower concentration of more highly disturbed locations than in many other highly rural areas of Wales. Seasonal analysis, taking account of the vulnerability of target species to disturbance at key periods such as when birds are nesting, suggests that it may be in spring and early summer when disturbance is most likely to have negative impacts on many species.
- 2.42 These tentative conclusions from national research should be examined in more detail in the National Park.

Vulnerability of the historic environment

- 2.43 Stakeholders during this study also identified the National Park's Historic Environment as being vulnerable to visitor pressure and disturbance. Only a very small number of the National Park's heritage assets are managed for visitors or as heritage attractions, leaving the majority of assets lacking specific historic environment management objectives leaving them vulnerable to visitor damage.
- 2.44 Unmanaged visitor pressure or recreational activity was felt to cause damage to historic environment management in a number of ways including:
- Erosion caused by people on foot, bikes or horseback - passing across assets, around focal points and through pinch points such as gateways.
 - The movement or removal of structural material - creating holes and gaps and constructing walker cairns and places to shelter.
 - Vandalism - defacement such as graffiti and engraving.
 - Anti-social behaviour and lighting fires - littering, fly tipping lighting fires. Bonfires and BBQs can result in heat damage to archaeological remains.
 - Recreational use of vehicles and metal detecting.

Understanding which historic assets within the National Park are most vulnerable to visitor pressure should be considered further.

⁸ CCW (2012) Habitat vulnerability mapping. Report by Footprint Ecology.

Stakeholder views and experience of impacts on the special qualities

2.45 Although there is less empirical evidence on other impacts of visitors on the special qualities of the National Park, discussion with stakeholders and the results of workshops held during this study provide anecdotal evidence, based on people’s own experience. This helps to identify positive impacts as well as the more negative ones described above. These are summarised in **Tables 2.2 to 2.4** using the three categories of special qualities described in Box 2.1. It should be noted that positive impacts record the circumstances under which visitors can enhance the special qualities (not where the special qualities benefit visitors).

Table 2.2. Summary of stakeholders’ views of impacts on the Park’s Aesthetic Qualities

Negative impacts	Positive impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Crowding’ of people at peak periods on most popular walking routes (including organised events) reduces tranquillity and well-being – particular impacts on upland landscapes • Path erosion causes visual scarring of landscape, reducing sense of grandeur (seen from a distance) and reduces quality of experience (up close) • Litter (either from deliberate fly-tipping or casual littering) reduces natural beauty and sense of peace • Congestion of traffic at peak periods on most popular roads reduces sense of tranquillity and well-being, particularly on narrow country lanes • High nuisance caused by illegal activities (including 4x4 vehicles, motocross bikes and hang gliders) damaging wilderness experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain aesthetic qualities can be better appreciated in the company of other people (e.g. dark night skies)

Table 2.3. Summary of stakeholders’ views of impacts on the Park’s Functional Qualities

Negative impacts	Positive impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disturbance, particularly by dogs off leads, of breeding birds and hefted livestock on commons (the latter threatening traditional farming practices and viability of commons grazing). Also disturbance to residents, visitors, wildlife and livestock by unleashed dogs. • Damage to hedgerows and road verges from traffic • Trampling of vegetation beside busiest or least well-maintained paths • Erosion of fragile soils, particularly peat, from certain activities (e.g. vehicles, bikes and horses) or from high numbers of walkers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and research – interpretation for visitors leads to better knowledge and understanding • Volunteer inputs to managing habitats and reducing negative impacts (e.g. National Trust working holidays) • Visitor payback into specific conservation projects • Potential for ‘citizen science’ wildlife recording by visitors

Table 2.4. Summary of stakeholders’ views of impacts on the Park’s Cultural Qualities

Negative impacts	Positive impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incomers can dilute the sense of local culture, leading to a loss of customs and language (but this is also threatened by broader societal changes) • Damage (often unintentional) to archaeological sites by erosion, movement of material and vandalism from traffic, walkers or riders. Examples are the removal of stones from Bronze Age hilltop cairns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and research – interpretation for visitors leads to better knowledge and understanding • Volunteer inputs to protecting and managing historic sites (e.g. National Trust working holidays) • Visitor spending pays for cultural events and exhibitions • Visitor payback is used to fund specific cultural projects (e.g. archaeological protection)

2.46 Comparing the negative impacts described above with the earlier findings on what visitors value most about the National Park highlights that the high number of visitors seeking the uplifting and challenging experience of walking in the hills is harming the qualities they come to experience. The tranquillity and wildness of these open landscapes and the physical infrastructure of paths, narrow country lanes and habitats are all fragile (compared to more enclosed and robust lowland landscapes) and, in the most popular locations, these qualities are at risk of being undermined and visitors' experiences diminished.

2.47 Similarly, the high volumes of visitor traffic at peak times, particularly on narrow country roads, is affecting the quiet rural nature of the National Park; the experience of visitors; and, in some places, is damaging roadside habitats. Further evidence on the volumes of visitor traffic is considered below. Illegal use of 4x4 vehicles and motocross bikes on green lanes and commons damages the tranquillity of these areas and their fragile soils and habitats.

2.48 There are a range of positive impacts of visitors on the special qualities of the National Park. For many of these, such as the involvement of volunteers to conserve and restore sites and the use of money collected from visitors to pay for conservation projects, there is potential to enhance these positive impacts.



Burned out car on common land to the south of the National Park

2.49 The following key points summarise the impacts of visitors on the special qualities of the National Park:

- There is relatively little systematically collected evidence on the impacts (positive and negative) of visitors and their activities on the National Park. Most of the indicators reported in the National Park Authority's State of the Park Report are not suitable because they do not distinguish the impact of visitors from other factors.
- However, there is good evidence on the condition of upland paths (with visitor use being an important factor, alongside others such as the fragility of soils and vegetation). 30% of paths surveyed in 2006 and 2010 were considered to be in bad condition and to have a high priority for repair. The cost of these high priority repairs was estimated to be £1.8M in 2006. Between 2006 and 2010, the proportion of surveyed paths judged to be in good condition fell from 40% to 30%.
- National data on the theoretical vulnerability of selected species to disturbance from human activity (including, but not limited to, recreation) suggests that there may be relatively few species locations in the National Park that are highly vulnerable to disturbance. Spring and early summer are times of the year when many species are most vulnerable to disturbance. More research is required to substantiate these conclusions.
- Stakeholders identified a range of additional negative impacts of visitors on the special qualities of the National Park. These include raised volumes of traffic on roads, illegal vehicular access on greenlanes and commons, disturbance of wildlife and livestock (particularly by uncontrolled dogs) and littering.
- There is evidence that in the most popular locations the peace and tranquillity of the fragile upland landscapes, which are the qualities that visitors value the most, are at risk of being undermined and visitors' experiences diminished.
- There is potential to enhance many of the positive contributions that visitors can make to the special qualities of the National Park, such as through volunteering for, and funding, conservation projects.

Impacts on communities and business

2.50 Examining the impacts of visitors on the National Park’s communities and businesses is helpful because it relates to the duty on the National Park Authority to seek to foster social and economic well-being (para. 1.9). It also recognises that communities and businesses, particularly tourism businesses and farmers, are important providers of facilities and services to visitors. Their active consent and involvement in visitor management is essential if the National Park’s second purpose (promoting enjoyment of the special qualities) is to be met. It should be noted that benefits and burdens arising from tourism are not spread evenly throughout the National Park, geographically or amongst businesses, farmers and residents. Efforts should be made to help those groups impacted by visitors gain benefit from them where this is practical.

2.51 In the same way as evidence on visitor impacts on the special qualities was examined above, this section first examines issues on which there is empirical data, before moving on to the views reported by stakeholders.

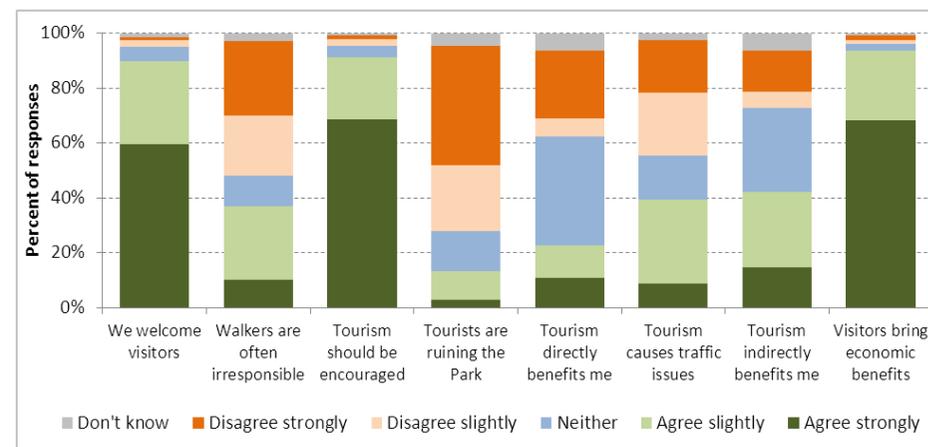
The views of residents

2.52 The postal survey sent to all households in the National Park by the National Park Authority in the spring of 2013 asked a question about residents’ perceptions about tourism in the Brecon Beacons. The question asked: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tourism in the Brecon Beacons National Park?” The statements were as follows:

- We welcome visitors into our local community
- Walkers are often irresponsible and don't respect the countryside
- Tourism should be actively encouraged and promoted
- Tourists are ruining the Park area
- Tourism directly benefits me/my family
- Tourism brings unnecessary traffic congestion and parking issues

- Tourism indirectly benefits me/my family
- Visitors help keep our shops and pubs open, bringing economic benefits to the National Park area

Figure 2.12. Residents’ perceptions on selected visitor issues



Source: BBNPA Residents Survey 2013. No of responses 2,753 to 3,042, depending on statement. See para. 2.51 for full text of each statement.

2.53 While proportionally more residents would disagree, either strongly or slightly (42%) that “tourism brings unnecessary traffic congestion and parking issues”, 39% agree with this statement. The large majority of residents disagree (68%) with the statement that “tourists are ruining the Park area”, with only 13% agreeing with this.

2.54 **Figure 2.12** shows the results of this question. Overall, it shows a positive response from residents towards visitors to the National Park. The larger majority of respondents (93%) agreed strongly that “visitors help keep our shops and pubs open, bringing economic benefit to the National Park area”. A similar proportion (92%) agree that “tourism should be actively encouraged and promoted”, while 90% agree that “we welcome visitors into our local community”.

2.55 Opinion was more evenly split on the statement “walkers are often irresponsible and don't respect the countryside” with 49% disagreeing with the statement (27% disagreeing strongly) and 37% agreeing (10% strongly). In relation to traffic problems, the majority of

respondents disagreed with the statement “tourism brings unnecessary traffic congestion and parking issues”, although a significant minority (30%) agreed slightly and a further 9% agreed strongly.

Traffic levels

2.56 The negative impacts of car traffic on the aesthetic qualities of the National Park have already been identified above. Traffic congestion can slow journey times, create pollution and reduce parking spaces, although, as noted above, the recent survey suggests that a minority of residents feel this is a major issue. Evidence on the seasonal pattern of visitor traffic is available from the STEAM data commissioned by the National Park Authority. It is important to appreciate that this information is not directly measured from traffic counts, but is inferred from other locally collected data such as bed occupancy rates and throughput at attractions. **Figure 2.13** shows the seasonal trend in visitor traffic from the 2011 STEAM report. It suggests a five-fold difference in car numbers between the low point in January and the high point in August. It also suggests that significant enhanced traffic levels are not limited to a few peak months but occur for the majority of the year (between March and October). The monthly averages shown in the chart hide daily peaks and troughs with key periods such as bank holidays likely to experience highest levels. The estimates for the National Park as a whole also hide spatial variation and impacts, with much higher disruption taking place on narrow country lanes than on dual carriageways.

Figure 2.13. Estimated number of visitor vehicles using roads in the Brecon Beacons by month



Source: STEAM 2011

2.57 Another source of information about visitor traffic in the National Park comes from vehicle counter data collected by the National Trust at its Storey Arms and Pont ar Daf car parks. **Figure 2.14** shows the data for 2012. A similar monthly pattern occurs in previous years’ data. This shows that peak numbers visiting these sites (thought to be amongst the most popular in the National Park) occur during the Spring and Summer school holidays through into September, with somewhat lower numbers during the summer months between these periods. Lowest numbers occur between November and February.

Figure 2.14. Counts of cars entering the Storey Arms and Pont ar Daf car parks, 2012



Source: National Trust. Data comes from an automatic (unmanned) vehicle counters



Unauthorised parking of cars on the track to Llyn y Fan

Employment in tourism

- 2.58 The economic structure of the National Park is not that different from that of Wales as a whole. The recent *Valuing Wales' National Parks Report* (Arup, 2013) calculates that the National Park's environment contributes to 4,000 jobs directly and a further 779 jobs indirectly. The STEAM data provides further information on the number of people directly and indirectly employed specifically in the visitor economy. The 2011 STEAM data suggests that 3,200 people (full time equivalents) are employed directly in tourism which is roughly 12% of total employment⁹. A third of this direct tourism employment is estimated to be in accommodation, 28% in food and drink and the remainder in recreation (including attractions), shopping and transport. If indirect employment in servicing visitors is taken into account, the overall contribution to the local economy rises to 15% of employment. A comment made by stakeholders is that tourism employment has typically been in seasonal and often low paid

⁹ The proportion of total employment is estimated by this study, using data from the 2001 population census (ONS data set KS605) for the best-fit Middle Level Super Output Areas covering the National Park.

positions, although tourism providers commented that this is becoming less of an issue with many accommodation providers and attractions operating over all or most of the year. In addition, very many tourism businesses are managed by their owners with relatively little employment beyond that of those owners. In these cases employment may well not be low paid.

Second homes

- 2.59 Earlier in this Chapter (para.2.5) it was noted that a high proportion of staying visitors stay in unserviced accommodation, including self-catering holiday cottages. The effect that the conversion of houses used by residents to holiday accommodation has on the local housing supply has been raised by local communities. Data from the 2001 population census suggests that the proportion of the housing stock that is used for second homes and holiday accommodation is very low in most of the National Park, being less than 2% in half of the wards in the National Park, and only rises to 5% of the housing stock in one ward (Talybont on Usk). This contrasts with much higher levels in many of the coastal areas of Wales, such as Aberdovey and Abersoch on the west coast, where holiday homes exceed 40% of the housing stock. This analysis does not take account of the effect of demand for second homes on the local housing market in the National Park.

Stakeholder views and experience of impacts on the communities and businesses

- 2.60 Discussions with stakeholders during the preparation of this Plan identified a number of positive and negative impacts of visitors: Firstly on farming and land management and, secondly, on local residents (the latter confirmed with chairs of Community Councils at a meeting in Brecon). These are summarised below.

Table 2.5. Summary of stakeholders' views of impacts on Farming and Land Management

Negative impacts	Positive impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disturbance, particularly by dogs off leads, causing livestock on commons to leave their hefts, threatening the viability of commons grazing Dog worrying causing harm to sheep Traffic congestion at peak times and locations, restricting feed lorries etc accessing farms Inconsiderate parking in gateways preventing access to fields Litter (either from deliberate fly-tipping or inadvertent casual littering) poses threat to livestock and adds to farmers' management costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for farm diversification – local produce, B&B's, camping etc. Reconnecting people with farming and food – improved understanding and awareness Volunteer inputs to maintaining field boundaries and reducing negative impacts (e.g. National Trust working holidays)

2.61 A particular concern for many commons graziers is the high level and intrusive recreational use of commons in ways which exceed the rights allowed for open air recreation on foot, as defined in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 and other local statutes that apply to particular commons. Large organised groups and dogs that are not under control might be considered to infringe these rights. On the most popularly used routes, unlawful activity can effectively make normal livestock grazing unviable, increasing farmers' costs of management and reducing their income. Some farmers in these most popular areas feel that the rights of walkers and other recreational users have been put ahead of the rights of landowners and commoners. They believe that proper enforcement of the CROW Act and Countryside Code would reduce many of these negative impacts.

2.62 In addition, at certain locations, poor parking by visitors leaving their cars while walking, and the volume of traffic using narrow lanes, makes it difficult for farmers to access fields or take deliveries of goods such as animal feed. In these areas, they feel that traffic restrictions should be adopted and enforced to reduce traffic volumes and improve parking.

2.63 During the preparation of the Plan, an opportunity was provided to talk to representatives of Community Councils in the National Park about the visitor issues and opportunities they felt affected local communities. This took place prior to the release of the results of the residents' survey described above. A summary of the views expressed at this meeting is shown in **Table 2.5**. The results of the residents' survey (Figure 2.12) suggests that the negative impacts shown below are not a major issue for most residents whereas the positive impacts are widely recognised and supported.

Table 2.5. Summary of stakeholders' views of impacts on Local Residents

Negative impacts	Positive impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congestion during peak periods – car parks full and roads slow Wear and tear on local services not paid for by visitor economy Anti-social behaviour such as litter and toileting. Economic reliance on a highly seasonal sector Certain types of visitors (e.g. to self-catering cottages) have low spend in local economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tourism economy provides employment and income Visitor spending helps maintain the viability of local shops and services Visitors support events such as festivals that locals can enjoy

2.64 The following key points summarise the impacts of visitors on communities and businesses in the National Park:

- Most of the residents of the National Park who responded to the survey in 2013 welcome visitors and feel that the tourism sector should be supported, even though they receive little direct benefit from the tourism economy.
- The behaviour of people walking in the countryside is a concern to about a third of the residents who responded to the survey.
- The high volumes of visitor traffic, particularly on narrow country roads and in town centres at peak periods, are a frustration for some residents and businesses.
- Farmers experience particular issues which they feel can threaten the viability of their businesses. They believe that large organised groups of walkers using common land, or walkers with uncontrolled dogs, exceed people's rights for quiet enjoyment on commons and the importance of protecting farm animals, crops and property needs to be recognised.
- The tourism sector is an important part of the local economy, accounting for between 12 and 15% of employment. Perceptions that tourism employment suffers from being highly seasonal and low paid are challenged by tourism businesses. The tourism sector provides significant opportunities for enhancing the contribution that visitors make to local communities and the economy.
- Analysis of data on the number of second and holiday homes in the National Park suggests that they do not have a significant effect on housing supply for local use.

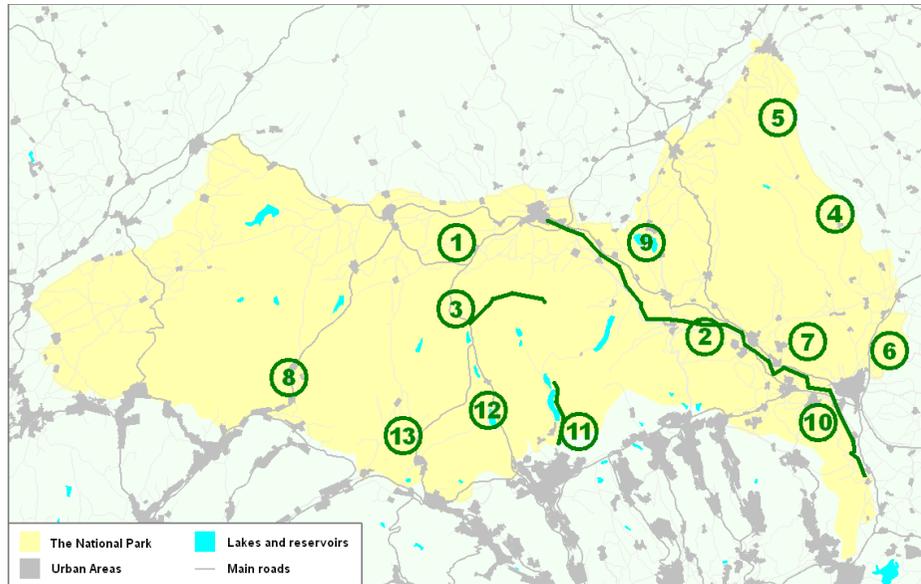
The spatial distribution of impacts

- 2.65 During the preparation of this Plan, discussion took place with key stakeholders, including National Park Authority wardens, commons graziers and others, on the specific locations where the impacts summarised above occur. Based on these discussions, these sites can be divided between the following types of sites:
- Popular honeypots of visitor activity where, despite high levels of use, impacts are generally being successfully managed and where there may be opportunities to enhance visitor enjoyment
 - Environmentally pressured sites where there are long-term negative impacts (which persist after visitors have left) or where there are seasonal / peak time impacts (which are dependent on visitors being present)
- 2.66 Separate maps are shown below providing examples of these sites. Lack of data on the volumes of people using particular sites, the condition of sites, or the impacts of visitors, means that a detailed spatial picture of visitors' impacts is not currently available.
- 2.67 **Figure 2.15** shows the most popular honeypots of visitor activity, based on information provided by stakeholders during the preparation of this report. These include notable success stories where concerted action (often by the landowner with the support of activity providers and facilitated by the National Park Authority and other agencies) is addressing long-term visitor management issues such as lack of facilities or inconsiderate behaviour. These include the Waterfall Country where Natural Resources Wales (previously Forestry Commission Wales) is using a mixture of controls and incentives to reduce crowding, unregulated access, and antisocial activity by visitors, all of which were causing a serious nuisance to local residents and damage to the environment. Another example is at Llangorse Lake where a system of licensing has been introduced to regulate water sports.
- 2.68 For other popular sites, such as the Storey Arms and Pont ar Daf car parks, there is a need to improve visitor facilities to ensure visitors are offered a good experience and to reduce negative impacts on the environment and on local communities and other users.

- 2.69 **Figure 2.16** shows a selection of the sites which stakeholders reported are experiencing most pressure from visitor activity. The lack of systematically collected information, particularly on the ecological impacts of recreation, means that this map does not present a comprehensive picture. However, there are relatively few sites where there are serious and lasting negative impacts. Most of these are locations in the uplands where sustained high levels of use by walkers (over many decades), combined with the fragile nature of soils and vegetation, has caused significant damage to habitats and erosion of soils.
- 2.70 Seasonal and peak time impacts, which are currently temporary (i.e. they tend to disappear once visitors leave) are more widely distributed. Traffic congestion and parking problems are responsible for many of these short-term impacts. Left unchecked, it is likely that seasonal and peak time impacts will become longer term problems as damage to vegetation and soils become entrenched.
- 2.71 The following key points summarise the impacts of visitors at particular locations in the National Park:

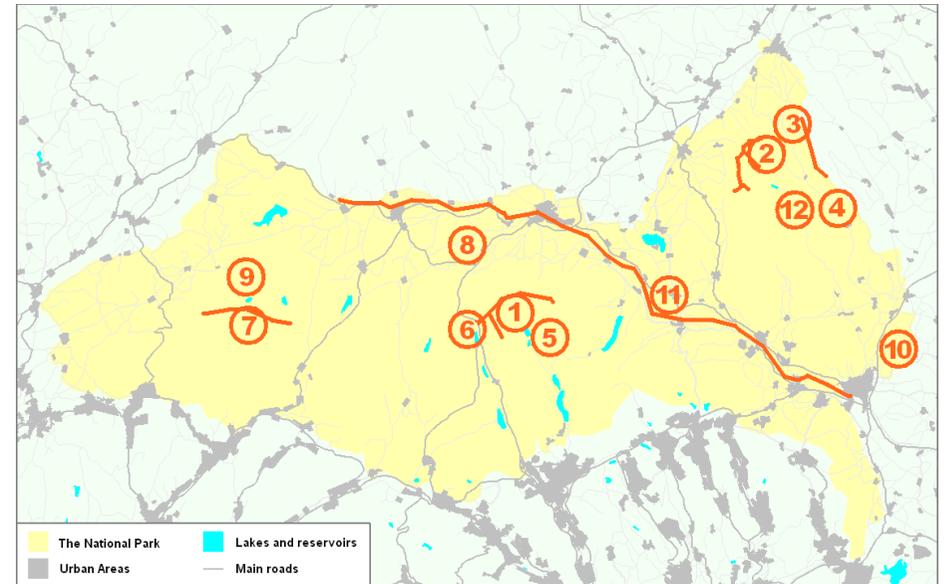
- Lack of monitoring data on visitor numbers and the condition of sites means that a detailed spatial picture of visitors' impacts cannot currently be drawn.
- There are many popular 'honeypot' sites where visitors are being successfully managed or where there are opportunities to enhance facilities to contain negative impacts and improve experiences.
- It would appear that there are relatively few sites where there are serious and lasting negative impacts. Most of these are in the uplands where high levels of use by walkers in a fragile environment have caused significant damage to habitats and erosion of soils.
- Traffic congestion and parking problems, which cause seasonal and peak time impacts, are more widely distributed. Left unchecked, it is likely that short-term problems will become more serious and entrenched long-term issues.

Figure 2.15. Popular honeypot locations for outdoor recreation



- 1) National Park Mountain Centre, Libanus
- 2) Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal
- 3) Storey Arms & Pont ar Daf car parks and the north scarp path
- 4) Llanthony Priory
- 5) Hay Bluff
- 6) The Skirrid
- 7) Sugarloaf
- 8) Upper Swansea Valley (Dan yr Ogof Showcaves, Craig y Nos Country Park)
- 9) Llangorse Lake
- 10) Bloreng
- 11) Brecon Mountain Railway Centre
- 12) Garwnant Forest Centre
- 13) Waterfall Country

Figure 2.16. Selected examples of environmentally pressured sites

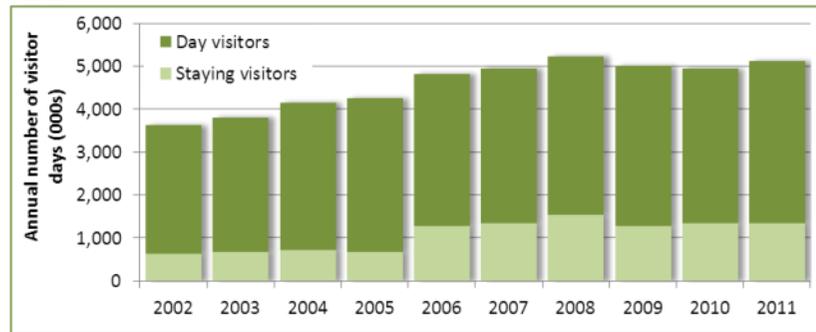


- 1) Northern scarp path (Erosion and peak time congestion from walkers)
- 2) Waun Fach and paths to it (Erosion)
- 3) Offa's Dyke path (Erosion)
- 4) Road up the Vale of Ewyas (Peak time traffic congestion)
- 5) The Gap Road (Illegal vehicle access)
- 6) A470 and Storey Arms car park (Peak time traffic congestion)
- 7) Beacons Way (Erosion and loss of tranquillity from large walking groups)
- 8) Illtyd Pools SSSI (Disturbance to nesting birds in breeding season)
- 9) Road to Llyn y Fan Fach (Peak time traffic congestion and unauthorised parking)
- 10) The Skirrid (Peak time parking on busy road)
- 11) River Usk (Impact of canoeing on wildlife and fishery during low water flows)
- 12) Gwyrne Fawr Valley (Traffic congestion and illegal access)

Trends and future drivers of change

- 2.72 This Plan needs to anticipate the changes that will take place in future years and decades, so that action can be taken now to mitigate them and the resources needed for future actions can be put in place.
- 2.73 Recent trends are often a good guide to what will happen in the future. **Figure 2.19** suggests that over the last ten years, there has been a 40% increase in the number of visitor days in the National Park (an increase from 3.6 Million in 2002 to 5.1 Million in 2011). However, this increase took place during the first half of the decade and numbers in the five years between 2006 and 2011 have been relatively stable. It is possible that this recent stabilisation is a result of the economic downturn and that numbers will rise again when the economy recovers.

Figure 2.19. Ten year trend in visitor days in the National Park



Source: Annual STEAM reports

- 2.74 Data on the amount that each visitor spends (again from the STEAM survey of the National Park) shows that the economic contribution of tourism continued to rise throughout the decade (with the total economic value rising by 50% over the period) and with increasing spending per person during the last five years. This suggests that there is potential for the economic contribution of tourism to carry on increasing ahead of any increase in visitor numbers.

- 2.75 Information on recent trends in the type of visitor activity is available at a national level from the Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey, contrasting the results from the latest 2011 survey with those from the previous one in 2008. The following key findings are relevant to this Plan:

- There has been an increase in the number of trips that people make as a family. In contrast, there was no change in the number of visits made by other groups such as people without children.
- There has been an increase in active pursuits such as road cycling and informal games in the outdoors. Wildlife watching is also becoming increasingly popular. These are perhaps a response to people's growing awareness of the environment and the benefits it can provide.
- 'Wild' environments away from people's homes have become more popular places to visit (particularly woodlands and beaches) and there has been a decline in the number of visits to local parks.
- This is matched by increasing use of the car as a means of travelling to outdoor recreation visits, with a decline in walking to the places visited.
- Finally, people report that time pressure is an increasingly significant constraint on their recreation activity, meaning that 'every minute' of time away from home should count.

- 2.76 All these findings from the Wales-wide survey have implications for the National Park. If these trends are to continue, it suggests that demand for recreation in the wild open spaces of the Brecon Beacons will increase, with active pursuits being more popular. Car use is likely to continue increasing and people may become increasingly frustrated at time wasted in traffic congestion.

- 2.77 Anecdotal evidence from stakeholders in the Brecon Beacons suggests that recreational activity in the most remote parts of the National Park (those mainly in the west) has not increased significantly, due to the difficulties of access to these areas and the

low level of promotion. On the other hand, the popularity of well-known and easily accessible areas has continued to grow.

- 2.78 Many people consulted during the preparation of the Plan commented that many of the negative impacts of visitor activity that they are concerned about are not new – many have been taking place for many decades. However, in the areas where the impacts are most severe, there is an increasing desire that these impacts should be addressed. Growing expectations on environmental quality (such as the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and increasing pressure on the viability of upland farming and commoning suggest that a tipping point is being reached, where concerted action will be needed to address long standing problems.
- 2.79 Finally, there is an increasing emphasis in Welsh Government policy on the role that access to the natural environment can, and should, play in people's physical and mental well-being. Overcoming the barriers to outdoor recreation experienced by people with low health outcomes (often in communities with high levels of economic deprivation) is likely to be an increasingly important driver of public policy. This will provide opportunities to enhance visitors' experiences and increase the contribution that the National Park makes to the well-being of local and nearby communities. However, unless this demand is properly managed, there is a risk that the negative impacts that are already taking place will increase.

Overall themes emerging from this Chapter

- 2.80 There are three high level themes that arise from the review of evidence in this Chapter. These form the structure for the following Chapter and for the Action Plan that is set out in Chapter 4. These themes are as follows:
- Addressing many of the issues and opportunities that have been identified will require concerted action 'on the ground' at a site level. This will include work to alter visitor behaviour or redirect activities where they are causing harm, stop and repair erosion scarring of paths and improve visitor facilities such as car parking and signage. There is thus a need for practical activities to address the impacts of visitors through **Site-based Interventions**.
 - Improving outcomes for the National Park (its special qualities, local communities and businesses) and for visitors will require the involvement of many different groups and individuals. It will be important that consistent messages are agreed and delivered effectively by all parties. This will require a co-ordinated approach through **Communication and Influence**.
 - Finally the organisations that will be responsible for taking forward this work will need effective structures and sufficient resources. It will also be important that the consent and expertise of landowners, graziers and local communities is harnessed so that all parties have a better understanding of the issues and opportunities. This will require a focus on **Institutional Arrangements**.

3. Themes for Action



Pony treckers in the Black Mountains

3 Themes for Action

3.1 Following on from the evidence presented in the previous chapter, this Chapter identifies the key themes and issues where action needs to be taken to strengthen and enhance visitor management. There is a high level of consistency in terms of issues raised by the many groups and individuals who have contributed to the preparation of this report. Three clear themes for action have emerged. These themes and the specific issues that relate to them are discussed below along with a number of Recommended Actions to resolve these issues.

Table 3.1: Summary of the issues addressed under the three Themes for Action

Themes	Issues	
A. Site-based Interventions		
Sites with high levels of use and their management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement over which are the most pressurised sites and routes • Better understanding of environmental disturbance and damage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing path erosion • Conserving the sense of remoteness • Tackling peak time traffic issues • Improving visitor facilities
B. Communication and Influence		
Using an understanding of visitor impacts to inform promotion and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighting the richness of experiences that have low impacts on the National Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreeing consistent marketing and interpretation of pressurised sites
Strengthening influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling unlawful activities • Addressing unsuitable visitor behaviour • Resolving conflicting recreational activities • Liaison with organisers of large events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaison with organisers of young people’s outward bound trips • Involving volunteers in visitor management • Enhancing visitors’ contributions to the local economy
C. Institutional Arrangements		
Strategic leadership and co-ordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shared endeavour 	
Engagement with key groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities in the National Park • Farmers and graziers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heads of the Valleys communities • Access for All
Integrated project planning to deliver key policy priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focussing activity on the highest priority projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring integrated planning and implementation
Ensuring the financial sustainability of initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legacy planning for projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital funding for repairs to eroded upland paths
Improving evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved knowledge of visitors • Improved understanding of environmental impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators to underpin evaluation of visitor management initiatives and strategies

A. Site-based Interventions

Sites with high levels of use and their management

- 3.2 The high number of visitors to the Park in particular locations and the impacts that result from these high levels of use is of concern to many stakeholders. There is a need to develop a stronger consensus on which locations are affected, how these impacts should be managed, whether more intensive management of sites is most appropriate or whether measures should be taken to disperse visitors to other locations. Even where sites are currently well managed, care is needed so that pressures and risks are monitored and timely interventions made, to prevent impacts rising to unacceptable levels.
- 3.3 In line with the examples of sites shown in Figures 2.16 and 2.17, it is proposed that an important distinction is made between the following two categories of sites that are used by visitors:
- i) **Honeypot sites** which currently or potentially have the capacity to provide high quality experiences for large numbers of visitors where impacts on the environment, local communities and others can be kept within acceptable limits. These sites can be split between those already experiencing high levels of use (such as the Mountain Centre at Libanus, the Craig y Nos Country Park and Llangorse Lake) and those that deserve to be better known and enjoyed (such as the Govilon Line cycle way, Pen y Crug hill fort west of Brecon and Goytre Warf on the canal). The issue of how these sites are interpreted and promoted to visitors is addressed in **Action B.2**.
 - ii) **Environmentally pressured sites** where visitor activities are having impacts (often in combination with other causes) which are deemed unacceptable and where management intervention is needed to reduce or mitigate these impacts¹⁰. This category can be split between sites where the impacts are long-term (i.e. they carry on after visitors depart) and those that are time-limited, occurring at times of peak use.

¹⁰ These impacts may relate to many issues such as biodiversity, cultural heritage, landscape quality, natural resources (e.g. soils or water), public access or productive land management.

Agreement over which are the most pressurised sites and routes

- 3.4 Lack of systematically collected data on the impacts of visitors means that there is currently no clear consensus from partners over where the most pressurised sites and routes are. This is holding back concerted action to address this pressure. There is a need to agree with conservation, landowning and tourism interests which are the outdoor recreational sites and routes that should receive priority attention for intervention to address the negative impacts of visitor activity.
- 3.5 Lack of recent evidence, particularly evidence that distinguishes the impact of visitors from other sources of environmental harm, is likely to be a constraint. Data from the National Park Authority's 2013 Upland Path Survey (para. 2.32) and analysis of NRW research on species/habitat sensitivity to disturbance (para. 2.40) can contribute to this work. In the long-term, better understanding of environmental objectives and limits (**Action A.2**) can be incorporated into reviews of these sites. However in the short-term, it is recognised that the assessment will need to be based on expert judgements. Where there is a lack of reliable benchmarking data (for instance showing change in habitat quality), it may only be possible to rank sites against each other. This will still be sufficient to establish priorities for intervention and provide justification for funding bids.
- 3.6 It is suggested that the 15 Landscape Character Areas (LCA) mapped in the Landscape Character Assessment of the National Park in 2012¹¹ should form the spatial framework for this assessment. An initial list of environmentally pressured sites in each LCA, based on information provided by stakeholders during the preparation of this Plan, is provided in a separately prepared Annex to this Plan.

Recommended Action A.1. Identify, with partners, the most environmentally pressured sites and routes requiring attention to address visitor impacts.

¹¹ BBNPA (2012). Landscape Character Assessment of the Brecon Beacons. Report by Fiona Fyfe Associates.

Better understanding of environmental disturbance and damage

- 3.7 A long-term aspiration must be to develop a better understanding of the ways in which outdoor recreation affects the ecology and other aspects of the most valuable environmental sites in the National Park. It is suggested that a start can be made on this by drawing up environmental objectives and trigger points or limits of acceptable change for key sites.
- 3.8 A brief review of the different approaches that can be used is provided in **Box 3.1** (it is suggested that the environmental limits approach will be most appropriate to this task). This might take account of the ecosystems approach (para. 2.27 and Box 2.1).

Recommended Action A.2. Develop and deliver a site-based approach, focussing initially on the most environmentally sensitive sites, identifying the limits of acceptable environmental condition, setting management objectives and monitoring change in relation to these.



Iltyd Pools SSSI near Libanus, where disturbance by people walking dogs in the spring may have reduced populations of ground nesting birds

Box 3.1. Different approaches available for planning site-based interventions

The report *Promoting outdoor recreation in the English National Parks: Guide to good practice* (2005 for the Countryside Agency) identifies a series of models that can help frame the strategic direction National Parks can take in terms of dealing with visitor issues. The following models (most of which are described more fully in that report) can be considered as the basis for setting site-based objectives in the Brecon Beacons.

- **Carrying capacity** – Determines the threshold level of activity beyond which the resource base will deteriorate. It is a complex and potentially confusing concept, not least because there is rarely a simple cause and effect relationship between amount of use and impacts.
- **Limits of acceptable change** - Focuses on the management of visitor impacts by firstly identifying desirable conditions for visitor activity to occur, then how much change is acceptable. This model offers great potential to be developed to suit the needs identified in this Plan.
- **Recreational opportunity spectrum** – Focuses on zoning an area by identifying a spectrum of settings, activities and opportunities that can be

provided by that area in order to create a diversity of experiences. May be suitable for large popular multi-use sites (honeypots).

- **Visitor experience model** – Emphasises the social and human dimensions of visitor management and the role that a planned approach to interpretation (differentiating messages appropriate at different stages in a visit to a location) can play in influencing behaviour and enjoyment. Should be addressed at both a Park-wide and site-specific scale.
- **Tourism optimisation management model** - Focuses on achieving optimum performance of the tourism industry rather than limiting activity. May be suitable for groups of sites at an area level (for instance the Upper Swansea Valley).
- **Quality of life capacity model** – Is based on the premise that the environment, economy and society provide a range of benefits for human life, and it is all these benefits which need to be protected and/or enhanced. It fits with the ecosystem services approach.

Addressing path erosion

- 3.9 It is likely that many of the locations identified through **Action A.1** will be sections of upland path. Path erosion is a very visible problem that has a negative impact on the natural beauty of the National Park and also detracts from visitors' enjoyment.
- 3.10 The National Park Authority and other landowners such as the National Trust have considerable expertise and experience in path restoration and management (see for instance a summary of the techniques employed in **Box 3.1**).
- 3.11 The Authority drew up a plan in 2007 to address the deteriorating condition of upland paths through physical repair of priority paths, but progress has been slow due to the high cost of this work and a lack of funding. An updated survey of upland paths is due to take place in 2013 which will provide valuable evidence on recent trends.
- 3.12 There is a need to re-examine sources of funding for priority capital works (see Recommended **Action C.9**) and also to consider less expensive interventions that change visitor behaviour. Proactive planning is also required so that interventions can take place at an early stage before damage becomes severe. Where physical repair of paths is considered essential, this should be seen as an opportunity to provide local employment and skills.
- 3.13 It is recommended that a hierarchy of interventions, guided by the environmental objectives produced in **Action A.2**, are adopted as follows:

Recommended Action A.3. Anticipate erosion problems before they occur: Use data from the 2013 survey of upland paths to identify sections at greatest risk of future damage (particularly those on peat soils) and undertake precautionary intervention to prevent deterioration.

Recommended Action A.4. Prevent eroded paths getting worse: Undertake 'soft' interventions (i.e. not requiring expensive and intrusive 'engineering' work to paths) to alter the behaviour of path users, so that erosion problems get no worse and vegetation is allowed to gradually recover.

Recommended Action A.5. Undertake physical repairs to the highest priority sections: Revisit the path prioritisation programme identified in the 2007 Upland Erosion Strategy, using data from the forthcoming 2013 survey to identify sections where erosion has the worst landscape and user impacts and/or where other measures to reduce erosion are least likely to be effective (for instance where there are no alternative routes that users can be directed to). This may involve extra assessment of landscape impact and alternative identification beyond existing methodology.

- 3.14 There are opportunities to use the maintenance and repair of paths to deliver other social and economic benefits. This includes the employment of local businesses as contractors who can be encouraged to provide skills to new staff through apprenticeships.

Recommended Action A.6. When letting contracts for physical repairs to paths, adopt a social procurement policy to maximise the social and economic benefits of these contracts (for instance selecting contractors with locally-based staff and/or who train apprentices).

- 3.15 These actions to improve the condition of paths must be accompanied by better interpretive information for users, explaining how they can help prevent erosion and assist restoration, as well as through the promotion of codes of conduct. These opportunities are addressed under the second theme of 'Communication and Influence'.



Highly used and maintained path from The Storey Arms on the way up to Pen y Fan

Box 3.2. Practical techniques for positive access management

- **Promoting selected routes.** On open access land, the public can choose where they walk but most people will use established routes that follow their 'desire line' (often the route to a prominent point or along the easiest terrain). Controlling where people gain access to open country (such as with roadside parking places, fences and stiles), and using interpretation boards to explain the reason for this, can influence the location of desire lines.

Discouraging use of unsuitable desire lines can be difficult where they are long established. Simply blocking paths crossing open country is not usually successful but covering a path with brushwood, mowing vegetation to create a new route and using a temporary sign explaining why this is being done can be successful. Many people tend not to walk far from their car, so limiting or preventing car parking close to sensitive areas can be successful.

- **Coping with erosion of popular routes.** In general, least erosion is caused where walkers are offered a reasonably level and narrow (up to 1m width) path. Boggy areas and organic soils (peat) are particularly susceptible to erosion and once a slippery or bumpy section of path has been created, people will try to avoid it, enlarging the erosion. Gullying from rainwater can quickly exacerbate man-made erosion. Taking pre-emptive action to improve drainage and the path surface and defining the path alignment can avoid problems developing.

Where horse riders, cyclists and motorised vehicles are using routes, erosion can be more severe and the surface of paths may need regular maintenance by creating drainage channels, regrading and filling holes with stone or, in extreme cases, using an artificial medium ('geotextile') to allow soils and vegetation to recover.

An explanation of the problem and how visitors can help reduce it (publicised through on-site interpretation boards, leaflets and websites) should accompany physical works.

The National Park Authority's Upland Path Erosion Strategy includes a set of Guiding Principles that cover best practice in more detail.

Conserving the sense of remoteness

- 3.16 Remoteness, and the feelings of wildness and tranquillity that accompanies it, are recognised as one of the key special qualities of the National Park, particularly on Mynydd Du in the west of the National Park. This remoteness is partly a result of the lack of roads and other rights of way (physical constraints that will ensure that the quality of remoteness is maintained) and partly a result of visitors' lack of knowledge about the area.
- 3.17 The promotion of new walking routes, such as the Beacons Way, and rising visitor numbers at promoted sites, such as Llyn y Fan Fach, are altering the feel of this area of the Park. In these open landscapes, the threshold for what people perceive as 'busy' or 'crowded' may be low, meaning that small increases in use can have a big impact on the tranquillity of the area, visitors' experience and conservation status of the environment
- 3.18 It is unclear how effective the National Park Authority's Remote Areas Policy has been on protecting this quality. Some businesses in the west of the National Park complain that it has been unfairly used to constrain their economic development. A new approach that focusses on remote areas of unenclosed countryside is proposed.

Recommended Action A.7. Create a new 'Undisturbed Landscapes' designation to identify the specific areas of remote common land on Mynydd Du and other quiet areas of unenclosed countryside. In these areas intrusive activities should be actively discouraged through the assertive use of existing powers (such as under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000), with lower tolerance than in other areas, and through appropriate interpretation material.
- 3.19 This should involve the tight enforcement with partners (such as landowners and police) of legal powers to prevent unauthorised vehicle access, controlling commercial recreational activities, limiting the size of organised groups, ensuring dogs are kept under control, stopping unauthorised wild camping, stopping cycling and horse riding off rights of way and preventing other inappropriate activities. It should also involve the use of low key waymarking and other interpretation material at access points, and the sensitive use of path surfacing.

- 3.20 The proposed 'Undisturbed Landscapes' designation should not apply to the villages and enclosed farmland in the remote areas of the National Park. **Action A.11** recognises the need to enhance visitor facilities in some villages in the remoter west of the National Park, in line with support for sustainable development.
- 3.21 See also Recommended **Action B.8** on extension of the National Park Authority's Events Policy.

Tackling peak time traffic issues and inappropriate parking

- 3.22 Traffic congestion which causes seasonal and peak time impacts, especially in towns like Brecon and villages like Talybont-on-Usk and on narrow roads in the Black Mountains, is of some concern to a proportion of local communities and businesses, particularly farmers in affected areas. If left unchecked it is likely that short-term problems will become more serious and entrenched long-term issues.

Recommended Action A.8. Continue to develop and deliver the Brecon Beacons Visitor Transport Initiative, encouraging modal change to forms of transport (e.g. bus services such as the Beacons Bus, electric cars and bicycles) with lower environmental and social impacts.

- 3.23 In 2012 the National Park Authority and Powys County Council produced a Visitor Transport Plan which set out a number of recommendations to encourage visitors to use low-carbon transport modes and reduce car mileage. There are opportunities to complement the work of the Visitor Transport Initiative by addressing solutions to congestion problems at particular sites. A range of interventions, from advisory signage to regulation (such as the use of Traffic Regulation Orders) can be considered.

Recommended Action A.9. Identify priority sites for traffic management interventions and work with local people to identify and implement solutions, ideally based on local community implementation.

- 3.24 As with traffic congestion, inappropriate parking in gateways to farms and fields and along narrow lanes is felt to cause significant problems and conflict to local communities, residents and farmers. The proliferation of ad hoc parking gradually erodes landscape character,

restricts farm operations and can become a road safety issue. This is largely a seasonal or peak time issue which is particularly acute around more popular walking routes in the Black Mountains and also on the road to Llyn y Fan Fach on Mynydd Du.

- 3.25 A policy in the Deposit Local Development Plan for the National Park (SP17) addresses the provision of traffic and parking management which is necessary for the enhancement of the sustainable transport network. It may be helpful to re-examine how this policy can be used to provide suitable visitor parking in areas where inappropriate parking now takes place.

- 3.26 Within the context of this policy, there may be opportunities to work with existing businesses, including visitor attractions, which are able to provide additional secure visitor parking and facilities. Businesses providing this parking may benefit from additional trade (e.g. Pubs) or through charging for parking. Part 4, Class B of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended) already makes provision for landowners to be able to use their land for any purpose (including temporary car parks) for up to 28 days per year.

- 3.27 Better information and interpretation has an important part to play (covered in more detail under the second theme). The smart use of technology such as electronic signage and mobile apps offers opportunities for providing timely information to visitors, helping them to make better decisions about where to park and how to avoid congestion. The disadvantages of some of the technology, such as poor mobile reception and the distractions it can cause drivers, also needs to be considered.

- 3.28 All these issues can be examined through a strategic approach to improving visitor parking as part of wider efforts to encourage modal shift and reduce car mileage amongst both visitors and the local population.

Recommended Action A.10. Draw up a Car Parking Plan for the National Park which should address issues such as the zoning of parking areas, charging, the potential for communities and businesses to provide car parking, the use of technology to better inform visitors and a strategy to prevent parking on common land.

Improving visitor facilities

- 3.29 Visitor facilities are unevenly spread across the National Park, with facilities being much less well developed in the more remote areas in the west of the National Park. This creates missed opportunities to attract visitors to these areas of the National Park and to increase visitor spend in local businesses, particularly from day visitors, and it may also exacerbate visitor behaviour issues.

Recommended Action A.11. Work with businesses and communities, particularly in the west of the National Park, to identify the scope to fill gaps in the provision of facilities in villages such as toilets, shelter in bad weather and places to buy food and drink during the day.

- 3.30 The Herefordshire Community Toilet project provides a good example that could be transferred to the Brecon Beacons.



Street scene in Llandeilo outside the western edge of the National Park

B. Communication and Influence

Using an understanding of visitor impacts to inform promotion and management

- 3.31 Many visitors have strong preconceptions about the qualities of the National Park that they come to visit – particularly the wild, tranquil and often challenging character of the uplands. In some areas, particularly the most popular upland walking routes and destinations, visitors' desire to experience these qualities is reducing these qualities and diminishing visitors' experiences.
- 3.32 Intervention is needed at two levels: Firstly to promote the many high quality experiences that have low impacts on the National Park through the way that the National Park is branded and marketed; and secondly to enhance management of the most popular sites and routes so that they can comfortably sustain the current high demand. Both of these will be achieved through co-ordinated use of high quality interpretation and marketing material.



Staff at the Mountain Centre, Libanus, helping visitors get the most from their trip

Highlighting the richness of experiences that have low impacts on the National Park

- 3.33 There are opportunities to highlight the many qualities that the Brecon Beacons provide as alternative and additional experiences to those that are currently best known by visitors, possibly through regular National Park information sections in local newspapers. There is particular merit in promoting activities that are likely to have low negative impacts and that can provide strong social and economic benefits. This includes walking along well-marked low level paths such as beside the Monmouthshire and Brecon canal, visiting countryside parks such as Craig-y-nos and historic sites such as Tretower Court, and taking in the rich local culture in towns and villages.
- 3.34 In contrast to walking in the remoter landscapes of the National Park, many of these experiences have the added benefit of providing opportunities for visitors to contribute more to the local economy in shops and restaurants.
- 3.35 The recently concluded branding study undertaken for the Sustainable Destination Partnership provides the basis for a new generic Brecon Beacons brand available to all businesses promoting the Brecon Beacons to their customers. It will be important that the promotion of tourism through this brand is consistent with the need to encourage experiences that conserve and enhance the National Park's special qualities.

Recommended Action B.1. Use the new Brecon Beacons brand to promote the full range of experiences that the National Park offers to visitors, ensuring that interpretation messages take account of the impacts that popular activities can have in fragile environments.

Agreeing consistent marketing and interpretation of popular honeypot locations and routes

- 3.36 As noted earlier (para. 3.3), promoting the diversity of recreational opportunities will not, and should not, stop demand at the most popular locations, such as Pen y Fan, Llangorse Lake and The Skirrid. Their natural beauty and the opportunities for active enjoyment of the outdoors will continue to draw large numbers of visitors in future.
- 3.37 There is a need to agree and adopt consistent approaches to the promotion of these honeypot locations and routes by all tourism providers and others involved in visitor management. Whilst footpaths, bridleways and tracks are already signposted opportunities to improve the clarity and consistency of routes to honeypot locations should be taken. The following recommendation addresses this need for consistent messages to be given that are based on an understanding of the sites' conservation needs and their potential for quiet enjoyment.

Recommended Action B.2. For each of the most popular visitor attractions and locations, agree the key interpretive messages, based on the desired management outcomes for both the resource and visitor. Tourism providers should be encouraged to use these when referring visitors to these areas.

- 3.38 Consistent with the approach in **Action A.1** (which refers to identification of the most environmentally pressurised sites), it is suggested that the framework of the 15 Landscape Character Areas¹² should be used as the spatial framework for this work. The separately prepared Annex to this report, which examines each of the Character Areas in turn, summarises the special qualities of that area and lists the most popular locations.
- 3.39 This work will need the involvement of representatives of tourism providers, landowners, farmers and communities (including Walkers

¹² BBNPA (2012). Landscape Character Assessment of the Brecon Beacons. Report by Fiona Fyfe Associates.

are Welcome groups). At a National Park level this could also involve liaison with the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild.

Strengthening influence

- 3.40 A significant change in how visitors expect to experience the natural environment and attractions has occurred over the past few years across the whole of the UK. The shifting focus to 'visitor experiences' delivered through more organised means and the growth in use of the internet as a way of accessing information has meant that a series of new challenges in terms of visitor management have emerged.
- 3.41 Discussions with stakeholders and the results of workshops and surveys have highlighted concerns in local communities and among some landowners and farmers about the impacts of inappropriate activities and behaviour of visitors. These are split between activities that are unlawful (such as unauthorised raves and joyriding), those that may be lawful but where behaviour can be inappropriate, those where conflict between different uses causes problems and those where problems are caused by a lack of visitor facilities.

Tackling unlawful activities

- 3.42 Whilst illegal use of motorised vehicles on common land and rights of way are already being addressed, including through action by the Police, there are still unacceptable levels of these activities in some locations, such as on the Gap Road and on Grwyne Fawr and surrounding hills. This causes a noise nuisance, damage to soils and vegetation and disturbs other visitors, local residents, wildlife and livestock. Initial damage to soils from vehicles can be difficult to repair under typical levels of legal recreational use.

Recommended Action B.3: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) should be drawn up with the Police service over the use of powers to discourage unauthorised vehicles (see **Box 3.4**). Discussions should also take place, formalised in a MoU if appropriate, with the Crown Prosecution Service, over their approach to taking forward prosecutions.

Box 3.4. Powers to control illegal off-road vehicle access

Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 enables the police to seize and dispose of vehicles being driven without lawful authority off-road or on any road that is a footpath, bridleway or restricted byway and in such a manner as to cause or be likely to cause alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public. Seizure tends to follow one or more formal warnings by police under Section 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

- 3.43 Farmers comment that cyclists, riders and large organised groups of walkers who cross open country (not on rights of way) are exceeding their rights of access as defined under the CRoW Act. This can cause disruption of livestock grazing and increases farmers' management costs.
- 3.44 It will be helpful to gather information on the full extent of this issue, enabling particular locations and activities to be better understood. The National Park Authority will aim to work closely with landowners in order to do this and ensure that incidents are able to be effectively reported and issues resolved.

Recommended Action B.4. Develop a simple mechanism for farmers and landowners to report incidents to the National Park Authority where visitors or their activities have caused problems.

- 3.45 This information will help inform a more generic approach to tackling problems caused by public access on commons and other open access land. Organisations such as the Forestry Commission in Wales (now part of Natural Resources Wales) have long standing experience of controlling access that is consistent with the public's rights of access. Lessons can be drawn from this experience and applied to land owned by other bodies in the National Park.

Recommended Action B.5. Agree with partners including farmers, landowners and outdoor activity providers the tolerance limits for size of groups on open access land, and activities such as wild camping, before special licences are required and develop a mechanism for administering these licences.

- 3.46 **Action B.8** on extending the National Park Authority's Events Policy is also relevant to this topic.

Addressing unsuitable visitor behaviour

- 3.47 Ill-informed or unintentional visitor behaviour can be an issue for land managers and communities and can cause unintentional damage to habitats and heritage assets. Examples include casual littering, disturbance by dogs off leads (causing livestock on commons to leave their hefts, or worrying of sheep), gates being left open and visitors straying from rights of way.
- 3.48 The promotion of recreational codes of conduct is a recognised way of making visitors aware of their responsibilities. A range of such codes already exist (such as the Countryside Code) and Natural Resources Wales are in the process of preparing a 'family' of these codes. In some cases there is a need to make the generic standards of these national codes fit the local circumstances of the Brecon Beacons (for instance relating them to specific access points or environmental conditions).
- 3.49 During 2012, A Sustainable Walking Code for the Brecon Beacons was researched for the National Park Authority as part of the Walking with Offa project. This reviewed a number of existing codes, including those prepared for other National Parks, and recommended that four key messages should be disseminated to walkers in the Brecon Beacons. There is now a need to promote this and other codes to visitors through the tourism sector in the National Park.

Recommended Action B.6. Draw on existing national codes of conduct to develop and deliver a consistent approach to the promotion of locally relevant standards of visitor conduct. Dissemination methods should include training of tourism businesses and recreation providers, media launches, leaflets, links on webpages and targeted use of signage at key sites, following best practice in interpretation methods.

Resolving conflicting recreational activities

- 3.50 The activities that visitors undertake in the National Park are not always compatible with each other and there are instances of conflicts between different users. Examples include canoeists and fishermen on the Usk; and cyclists, walkers and horse riders on paths.
- 3.51 The solution to these issues will require dialogue and agreement between organisations representing the different activities. Organisations such as the National Park Authority, Natural Resources Wales and South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group have a role as 'honest brokers' to bring groups together and find resolution.

Recommended Action B.7. Continue to work with partners to facilitate dialogue and agreement between different groups of recreational users to resolve areas of conflict.



Different recreational activities taking place along the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal

Liaison with organisers of large events

- 3.52 Organised events put on by charities and private companies help to put the National Park on the map and may introduce new visitors to the Brecon Beacons. However, as the popularity and scale of these events grows, their cumulative impact on the local environment and communities may be negative if they do not happen in a co-ordinated way.
- 3.53 The National Park Authority has recently adopted an Events Policy on its own land that encourages organisers of events to consult it at the planning stage of the events, allowing the Authority to liaise with other partners such as grazier associations and tourism providers. This is starting to work well but does not currently extend to areas of the National Park not owned by the Authority.

Recommended Action B.8. Extend the National Park Authority's Events Policy to cover land under other ownership ensuring that a consistent Brecon Beacons-wide approach is taken to managing the impacts of organised events.

This may be achieved in two ways. Firstly, some landowners will wish to adopt the Events Policy as part of their own on-going liaison with events' organisers and secondly, other landowners may delegate responsibility for doing this to the National Park Authority.

Liaison with organisers of young people's outward bound trips

- 3.54 The Central Beacons and Black Mountains in particular, are regularly used by schools, youth groups and organisations such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and Scouts to give young people challenging experiences in wild locations.
- 3.55 Activities such as wild camping, which is popular with these groups (as it is with some individuals and families), can leave behind lasting impacts of disturbance to habitats and pollution in fragile landscapes. Large groups can disturb wildlife and grazing livestock and reduce the sense of tranquillity for others.
- 3.56 The South Wales Outdoor Activities Providers Group provides access to many of the organisations that administer these trips, although it does not cover groups that are self-guided once the activity is taking place.

Recommended Action B.9. Continue to work with the South Wales Outdoor Activities Providers Group (including the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres), and engage directly with self-guided groups such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme to encourage schools, youth groups and organisations to adopt behaviour and use locations that reduce their negative impacts on the upland areas they use for their activities.

Involving volunteers in visitor management

- 3.57 The National Park Authority and The National Trust already have active volunteer programmes where interested members of the public give their time to help warden popular visitor locations such as the Waterfall Country, collect information from visitors through surveys and help with management tasks such as path maintenance. In addition, initiatives such as the Walkers Are Welcome project harness the knowledge and enthusiasm of local people on a voluntary basis.
- 3.58 These volunteering activities provide a way for local communities and visitors to contribute to the conservation, and promote understanding and enjoyment, of the National Park. They can also enhance the health and well-being of volunteers and provide them with new skills and experience which may lead to opportunities for paid employment.

- 3.59 Running volunteer programmes that achieve these objectives is a time consuming activity that requires adequate resourcing. In addition, volunteers may not be a suitable replacement for employed staff or contractors (particularly for skilled or onerous tasks). It is also important that volunteer programmes do not displace the activity of local businesses.

Recommended Action B.10. Develop a co-ordinated approach to the involvement of volunteers in visitor management, with cross-promotion between organisations offering volunteering opportunities.

Enhancing visitors' contributions to the local economy

- 3.60 There are important opportunities to increase the economic benefits that visitors bring. This is likely to involve encouraging visitors to spend more with local businesses, converting day visitors into staying visitors and developing enhanced visitor gifting schemes. These are activities being pursued by the Sustainable Destination Partnership through the Sustainable Tourism Strategy. There are particular opportunities for promoting local produce in visitor marketing and an enhanced visitor gifting scheme that raises money for conservation work in the National Park. Lessons from other protected landscapes in the UK show that the main challenge is to administer such schemes cost-effectively.

Recommended Action B.11 Continue working through the Sustainable Destination Partnership to develop and pilot ways of enhancing visitors' economic contributions to the management of the National Park, particularly in relation to an enhanced and cost-effective visitor gifting scheme and the promotion of local produce in visitor marketing.

C. Institutional Arrangements

3.61 This final group of issues and recommendations addresses the ways that the National Park Authority and its partners should work, singly and together, to improve visitor management.

Strategic leadership and co-ordination

A shared endeavour

3.62 The responsibilities and opportunities to improve visitor management in the National Park are held by a wide range of organisations and interests. There is a need for greater co-ordination and sharing of work at both policy development and project delivery levels. This should include taking responsibility for advocating and co-ordinating the implementation of this Plan.

3.63 **Figure 3.1** shows that visitor management is an important part of the delivery of both National Park purposes and also the duty on the National Park Authority to foster economic and social wellbeing. It is important that it continues to be a shared responsibility, fully supported by conservation, tourism and community interests.

Figure 3.1. Conceptual relationship between Visitor Management and the National Park's Purposes and Duty



Recommended Action C.1. Strategic leadership for overseeing the implementation of this plan should lie with a broad-based partnership operating at a high level in the National Park, representing environmental, business and community interests. The constitution of this group should be established in the context of the on-going review of the National Park Management Plan.

Engagement with key groups

3.64 Although there is effective engagement and close working between many of the interests in the National Park, an important finding of the workshops and consultations that took place during the preparation of this Plan is that there are opportunities to strengthen visitor management and provision through more effective engagement with several key interest groups. These are the communities living and working in the National Park and those living just outside (in particular around the Western and Southern margins of the park) who are frequent visitors to the area. A very important subset of these local communities are farmers and graziers, their interests and responsibilities being sufficiently distinct from others that they are dealt with as an important interest group in their own right.

3.65 It is worth noting that under the Welsh Government's Future Generations Bill (due to be introduced before the Assembly in Autumn 2013) there will be a requirement on Wales' National Park Authorities to engage and work with others to highlight and demonstrate Sustainable Development as their central organizing principle. In addition, all Local Authorities are moving towards collaborative working to improve outcomes for their communities at reduced costs, through development of Single Integrated Plans, delivered through Local Strategic Boards (LSBs). Principles of good stakeholder engagement that may be used in these processes are summarised in **Box 3.5**.

Box 3.5. Principles and use of stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement is the process by which an organisation invites people who may be affected and/or who have influence on the implementation of decisions to get involved in deliberation, dialogue, decision-making and action to achieve desired outcomes. Public engagement is specifically about citizens having a voice in the public decisions that affect their lives.

Government policy in Wales emphasises the importance of effective public engagement as a crucial aspect of ensuring that all organisations in Wales develop a more 'citizen-focused' approach to the design and delivery of their policies, programmes and services.

The Welsh Government's current Sustainable Development Scheme, *One Wales: One Planet*, which has 'Involvement' as one of only two core principles, states "*People and communities are at the heart of sustainable development, so we will be inclusive in our involvement of all our stakeholders in the development of our policies and programmes.*"

To get value from public engagement a whole organization approach is required. It is the responsibility of decision makers and senior staff to set the tone and overall approach, the cultural commitment to engagement and collaboration. Middle management need to assume responsibility for a coherent programme of engagement activities, appropriate to their context and appropriately designed, resourced, managed and delivered, in order to produce clear outcomes. Operational staff are responsible for undertaking the day-to-day engagement activity, analysing the results, feeding them into decision-making and feeding-back to participants.

An aid to effective engagement is an engagement strategy describing this whole organization approach encompassing culture and direction, process management and delivery.

Communities in the National Park

- 3.66 A range of initiatives led by the National Park Authority are particularly effective at involving tourism businesses and local communities in providing high quality facilities and experiences for visitors, such as guided walks and organised outdoor recreation events. These initiatives include the Collabor8 Clusters, Rural Alliances Project, Walkers are Welcome settlements and Tourism Ambassador posts, as well as close working between the Authority staff and Brecon Beacons Tourism Association.
- 3.67 Although responses to the 2013 Brecon Beacons residents' survey (para. 2.51) show strong support for visitors and tourism, consultation during the preparation of this Plan suggests that, in communities affected by high levels of visitors at peak times, the mechanism for engaging with concerns over visitor management issues can be improved.

Recommended Action C.2. Make use of Rural Alliances and Community Council Clusters and similar arrangements to involve local communities in assessing their local visitor management needs and opportunities, and the mitigation of impacts. This can be done by collecting evidence through local residents' surveys and by drawing on the Community Council representatives in Rural Alliances.

Farmers and graziers

- 3.68 There is a feeling from some in the farming community, particularly those not involved in diversified tourism enterprises, that they are powerless and unsupported in coping with the visitors who cross their land. Some of the contact that occurs between farmers and visitors is often perceived as negative (for instance when farmers experience blocked gateways, dog worrying and littering) even if these experiences are relatively rare. These perceptions and problems can start to be addressed by improving liaison between farmer and landowner representatives and the organisations involved in visitor management.

Recommended Action C.3. Hold regular (at least once a year) meetings between representatives of farmers, commoners associations, landowners, the National Park Authority and other land management bodies (such as National Resources Wales).

- 3.69 Local meetings already take place between the commoners associations on Mynydd Du and the National Park Authority (the Meithrin Mynydd group). There may be value in holding similar meetings for other areas of the National Park such as the Black Mountains.
- 3.70 **Actions B.4** and **B.5** address other issues concerning the relationship between farming and visitors.

Heads of the Valleys communities

- 3.71 There is a lack of good quality information about use of the National Park by residents of the urban areas along its southern edge. Some stakeholders suggested that most day visitors from South Wales come from more prosperous areas such as Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. If this is the case, there are missed opportunities to offer high quality 'doorstep' recreational access at locations close to large settlements such as Brynamman, Merthyr Tydfil, Tredegar and Brynmawr; to provide an educational resource (encompassing the cultural and environmental links between the industrial landscapes of the Heads of the Valleys and the National Park); and to provide economic opportunities through skills and green jobs in countryside management and visitor management.

Recommended Action C.4. Enhance co-operative working with the Valleys Regional Park and explore potential links with Communities First initiatives in the Heads of the Valleys.

Access for All

- 3.72 The National Park Authority is involved in work on its own behalf and with other agencies to encourage access to people who experience barriers such as physical disability, learning difficulties, economic disadvantage or a lack of knowledge or cultural familiarity with the

National Park. The principle of Least Restrictive Access¹³, is applied throughout National Park activities including making information available on accessible sites through the Brecon Beacons website and involvement in the Mosaic and Crossing Park Boundaries Projects.

Recommended Action C.5. Continue to use the National Park Social Inclusion and Child Poverty Action Plan 2012 to 2014 and make use of NRW's Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey Profiles for health, to extend visitor access to a wide audience including those with disabilities and/or poor health, ethnic minorities, disadvantaged communities, those on low incomes and young people.

Integrated project planning to deliver key policy priorities

- 3.73 Visitor management projects have many different potential outcomes and may, if not fully planned, have unforeseen effects. By focussing on a relatively small number of key policy priorities and maximising the benefits to both of the National Park purposes and the Authority's duty it is possible to make the most effective use of resources and achieve win-win outcomes that enhance visitors' enjoyment of the special qualities, conserve natural beauty and enhance the wellbeing of communities and businesses.

Recommended Action C.6. Looking beyond the actions set out in this Plan, the objectives that will be identified in the forthcoming National Park Management Plan should be used to focus co-ordinated and adequately resourced activity by all teams of staff in the National Park Authority and their partners on a small number of project areas that will form the basis for integrated action during the period of the Management Plan.

Recommended Action C.7. For projects led by the National Park Authority the Departmental Management Team within the Authority's Countryside Directorate should be used to co-ordinate and sign-off project plans (including applications for external funding) developed by the different teams working in that Directorate.

¹³ 'By all reasonable means: inclusive access to the outdoors' (2005) CCW

Ensuring the financial sustainability of initiatives

Legacy planning for projects

- 3.74 The projects undertaken by the National Park Authority and its partners are inevitably constrained by the relatively short-term commitments made by funding organisations and programmes. This means that while the guarantee of funding usually lasts for between two and five years, the requirement to maintain facilities developed by projects often lasts much longer. As part of the initial project plan, resources from other initiatives need to be identified to meet these long-term maintenance requirements, or there should be a decision at the start of the project that activities will finish at the end of the funding period with no requirement for on-going maintenance.

Recommended Action C.8. Ensure all project plans address the impact of the funding on on-going maintenance and management requirements and also, once funding comes to an end, the need for an 'Exit Strategy' describing how the legacy of the project will be maintained beyond the end of funding.

Capital funding for repairs to eroded upland paths

- 3.75 A particular challenge for the National Park Authority's work on maintaining and improving rights of way in the National Park is the completion of the Welsh Government's recent Rights of Way Improvement Programme (RoWIP) funding programme, pending a review on future spending. That programme has provided valuable resources to supplement funding provided by Local Authorities which is likely to be under tight scrutiny in coming years. The need for significant sums of capital funding to repair priority sections of upland paths, and take pre-emptive action to prevent future erosion, will require new sources of funding.

Recommended Action C.9. A campaign should be developed on a partnership basis to raise the attention of funding bodies to the significant need for repair and maintenance of rights of way in the National Park. Information on the social and economic benefits derived from use of these paths will help to substantiate the need and value of future capital and management funding.

Improving evidence

- 3.76 This Plan has identified significant gaps in knowledge about visitors, their activities and impacts. In order for interventions to be effectively targeted and evaluated, it is important that these gaps are filled and that a concise set of suitable indicators is identified for on-going monitoring. This work is likely to involve co-ordinated collection of data from a range of different partners in the private and public sectors which should be overseen by the proposed high level strategic partnership (**Action C.1**).

Improved knowledge of visitors

- 3.77 The most recent survey which provided detailed information about day visitors (covering where they come from, what their expectations are, what they do and where they go) took place in 2005. There is a need to update this information, enabling better informed interventions to manage and enhance the experience of different types of day visitors.

Recommended Action C.10. A large scale survey of day visitors should be commissioned to provide information comparable to the survey conducted in 2005.

- 3.78 While there is reasonably good data on throughput at 'turnstile' attractions (where visitor numbers are counted), there is little information on the numbers of people using the most popular outdoor recreation routes and sites (the National Trust's data on its key sites being an exception). As above, better information will enable more effective management interventions.

Recommended Action C.11. People and/or car counters should be installed (under contract from specialist providers) at the most popular car parks and at entry / exit points on popular routes.

Improved understanding of environmental impacts

- 3.79 With the exception of the condition of upland paths, there is a lack of directly collected data on the environmental impacts of visitor activities (such as disturbance to breeding birds and trampling of vegetation) which means that the influence of visitors on these special qualities is difficult to distinguish from other influences such as atmospheric pollution and the management of grazing animals. Improving this knowledge will mean that interventions can be better targeted to conserving the special qualities of the National Park.
- 3.80 The designation of the National Park as an International Dark Skies Reserve has the potential to bring about a change in visitor behaviour which may cause both new opportunities and impacts. Research to improve understanding of this new designation and quantify its benefits will help to maximise the opportunity to the status brings. The long term viability of collecting data needs to be considered when designing all monitoring and research exercises with priorities and synergies carefully identified.

Recommended Action C.12. Through ongoing monitoring and review of the Management Plan, objectives should be set and implemented for monitoring the impacts of visitors on the special qualities of the National Park and to understand the benefits brought by being an International Dark Skies Reserve.



Exploring an exhibition about the crannog on Llangorse Lake

Indicators to underpin evaluation of visitor management initiatives and strategies

- 3.81 The most recent State of the Park report was published in 2006 and an update is due to be published as part of the revised National Park Management Plan. Very few of the indicators covered by that Report address the issues raised by this Plan and there is therefore a need to create a new set of indicators to create a baseline against which future progress can be measured.

Recommended Action C.13. A set of indicators to track progress in the management of visitors, covering both the enhancement of their enjoyment of the special qualities and the reduction in their negative impacts on them, should be included in the next State of the Park report.

4. The Action Plan



Walking up to Llyn y Fan

4 The Action Plan

4.1 This final Chapter takes each of the proposed actions from the previous Chapter and assigns a lead agency and partners to its delivery. A timescale is suggested and the scale of additional resources required is briefly stated.

Abbreviations

4.2 Organisations used in this Chapter, and in Appendix 1, are abbreviated as follows:

AHOEC	Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres	LAF	Brecon Beacons Local Access Forum
BBNPA	Brecon Beacons National Park Authority	NFU	National Farmers Union
BBPS	Brecon Beacons Park Society	NRW	Natural Resources Wales
DoE	Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme	NT	The National Trust
CLA	Country Land and Business Association	SDP	Brecon Beacons Sustainable Destination Partnership
FUW	Farmers Union of Wales	SWOAPG	South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group

Issue	Actions	Lead Agency & Partners	Timescale	Scale of resources
A. Site-based Interventions				
Sites with high levels of use and their management				
Agreement over the most pressurised sites and routes	A.1. Identify the most environmentally pressurised sites	BBNPA – with NRW and other conservation and heritage bodies	2013-14	Existing staff
Better understanding of disturbance and damage to wildlife	A.2. Develop and deliver a site-based approach to identifying the limits of acceptable environmental condition, and associated management objectives	BBNPA – with NRW and other conservation and heritage bodies	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff
Addressing footpath erosion	A.3. Use data from the 2013 survey of upland paths to anticipate problems before they occur	BBNPA – with LAF partners	Ongoing	Existing staff. Delivery requires significant project funding

Issue	Actions	Lead Agency & Partners	Timescale	Scale of resources
	A.4. Undertake 'soft' interventions to prevent eroding paths getting worse	BBNPA – with LAF partners	Ongoing	Reliant on significant project funding
	A.5. Undertake physical repairs to the highest priority sections of upland paths	BBNPA – with LAF partners	Ongoing	Reliant on significant project funding
	A.6. Adopt a social procurement policy when letting large path repair contracts	BBNPA – with LAF partners	Ongoing	Existing staff. Delivery requires project funding
Conserving the sense of remoteness	A.7. During the revision of the NP Management Plan, consider the creation of a new landscape designation	BBNPA – with Management Plan partners	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff, Members
Peak time traffic issues and inappropriate parking	A.8. Continue to develop and deliver the Brecon Beacons Sustainable Transport Project	BBNPA – with sustainable transport partners	Ongoing	Separate project funding
	A.9. Adopt locally determined traffic management interventions at problem sites	BBNPA – with local communities, County Highway Authorities	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff and capital budgets
	A.10. Draw up a Car Parking Plan for the National Park	BBNPA - with Highways Authorities, landowners and Community Councils	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff – significant task
Lack of visitor facilities	A.11. Identify scope for businesses and communities to fill gaps in visitor facilities	BBNPA – with Community Councils	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff – potential project funding
B. Communication and Influence				
Using an understanding of visitor impacts to inform marketing and promotion				
Highlighting the richness of experiences that have low impacts	B.1. Use the new Brecon Beacons brand to promote the full range of visitor experiences, ensuring that messages take account of the impacts that popular activities can have in fragile environments	SDP – with all its partners	2013-14 ongoing	Existing staff

Issue	Actions	Lead Agency & Partners	Timescale	Scale of resources
Agreeing consistent marketing of popular locations and routes	B.2 Agree the key interpretation messages and management approaches for the most popular visitor locations and routes	SDP – with owners of key sites, tourism providers, farmers and communities.	2013-14	Existing staff – could be significant task
Strengthening influence				
Tackling unlawful activities	B.3. Develop an MoU with the Police over the use of enforcement powers, such as under S59 of the Police Reform Act 2002	BBNPA – with Police Forces (South Wales, Gwent, Dyfed-Powys)	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff
	B.4 Develop simple incident reporting mechanism for farmers and landowners to use	BBNPA – with NFU, FUW, CLA and Commoners Associations	2013-14	Existing staff
	B.5. Agree with partners the tolerance limits for open access before licensing is required	NRW (as national lead body) – with BBNPA and LAF partners	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff. Delivery requires significant project funding
Addressing unsuitable visitor behaviour	B.6. Increase awareness of codes of conduct amongst tourism providers and others	BBNPA – with BBT, SWOAPG and NRW	Ongoing	Existing staff
Resolving conflicting recreational activities	B.7. Continue to facilitate dialogue and agreement between different groups of recreational users to resolve areas of conflict	BBNPA – with SWOAPG and NRW	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff
Liaison with organisers of large events	B.8 Extend the principles of the NPA's Events Policy to other areas of the National Park	BBNPA with landowners	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff – could be significant task
Liaison with organisers of young people's outward bound trips	B.9 Encourage group organisers to reduce the negative impacts of their activities	BBNPA – with SWOAPG, DoE and other organisers	Ongoing	Existing staff
Involving volunteers in visitor management	B.10. Develop a co-ordinated approach to the involvement of volunteers in visitor management	BBNPA – with volunteering organisations	Ongoing	Existing staff – significant task

Issue	Actions	Lead Agency & Partners	Timescale	Scale of resources
Enhancing visitors' contributions to the local economy	B.11. Develop and pilot ways of enhancing visitors' economic contributions to the management of the National Park, particularly through an enhanced gifting scheme.	SDP, with BBT and other partners	2013-14, 2014-15	Potential new project
C. Institutional arrangements				
Strategic leadership and co-ordination				
A shared endeavour	C.1 Agree how strategic leadership for overseeing the implementation of this Plan should be vested in a high level and broad-based group	BBNPA – with partners	2013-14, 2014-15	To be agreed
Engagement with key groups				
Communities in the National Park	C.2 Make use of Rural Alliances and Community Council Clusters to involve local communities in assessing visitor management needs and mitigation of impacts	BBNPA with Rural Alliances and Community Council Clusters	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff – significant task
Farmers and graziers	C.3 Hold regular meetings with farming and landowning representatives from Mynydd Du, Fforest Fawr, Central Beacons and Black Mountains	BBNPA – with NFU, FUW, CLA, Commoners Associations and other landowner representatives	Ongoing	Existing staff
Heads of the Valleys Communities	C.3 Enhance co-operative working with the Valleys Regional Park and Communities First in the Heads of the Valleys	BBNPA – with the Valleys Regional Park Partnership	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff – significant task
Access for All	C.5 Continue relevant actions in the National Park Social Inclusion and Child Poverty Action Plan	BBNPA and partners	Ongoing	Existing staff

Issue	Actions	Lead Agency & Partners	Timescale	Scale of resources
Integrated project planning of key policy priorities				
Focussing activity on the highest priority projects	C.6 Use Management Plan objectives to identify priority projects	BBNPA – with Management Plan partners	2013 onwards	Existing staff
Ensuring integrated planning and implementation	C.7 Co-ordinate project planning through the NPA Departmental Management Team	BBNPA	Ongoing	Existing staff
Ensuring the financial sustainability of initiatives				
Legacy planning for projects	C.8 Ensure project plans include an 'Exit Strategy' to show how the legacy will be maintained	BBNPA	Ongoing	Existing staff
Capital funding for repairs to eroded paths	C.9 Raise awareness of the need for substantial new capital funding for path repairs	BBNPA – with NRW and LAF partners	Ongoing	Existing staff and members
Improving evidence				
Improved knowledge of visitors	C.10 Commission large scale survey (similar to 2005 survey) to collect information on day visitors	BBNPA	2014-15 and 3 yearly	Project funding
	C.11 Install people / car counters (through contractor) at key locations	BBNPA – with landowners including NT	2014-15 ongoing	Project funding (ongoing)
Improved understanding of environmental impacts	C.12 Set objectives for monitoring impacts of visitors on the special qualities of the National Park	BBNPA	2013-13	Existing staff
Identification of indicators to underpin the evaluation of visitor management	C.13 Establish a set of visitor management indicators as part of the next State of the Park Report	BBNPA	2013-14, 2014-15	Existing staff

Appendix 1. Proposed indicators to underpin evaluation of visitor management initiatives and strategies

The proposed indicators are listed in the order of the Recommended Actions from this Plan to which they apply. Indicators that are already proposed in the Sustainable Tourism Strategy are shown with the letters **STS**. For other abbreviations, see the list of abbreviated organisations listed at the start of Chapter 4.

Proposed indicator	Relevant action from this Plan	Source of data	Frequency
Number of site specific visitor management plans being implemented in the National Park (or plans including visitor management) STS	A.2, B.2	Review of site specific management plans	Every 3 years
Number of site specific visitor management plans less than 5 years old being implemented in the National Park (or plans including visitor management) STS	A.2, B.2	Review of site specific management plans	Every 3 years
Percentage of SSSI's in unfavourable conservation status due to recreation STS	A.2	NRW data	Every 5 years
Percentage of highly environmentally pressured sites not meeting the environmental thresholds set for them due to visitor impacts	A.2	BBNPA	Annual
Average Upland Path Survey: factor change STS	A.3, A.4, A.5	Upland Path Survey	Every 3 years
Number of reported illegal motorised vehicle incidents and percent followed up by police and CPS	B.3	BBNPA	Annual
Number of visitor management incidents reported by farmers (Action B.4)	B.4	BBNPA	Annual
Number of licences issued to organisers of activities on open access land (Action B.5)	B.5	BBNPA and partners	Annual
Number of outdoor events liaised with through the Events Policy	B.8	BBNPA and partners	Annual
Number of self-guided groups, and size of groups, using open access land	B.9	D of E, Scouts, AHOEC	Annual

Number of volunteer days involved in visitor management	B.10	BBNPA and partners	Annual
Number of tourism businesses signed up to Green Tourism Business Scheme or other relevant certification scheme STS	B.11	Certification scheme records	Every 2 years
Money collected from visitor gifting schemes which is spent on conservation projects in the National Park	B.11	BBNPA	Annual
Number of easy access events publicised by BBNP STS	C.5	Events Programme	Annually
Number of day visitors, their origins, destinations, activities and appreciation of the National Park	C.10	Visitor Survey	Every 5 years
Percentage of visitors satisfied with experience of visiting BBNP STS	C.11	Visitor Survey	Every 5 years
Percentage of visitors to the BBNP who are aware that they are in a National Park STS	C.11	Visitor Survey	Every 5 years
Footfall (either no. of cars or walkers, as appropriate) at key honeypot sites	C.11	Visitor counters	Annual, by week



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