Hello and welcome to the Autumn/Winter Edition of Community Update from the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

The Brecon Beacons have been blooming! As Chair of the National Park Authority, I have been given excellent feedback about the wildflowers which were planted in Brecon by our staff, partners and trainees in the spring. See page 7 for more about this initiative.

It is a proven fact that getting out and about in the natural world has a positive impact on physical and mental health. Two projects run by the Authority that are encouraging people to get out are the ‘Small Steps’ and ‘Active Aging’ projects. I am pleased to hear how well these have been received and the real benefits people are getting from being in our National Park. See pages 3 & 4 for more details.

Our drive to become more energy efficient has seen our hydro and solar energy schemes generate enough combined electricity to take an electric car to the moon and back. That’s a massive 736,000 miles. In just six months, the small 10kw solar panel at our Authority Depot in Ffrwdgrech Industrial Estate provided enough power to drive our new Hyundai Kona almost 28,000 miles, the equivalent of the whole circumference of the Earth. This is why the Authority has become just one of two ‘Go Ultra Low’ organisations in Wales.

Our vehicle fleet helps staff get out and about in the community, to deliver a range of services which benefit those who live, work and visit the National Park. Most recently we are supporting the Brecon 20/20 initiative to work towards a Place Plan for Brecon. With representatives from the Town Council and local groups, work to analyse a residents’ survey and develop an action plan is underway.

Teams are also supporting the Brecon Business Improvement District (BID) process, working with local businesses to understand how BID status could enhance businesses and the town.

Partnership working is the key to addressing issues which affect those who live, work and visit the National Park. I am encouraged to see how resources are being used more effectively by public service providers and will be supporting the Authority to maintain and develop relationships now and in the future.

Cllr. Gareth Ratcliffe, Chair of the BBNPA

If you would like to be placed on our mailing list or contribute to future editions, please be sure to contact the Communities Team via the A-Z of services at the end of this newsletter. This newsletter is also available online at http://www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/communities/community-newsletter/
Inspironment is a series of walks and activities run by the Sustainable Communities Team in the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. These are designed to encourage vulnerable and socially excluded groups out into the Brecon Beacons National Park as we recognise the benefit of being outside and active to health and well-being. Walks cater for all abilities, from wheelchair users to those able to undertake more adventurous mountain challenges and take place across the whole Park. Where possible walks coincide with public transport routes to encourage groups to return on their own at a later date.

We have been welcoming groups from L’Arche Brecon and Cardiff People First who have been on walks and activities with us. We’ve been exploring mountains and rivers, canals and woodlands as well as using photography and plant and animal identification to get a better understanding of the National Park. Both groups have stated that they feel much more confident in getting out by themselves. They have discovered lots of places that they didn’t realise they were able to visit with their mixed range of abilities, or how easy they were to get to.

Future with Nature at its Heart

The National Park is home to a variety of habitats and species, some of which occur nowhere else in the world.

As part of efforts across Wales, Local Nature Partners recently launched a Nature Recovery Action Plan for the Brecon Beacons National Park. Above all, the Plan is an urgent ‘call for action’ and sets a high ambition to help reverse the decline in biodiversity by developing nature networks which are more diverse, greater in extent, in better ecological condition and more joined up.

The National Park is a place where big things can and do happen. Yet the challenges are too big for any organisation, community or landowner to handle alone. Nature recovery on a meaningful scale can only take place by working together across geographic boundaries, across different land uses and involving all people. It’s on this basis that Local Nature Partners have come together to maximise nature recovery efforts and work towards a future with nature at its heart – for everyone.

To find out more, the Nature Recovery Action Plan is available to view at:

Talgarth Community Woods

Talgarth Woods is a 167 acre plantation at the edge of Talgarth owned by the Woodland Trust and now managed by a community group who are working to create an area of ancient woodland.

The Sustainable Development Fund has been crucial in the setting up of the group by funding training and equipment so that volunteers can work safely and effectively to thin the overcrowded beech trees. Using horse logging, winches and person power this way of working has a light footprint on the ground, meaning that the environment and wildlife habitats are protected. The group has worked so well that the Woodland Trust has been confident enough to give them contractor status for the next 5 years. Volunteers who work on the project not only benefit from the exercise and socialising but can also leave with a boot full of wood for their stoves. Community groups like this are essential to help manage and conserve our landscape so if you are thinking of setting up a similar project then please speak to one of our SDF officers to see if we can support you.

You can see a short film that we produced about this project here: https://youtu.be/_2lk-PWXJIM

Launch of the Nature Recovery Action Plan at this year’s Royal Welsh Agricultural Show at the Woodland Trust stand with students from Brecon High School.
Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Community Update Autumn/Winter 2019

Volunteering to Protect our Heritage

Brecon Beacons Park Authority Heritage Volunteers have been out and about, working to record the condition of some of our most precious archaeological sites.

Using a recording system devised with Cadw and a bespoke on-line field recorder developed for the project, volunteers are helping us to monitor the condition of historic monuments in our care by creating a written and photographic record, recording the changing condition of our sites and flagging up any threats or damage to our historic environment.

The work undertaken by our volunteers will help us to build a long term picture of the condition of archaeological sites in our ownership, allowing us to identify trends, note change and with the help of Area Wardens and conservation volunteer teams, develop targeted projects to protect and improve the condition of some of our most important archaeological monuments.

Volunteering Opportunities in the National Park

Volunteers work with Wardens to assist in the wide range of practical tasks that are needed to maintain and improve the National Park. This can include path work, fencing, gate repairs, watercourse clearing, tree felling and a wide range of other practical tasks. These work parties take place at various locations across the Park. The Brecon group meets on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month. The Western Area group meets on the first and third Wednesday of the month. The practical work party in the Waterfalls area operates on the second Saturday of every month.

Volunteer Patrol Wardens assist visitors to the area. This involves patrolling car parks, walking the footpaths, providing advice and guidance to the public, collecting litter and reporting any damage or concerns to the Wardens. Areas covered are the Waterfalls and the National Park Visitor Centre (Mountain Centre).

Volunteers must be over 18. For more information contact volunteer.officer@beacons-npa.gov.uk

Small Steps Project

Small Steps is a Welsh Government Funded pilot action research project run by the BBNPA’s Sustainable Communities team, in partnership with Powys Teaching Health Board. It aims to improve the health and wellbeing of residents living in the National Park area with long term mental health conditions.

The participants take part in a range of activities including willow weaving, photography, geocaching, bird watching, local history walks and other guided walks across the National Park.

The feedback so far has been very encouraging and it has been great to see how participants have become more connected to the environment and more confident in their social interaction.

“Walking made me healthier, fitter and I feel better mentally and physically” commented one of the participants.

The next stage of the project is to help develop the independence of the participants through building confidence in planning walks and activities themselves, especially in areas that are easily accessible by public transport.

Whilst the research is still ongoing, the participant feedback and anecdotal evidence suggests that the activities within the green spaces of the National Park have been very beneficial to the wellbeing of the participants (and staff involved!).

Enjoying the Waterfall Country.

Clearing gorse along Sarn Helen.

Photography day in the bluebells at Coed Cefn.

Volunteers out on site.
Between 2015 and 2017 the Vincent Wildlife Trust translocated 51 pine martens from the Scottish Highlands to mid Wales in order to reinforce the dwindling native population.

The project has received funding from the Sustainable Development Fund and over the next three years they will be installing 60 den boxes and monitoring the area with 40 camera traps to track the spread of the pine marten back in to the National Park.

The Brecon Beacons Uplands Volunteers will be working in partnership with the Vincent Wildlife Trust to identify suitable den site locations within the National Park. Gwent Drug and Alcohol Services (GDAS) will build sixty den boxes for the Uplands Volunteers to erect within the National Park and these boxes will be continuously monitored using field surveys and wildlife camera traps.

Conservation Officer Jason Rees who coordinates the project said, “This is a very exciting opportunity for the Uplands Volunteers to expand on their already extensive uplands work programme and help with boosting the population of this iconic species within the Brecon Beacons National Park.”

If you are interested in volunteering within the National Park please contact our Volunteer Development Officer volunteer.office@beacons-npa.gov.uk

Active Ageing Walks for Older People

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority has been running the Active Ageing Project since the start of 2019.

The project provides very gentle walks, tailored to the participants and often ends in a social trip to a cafe. Currently there are four active walking groups; one based around Ystradgynlais, one from Merthyr Tydfil and another in the Abergavenny/Crickhowell area and one recently started in Hay-on-Wye.

The aim of this project is to support older people to stay active, enjoy the outdoors and the company of their fellow walkers, to improve health and wellbeing. The atmosphere is very positive and supportive and participants report feeling healthier, fitter and that they enjoy the company of their fellow walkers. The long term aim is for the groups to continue walking together without further input from the project. The impact of the project is being evaluated by Cardiff University School of Social Sciences.

The project is free for participants and is funded by Sport Wales and the BBNPA’s Sustainable Development Fund For more information, please contact: Ilona Carati 07854 997561 or Alex Norman 07854 997579 email: ActiveAgeing@beacons-npa.gov.uk

National Park Ambassador Schools

National Park Education Officers have been working with Llangattock Primary School this autumn helping them to focus on how outdoor activities can improve health and well-being and how they can use local outdoor spaces to keep healthy and happy.

Llangattock Primary is the most recent school to take part in the National Park Ambassador School award. Earlier this year Heronsbridge School from Bridgend were the first school from outside of the National Park to take on and achieve their award. Their commitment to learning outdoors was truly inspiring and their interest in the National Park Ambassador School scheme followed a free twilight training session for teachers at Craig-y-nos Country Park.

The Education Team are qualified to deliver activities which provide first-hand experience and investigation to connect pupils with their unique surroundings. They are committed to delivering high quality outdoor learning in the National Park in both Welsh and English.

If you would more information about our education services please contact: lora.davies@beacons-npa.gov.uk


If you are interested in volunteering within the National Park please contact our Volunteer Development Officer volunteer.office@beacons-npa.gov.uk

Infants from Llangattock Primary School at Llangattock Beechwood which is owned and managed by the BBNPA.
From September 2019 Craig-y-nos Country Park will be home to a new Geopark Discovery Point. The Fforest Fawr UNESCO Global Geopark covers the western half of the National Park and the new Discovery Point will allow people to plan their visit and find out more about the Geopark.

The terraced area outside the restaurant at Craig-y-nos will host a 3D bronze model of a large section of the upper Swansea Valley, the area around the Country Park. The model is currently being designed by local artist Rubin Eynon and will be cast at a Welsh foundry before being placed in situ later in the summer.

Three new wooden ‘monoliths’ will provide inspiration and information on places to discover in the wider Geopark. Dotted around the terrace there will be new benches with interpretive table tops, each with a different theme, giving visitors something to explore whilst enjoying refreshments and the views. For updates follow @fforestfawrgeopark on Facebook and Instagram.

Funding for the Discovery Point is being provided by the National Park Authority and Welsh Government.

Talyllyn’s TIC rivals the TARDIS

Bigger on the inside it may not be, but as one of the smallest Tourist Information Centres in the UK, the TIC Telephone Box provides a whistle stop tour of time, giving a clear picture of the historical legacies left behind by the people of Talyllyn.

The Llyn Syfaddan History Group were able to redevelop the K6 model telephone box thanks to a grant of £5,907 from the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority’s Sustainable Development Fund.

Roger Reece, of the Llyn Syfaddan History Group, said it was due for closure when the History Group saw an opportunity for a makeover of this much-loved Talyllyn feature. “As part of the British Telecom’s Adopt a Kiosk Scheme, Llangors Community Council became the proud owners of the phone box in July 2017, with the History Group taking over responsibility for its development and management. The box has received a much-needed re-vamp – it has been repainted and repaired, and bi-lingual interpretation installed along with an array of local photographs and advertising space for businesses. This has transformed it into a mini Visitor Centre to promote local history and culture, the visitor opportunities in the area and our local businesses”.

For more information about Llyn Syfaddan History Group and its work visit the group’s website - https://www.llangorsehistory.org
For a few years now, significant work has been taking place at the former Gunpowder Works at Pontneddfechan. All activity is not only focusing on conserving the historic remains and flora and fauna of this site, but celebrating it as well. Now the scheduled ruins have been saved, it is time to focus on the biodiversity to be found in this remarkable river valley. The high sided, narrow gorges in this area, along with their fast flowing rivers, create the perfect conditions for our Celtic rainforest to thrive, leading it to gain top biodiversity protection.

Ten different bat species, over 100 moth species, hundreds of ancient woodland plants and some of the rarest mosses and lichens live within the Mellte Valley amongst the ancient woodland found there.

However, in the 1960s, this area was chosen for mass plantations of non-native coniferous species to restock the nation’s timber supply. Not only do these fast growing species block out light which restricts plant growth but they also provide just a fraction of the nutrients that our native trees and ground flora can give.

As the wood cannot be harvested commercially, we are stepping in. Alongside the river bank, some of the non-native species are currently being removed to be replaced with locally sourced oak, downy birch, hazel, wych elm and rowan trees.

Once this work is completed, signs of our ancient woodland plants returning should soon become apparent.
To help improve biodiversity around Brecon, the Sustainable Communities Team from the BBNPA has been working with Powys County Council (PCC) to turn some of the roadside verges into wildflower meadows.

Typically verges are a mix of scrub grass which offer poor habitats for pollinators and other wildlife. Two sites were chosen as a pilot project, one on Camden Road and another on Cradoc Road. Funding was then secured from the Sustainable Development Fund to purchase the seeds needed and the BBNPA’s Warden Team provided 250 yellow rattle plugs as this will reduce the vigour grasses and will allow the wildflowers to flourish.

Preparation and sowing of the sites took place in April 2019 and was achieved with the help of the Prince’s Trust Trainees and a group from the Healthy Lives Project who involve people with learning disabilities in Brecon. The sites will be mown once in the autumn and left to self-seed in following years. Future verges have been identified by PCC and it is intended that this will lead onto a bigger project with greater community involvement in the near future.

Young People Looking after the Environment

On a sunny day in August nine youngsters came out litter picking around the Waterfall Country as part of the summer activities run by Neath Port Talbot Children’s Services. Wanting to give the youngsters a sense of purpose for the day and in partnership with Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Services, they were led by Officers from the Sustainable Communities team who discussed the issues caused by litter to wildlife and people and also the problems with arson and mountain fires in the Park and their impact on the environment.

Four large bags of rubbish were collected from around Sgwd Clun Gwyn, Sgwd y Pannwr and the surrounding footpaths and were lugged with good humour back to Cwm Porth.

Darren Bartley, Engagement & Participation Officer Neath Port Talbot CBC Children’s Services said of the day, ‘I’d once again like to thank the BBNPA staff for providing a great day out for Neath Port Talbot Children’s Services staff and young people. The day delivered amazing scenery and challenging walks. The young people thoroughly enjoyed helping to maintain the Brecon Beacons Park’s pristine beauty with a litter pick and had a deserved picnic at Sgwd y Pannwr. It was made all the more memorable with a visit to the ‘Bat Cave’ (Porth yr Ogof). The event was only made possible with the collaboration of Mid and West Wales Fire & Rescue Service who transported us and joined us for the day. Such experiences are essential to help improve the health and well-being of young people in care and promote relationship skills along with building confidence and self-esteem.’
Reporting Rights of Way Issues

You can report any issues regarding our rights of way such as damage to footpaths, stiles or fingerposts to our Rights of Way Officer, Eifion Jones.

eifion.jones@beacons-npa.gov.uk
or call 01874 620452

Planning Surgery

This is available for advice on householder developments every Wednesday from 9.30am - 12noon am and 1.30pm-3.00pm at the National Park Offices, Brecon.
Appointments are available in 30 minute slots and must be booked in advance.

To make an appointment or for any general planning enquiry, please call 01874 620431

Sustainable Development Fund Enquiries

For further information and advice about the Fund please see https://www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/communities/sustainability-2/subsustainable-development-fund/ or contact either:

Helen Roderick or Ceri Bevan on 01874 620471
Email helen.roderick@beacons-npa.gov.uk
or ceri.bevan@beacons-npa.gov.uk

Grant application deadlines for the next six months:
27th November 2019
15th Jan 2020
18th March 2020

Black Mountains Land Use Partnership – Phase Three

The Black Mountains Land Use Partnership has recently launched the third phase of its education programme delivered by the National Park Education team, funded through the Welsh Government’s Sustainable Management Scheme. Working with local schools, the Partnership hopes to inspire school children to appreciate and understand what is special about the Black Mountains, how farming is important for wildlife and people, the impacts of visitors and climate change and find out about the current landscape scale partnership project.

Meeting with local school children at the beautiful and evocative ruins of Llanthony Priory, the groups are guided along ancient trails onto Hatterall Hill. This sweeping moorland is shaped by livestock grazing and traditional practices like heather burning. The hill walk allows pupils to enjoy the spectacular scenery, providing opportunities to observe and discuss hill farming practices, past and present. Whilst reinforcing the aims from phase one and two of the project, which included visits to Hay Bluff and Pen yr Heol Chapel.

The funding to make all this possible has been made available from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government via a Sustainable Management Scheme project.

Waterfall Country Update

The National Park Authority has continued its work with partner organisations in identifying long term, sustainable outcomes for the area known as Waterfall Country. The partnership currently consists of the core group which supported the creation of the 2018 Visitor Traffic Study; the three Councils of Neath Port Talbot, Powys and Rhondda Cynon Taf, Natural Resources Wales and the Community Councils representing Pontneddfechan, Ystradfellte, Penderyn and Hirwaun. The group is close to the point where it is able to expand its reach and take in adjoining areas and partners, so that the potential benefits for the environment, people and local economy will be felt where they are most needed.

The aim of the partnership is to resolve long standing issues related to high visitor numbers, achieve greater community benefits and improve local infrastructure and facilities, placing our most precious asset, the natural environment, at the very heart of this.

In the short term, National Park Authority staff and partners have been working hard to address the immediate concerns raised by local communities in managing the impact of year on year increase in visitor numbers. Where we have been able to negotiate solutions we have improved traffic flow, reduced congestion and identified additional parking, we are thankful to those who have worked with us to achieve this.

In discussion with interested parties, we will seek to formalise some of these temporary solutions over the coming months and continue to work with our partners, individuals and local communities to find answers in areas where the situation is more complex.
Need a meeting room in Brecon?

We have the following available for hire:

- Conference Room
- Small Meeting Room
- Members Video Conference Room

Catering available
For details contact 01874 624437 or check http://www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/the-authority/hire-a-room/

Community Marquee Available

The Community Marquee loan scheme offers groups, schools, charities and other nonprofit organisations within the National Park the opportunity to use the 20' x 30' Community Marquee at their local events. A donation is requested.

For booking forms please contact Ceri Bevan on 01874 620471 or ceri.bevan@beacons-npa.gov.uk

Webcasts

All the Authority’s meetings are available to view via our webcasts microsite. To find out more visit:

http://www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/the-authority/webcasting/

Events

For an extended list and further details of activities and events in the National Park please visit http://www.breconbeacons.org/events

18 October 2019 | 19:00–22:00

Star Gazing at the National Park Visitor Centre

Tickets are £15.00 which includes coffee and cake to get your evening off to a great start. This event starts at 7.00pm. Please come dressed in warm clothing.

Organised by the Brecon Beacons National Park Visitor Centre in conjunction with Dark Skies Wales.
Your Authority A-Z
Your helpful guide to contacting the Authority for information or services

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