

News from Around the National Parks Autumn 2015



Pic: Architect's design of the Sill – Northumberland National Park Authority

The News from Around the Parks is compiled by the Campaign for National Parks based on updates and information supplied by National Park Societies and Authorities. We would encourage Societies and Authorities to always supply news updates so that we can have the best possible summary of what's happening. If information is not supplied, the Editor has filled in gaps where necessary.

BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK

Brecon Beacons Park Society/Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (provided by Samantha Games)

Brecon Beacons Park Society accepts Rural Wales Award on behalf of the Brecon Beacons International Dark Skies Reserve.

Earlier this month, the Campaign for the Protection for Rural Wales (CPRW) Brecon and Radnor Branch presented its 2015 Rural Wales Award to the Brecon Beacons Park Society in recognition of the enormous task required in gaining International Dark Sky status for the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Hosted by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority at the National Park Visitor Centre, Lt Colonel (retd) Mike Lewis, the High Sheriff of Powys presented the award to Jim Wilson, Chairman of the Park Society, who accepted the highly coveted accolade which recognised the vital role the Society played in helping the Brecon Beacons National Park gain International Dark Sky Reserve status.

On accepting the award, Jim Wilson, Chairman of the Brecon Beacons Park Society said: "The Park Society is delighted to accept this award. We are committed to the International Dark Sky Reserve and today is an important day for us all. Not only does it recognise the pivotal role the Park Society played in achieving this status, but also how our work has encouraged others to do the same. Snowdonia National Park Authority is currently applying for the status and we have celebrated the news that our neighbours in the Elan Valley are now an International Dark Sky Reserve – International recognition for the quality of Wales' Dark Skies!"

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

Walking with Romans project wins top interpretation award

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority's Walking with Romans project has won a coveted [Association for Heritage Interpretation](#) 2015 Discover Heritage Award in the Landscapes, forests, nature reserves, parks and gardens category which looks at the interpretation of cultural and natural heritage of the wider outdoors.

At a gala awards ceremony held at the Hilton Central Hotel, Newbury, AHI patron and Honorary Graduate of the University, Dr Lloyd Grossman, who was awarded a CBE this summer for services to heritage, presented the award to Suzanna Jones, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority's Interpretation Officer who accepted on behalf of the Authority.

[Walking with Romans](#) sets out to encourage visitation and improve the visitor experience at two remote Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Brecon Beacons National Park with the aid of computer generated reconstructions and an audio which can be accessed on site with an App. The project was developed by Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and Living Data, as part of the Romans in Carmarthenshire scheme and funded through the the £19 million Heritage Tourism Project (HTP), which is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund through the Welsh Government, managed by Cadw, the Welsh Government's historic environment service.

The AHI Discover Heritage Awards are the only UK and Irish awards to recognise excellence in all types and sizes of heritage interpretation, whether held in museums, historic buildings, visitor centres or any type of outdoor location. The Awards celebrate projects that best meet their interpretive aims and successfully communicate their key messages to their audiences.

Black Mountains Land Use Partnership appoint new Chairman

In September, the newly formed Black Mountains Land Use Partnership appointed Phil Stocker, Chief Executive of the National Sheep Associations as their new Chairman.

The partnership brings together key representatives and landowners from the Black Mountain Graziers Association and farming community, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Natural Resources Wales, Glanusk Estate, Natural England, Welsh Water, Tregoyd Estate, Bal Mawr/Bal Bach Estate, Duke of Beaufort Estate, Michaelchurch Estate and Ffwdog Estate to agree on the decision making and future management of the Black Mountains. The newly formed partnership will provide the driving force behind the restoration and sustainable management of the iconic and protected area.

The creation of the partnership is the second phase of a unique collaborative project to improve the biodiversity on the Black Mountains which was made possible with a 3200,000 grant from the Welsh Government's Nature Fund. The grant supports a continuous improvement programme to restore heathland, peat bogs and other habitats in the Black Mountains and represent a significant portion of the Welsh Government's Nature Fund – which is investing in innovative and collaborative projects across Wales to support practical action to improve areas of biodiversity while providing benefits to communities and local economies.

THE BROADS NATIONAL PARK

The Broads Society (provided by Robin Godber)

Hoveton Great Broad (HGB)

The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded funding for a project that clearly does not fulfil the criteria for public funding, thus creating a dangerous precedent. Obviously the Broads Society welcomes any initiative to restore a broad or waterway within the Broads system. However, with resources being so small against the overall task in hand, one has to prioritise and in this instance if public money is involved this should clearly be spent at Hickling, our largest and most important Broad in desperate need of attention and where no problem exists regarding public access.

There are two issues regarding public access at HGB, that of direct public access from the land, which should have been a requirement before awarding public funding, and navigational access from the water. It would appear that Natural England are confusing the issue by announcing, rather late in the day, that they will now be running free boat trips on the Broad this summer. But how does one get there? This is not full public access. The navigational issue regarding tidal waters will not, I am afraid, be resolved for some time - at the earliest ten years from now when the fish barriers are removed, as required by the recent planning permission, but this may drag on for another fifteen years after that seeing as the project is due to run for twenty five years.

Branding the Broads – Judicial Review

It would appear that although the application for a Judicial Review regarding the Broads Authority's decision to use the Broads National Park name for marketing purposes has been refused, the Claimants have exercised their right to appeal for a renewal hearing in the High Court. We understand that this will take place in February 2016.

River Wensum Strategy Partnership

After many years campaigning by the River Wensum Parkway Project (supported by the Broads Society in recent years) for a clear strategy for the River Wensum through Norwich, it is pleasing to see the birth of the River Wensum Strategy Partnership (RWSP) to take this vital initiative forward using the combined resources of the Norwich City Council, BA, NCC, EA and the Wensum River Parkway Partnership. The public launch on 24 June at Blackfriars Hall was well attended and the subsequent on line consultation brought a good response from the public. With a new river ferry service operating from Thorpe Green to Thorpe Railway Station calling at Whitlingham en-route and the prospect of further operators from canoe and day boat hire to larger vessels the future for the River Wensum looks bright. It is early days, however, and we will continue to support all efforts to open up Norwich as a 'river city' – it is after all, the only city to lie within a 'National Park' boundary. It is also a boost for the Southern Rivers Committee re-generation project.

National Park Societies Annual Conference, October 2016

The Broads Society is now fully committed to hosting the 2016 NPS Annual Conference. This will take place at Belsey Bridge Conference Centre near Bungay from Friday 21 to Sunday 23 October 2016. Full details will be published early in the New Year.

The Broads Authority (provided by Lorna Marsh)

Major project for Victorian jetty

Much needed work on 160-year-old Turntide Jetty for the benefits of boaters on Breydon Water is underway at a cost of £338,000. It is the biggest project in more than a decade for the Authority and the most significant investment since the £3m restoration of Barton Broad in 2001.

The jetty, which was first constructed in the 1860s, directs the flow of the rivers Yare and Waveney where they meet at the southern end of Breydon Water and is a prominent landmark for vessels heading across Breydon to the southern rivers and broads.

The Authority inherited it when management of Breydon Water and the Lower Bure was transferred from Great Yarmouth Port Authority in 2010 and recognised it was in serious decline with some of the piled walls failing and becoming a hazard to navigation.

With significant investment clearly required a sediment and water flow study of Breydon water was commissioned. This involved modelling the typical flow regimes in and around Breydon Water, with the aim to predict the likely consequences of maintaining or removing the declining structures of Turntide Jetty and the associated Dickey Works.

It demonstrated that the structure does effectively direct the flow of the Yare and reduce accumulation of sediment in the Waveney channel. The study also however suggested that a shorter jetty would still produce the same effect, and direct the flow of the River Yare as desired. On this basis the decision was made to embark on a project to reconstruct the essential part of Turntide Jetty.

Together with Norwich-based engineering consultants from Canham Consulting, a design was drawn up for a hardwood piled structure similar to the existing jetty which had lasted so long.

Work began in March and is due to be completed in the 2015/16 financial year.

Owl you need is love!

Two once dwindling species are now thriving in the Broads thanks to special projects to reverse their decline.

The Broads Barn Owl Project which aims to conserve and increase local barn owl and kestrel numbers in the area while a joint partnership scheme is saving one of Britain's rarest and most spectacular spiders.

The Fen Raft Spider is flourishing in the Broads after being at risk of extinction. Before the project began only three fragile populations of the spider – Britain's largest breed – existed, one of which was in the Broads.

The Broads is now the spider's UK stronghold after an intensive breeding programme established a further three new populations since October 2014. At the same time the project, which was supported by the Love the Broads visitor giving scheme, is making this iconic species accessible to, and appreciated by, a very much larger audience. It was led by independent ecologist Dr Helen Smith and involved the Broads Authority, Natural England and other partners.

The Broads Barn Owl Project saw 50 barn owl and kestrel nest boxes provided to land owners by The Broads Authority in partnership with the Hawk and Owl Trust. Seventeen of these were funded through Love the Broads. Currently, there are an estimated 75 to 100 breeding pairs of barn owls in the Broads, many of which exist thanks to the scheme. At least 15 of the boxes are being used this year by roosting and breeding barn owls and it is hoped more boxes will be occupied as the local population increases.

Many traditional barn owl roosting and nesting sites have been lost due to barn conversions and tree disease, and a loss of prey rich rough grassland hunting habitat has also resulted in a decline in numbers.

Pioneering project commended in national awards

A project to restore an eroded reedbed with barricade building techniques used by the Army in Afghanistan was commended after making it to the finals for a prestigious national award.

The Broads Authority project at Duck Broad was one of four shortlisted for the Environment category in the Living Waterways Awards but narrowly missed out on first prize to the Inland Waterways Association Himalayan Balsam Campaign.

The project has helped separate Duck Broad from the main channel and improve water quality within it. Wildfowl have been seen making their homes there again.

Reinforced steel baskets, filled with rocks and sediment, were joined together to make the perimeter of a one hectare spit of land. This was filled with 10,000 cubic metres of sediment dredged from Heigham Sound and planted with common reed and reedmace.

The aim was to restore the reedbed to how it would have looked in 1946, based on aerial photography. The dredging of Heigham Sound to create the reedbed has also improved channel depth for navigation.

An independent panel of experts, led by Christopher Rodrigues CBE, selected the finalists for the awards which were launched by the Canal & River Trust in January in a bid to recognise the most inspiring and exciting waterway-based improvement projects across the UK.

Tony Hales, chairman of the Canal & River Trust, said: “The Living Waterways Awards celebrate the individuals, communities and organisations that have done the most to make a difference to the nation’s rivers, canals, lochs, lakes, reservoirs and docks, making them exciting places to live, learn and spend time.

“After a series of visits and assessments, which saw the expert judges travel from Sandwich to Enniskillen and from Glasgow to Devon, we are thrilled to announce the shortlist of finalists.”

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Dartmoor Preservation Association

Affordable Housing on Dartmoor

DPA Director Philip Hutt had the following article published in the Western Morning News in September:

Allowing housing association tenants to buy will remove affordable homes.

In recent months, there has been a lot of publicity about the threats facing national parks. Now there is another issue looming which, though less well-publicised, could create as big a problem as funding cuts, potash mines, or telecommunications masts.

This is the Government’s plan to give the tenants of housing associations the right to buy their properties – and it could have catastrophic consequences for Dartmoor’s rural communities.

The right for council tenants to buy at substantial discounts was introduced by the Thatcher Government in the 1980s, but it did not apply those in housing association homes. The present Government intends to pass legislation that will extend the right to buy to 1.3million housing association tenants, at a discount of up to £77,000 per property.

Greg Clark, the Communities Secretary, claims that this will create a level playing field, increase house building and reduce social housing waiting lists. A closer examination suggests otherwise.

There is already a shortage of open-market housing in rural areas, which suffer from lower-than-average wages and higher house prices – on average 26% higher than in urban areas – as commuters, holiday home owners and retirees compete to push up prices. In the national parks the premium on house prices is even higher. Many young people on low incomes have been priced out of the property market and driven to seek housing outside the region, denying rural businesses the staff they need.

In some urban areas, social housing has provided a safety net. However, in rural communities, the original right-to-buy has already contributed to a serious shortage of affordable housing – about 12% of the total housing stock, as opposed to 19% in urban areas. This will get much worse if right-to-buy is extended further, and many much-needed affordable properties will be lost forever.

The government has pledged to replace each home sold to a tenant with another affordable home; experience suggests that this just won’t happen. Nationally, only 46% of properties sold under right-to-buy legislation over the last three years have been replaced. In Devon, Cornwall and Somerset in 2013, the figure was less than 10%.

In theory, if right-to-buy is extended, local authorities will have to sell off their vacant higher-value properties to fund one-for-one replacements. However, according to the National Housing Federation, about 465,000 council houses have been sold in rural England since the right to buy was originally introduced and 65% of rural local authorities no longer own any homes. So where will these higher value properties come from? The government is consulting and housing minister Brandon Lewis has promised to outline the details when the Housing Bill is published in the autumn.

The economic case for extending right to buy seems questionable at best. Why is the government so keen on this? According to Mr Clark, "it is what a government for working people is about – making sure people have the security they need to build a brighter future for them and their families." But why should tenants who have already enjoyed years of paying affordable rents be gifted £77,000 towards buying their homes – let alone the potential to obtain significant profits if they subsequently sell them? Are they more deserving than the millions of families who pay much higher private-sector rents, or the 1.8 million families on council waiting lists, or the 3million adult children living with their parents because they cannot afford to rent or buy?

The UK housing problem is not one of too few home owners, but of too few homes. We don't have a problem with demand, we have one of supply: for more than 40 years we haven't built the homes the country needs. Extending right-to-buy will not provide more social housing, it will remove it forever; and the money handed out as discounts would be far better spent on building new affordable properties, to provide homes that will remain available to house future generations.

In Dartmoor National Park it is estimated that a large proportion of the 1,600 housing association homes could be removed from social housing stock because of right-to-buy. The temptation to realise a healthy capital gain will be enormous, with erstwhile social housing sold to the highest bidder. In another national park, the Yorkshire Dales, 1,000 homes were built in a recent ten-year period, but the park population rose by only 100 people – they were snapped up for holiday cottages and second homes. Housing provision in the national parks should include the right proportion of affordable rented housing. The Housing Bill should exempt national parks from right-to-buy provisions, or risk causing serious decline in economic and social well-being of areas like Dartmoor. We want to see economically active local communities, not an unhealthy mix of the retired, second homeowners and half-empty holiday properties.

A Better Future for Devon's Birds

The DPA and Devon Birds are hosting a major one-day conference on the state of Devon's birds on 6 November at Exeter Racecourse, Kennford. The conference focuses on the current state of Devon's birds and the conservation measures being taken to create a better future for many of our declining species. Topics include key findings from the new Devon Bird Atlas; species recovery programmes; landscape scale conservation and Dartmoor's central importance for birds. The conference is aimed at everyone with an interest in the county's birds, including wildlife organisations, conservationists, land managers and farmers.

Dartmoor National Park Authority (provided by Michael Nendick)

South West National Parks essential for the region's economy

The contribution made by **Dartmoor and Exmoor** National Parks to the region's economy has been highlighted in a new economic prospectus.

The two National Parks are living, working landscapes that are home to approximately 44,000 people and 3,145 businesses with an annual turnover of £770m a year.

National Parks are also world renowned brands, recognised for quality of environment and visitor experience. Dartmoor and Exmoor attract over 8 million visitor days and generate £428 million for the greater Dartmoor and Exmoor areas annually.

The prospectus highlights the high quality of the National Park environment underpins economic activity both within the National Parks and the wider Heart of the South West area. National Park Authorities bring together key players to support and enable sustainable economic growth within these deeply rural landscapes.

Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Authorities have been at the forefront of supporting pioneering new ways to unlock economic growth within the National Parks, the prospectus highlights some of these success stories.

Both National Park Authorities are keen to continue to build on their successes in contributing to regional growth and have identified four key areas for investment to release future growth potential:

- Improving connectivity - through superfast broadband and better mobile coverage to deliver 4G service to all settlements
- Promoting the place and product - recognising the value of the National Park and local supply chains, including food and drink, as quality destination 'brands' and the unique distinctive product they offer to the region
- Support key sectors - such as farming, forestry, food and tourism. The creation of rural growth hubs, to increase productivity and develop rural skills
- Sustain the resource - There is a need for continued investment managing the National Park resource: The environment; Access to it and; Promotion. Without this the resource will degrade and opportunities for sustainable rural growth lost.

New funding available for Dartmoor Communities

Dartmoor National Park has just launched its Communities Fund for 2015/16. The Fund, supported by the New Homes Bonus from West Devon Borough, Teignbridge and South Hams District Councils, will support capital projects that ensure the long term viability of valued existing community facilities and services, or create new community infrastructure to meet identified community needs.

This year there is just over £48,000 in the pot. The scheme is designed to be simple, flexible and responsive, providing clear guidance, supporting a one-step application process. Last year funding of nearly £40,000 was allocated to community projects with a value in excess of £200,000 including Holne village shop and community tea room, improvements to Palstone Park, South Brent and works to extend the use and income raising potential for village halls in Bittaford, Postbridge, Drewsteignton and Throwleigh. The Fund also helped improve playgrounds for children in Lydford and Yelverton.

The deadline for the first round of applications is 31 October 2015, with any further rounds being subject to funding availability.

The New Homes Bonus is a Government scheme encouraging local authorities to grant planning permission for the building of new houses in return for additional revenue. The support for Dartmoor Communities Fund is in recognition of Dartmoor National Park's role as a planning authority.

Sponsorship helps National Park continue its vital work

Dartmoor National Park has just taken possession of a new four wheel drive vehicle thanks to a sponsorship agreement with long established local company Ashburton Motor Works.

The new Isuzu Rodeo D-Max is on a loan to the National Park on a 12 month agreement and will help Dartmoor National staff carry out their work on all terrain and often in demanding conditions. As part of the agreement the vehicle will be serviced and taxed by Ashburton Motor Works.

Sponsorship agreements like this are vitally important for the future of the National Park as new ways need to be found to help fill the funding gap and continue to deliver for Dartmoor. Dartmoor has also had success securing other sponsorship agreements with the private sector including with outdoor equipment supplier Sprayway who have provided uniforms for Rangers and staff as well as for the Junior Rangers and the John Lewis Partnership who supplied a discounted big screen for the National Park Visitor Centre in Princetown.

The new vehicle was officially handed over to Dartmoor National Park during a recent visit to Dartmoor by Mel Stride, MP for Central Devon.

Mel Stride MP said: "I have been very impressed by the work that Dartmoor National Park are doing and equally commend Ashburton Motor Works for their generosity in this donation. Having the right tools for the job is very important and I hope that this is the beginning of a long standing partnership between the two."

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Exmoor Society (provided by Arabella Amory)

Exmoor Society's AGM

Chairman Rachel Thomas gave a report on the state of the Exmoor National Park. Below are a few quotes from key sections of the report:

'Last year was Exmoor's 60th birthday as a National Park. Fragile in extent, with a remote rural population, it has faced many battles over six decades on such things as moorland loss, proposals for inappropriate afforestation or recreation or development. It is remarkable that it has survived as a national park, at all. Today the beautiful landscape is still perceived as relatively wild and tranquil, at times hostile and challenging, at others soft and gentle. The spectacular coastline remains relatively free from development with the hanging woods in all their autumn glory. Visitors in particular come in their thousands to enjoy the outdoors and to delve into its ancient history and experience the culture of Exmoor. In presenting the Annual Report to you, I want to warn about the unprecedented times for national parks.

Within an apparently benign state, there are underlying threats and concerns, many of which have come to the fore this year. Nationally, there is a recognition national parks have slipped down the political agenda. With the general election taking place in May the Society decided to bring out an Exmoor Manifesto based on one published by the Campaign for National Parks but taking into account the special qualities of Exmoor. It identified key areas that need support if national parks are to continue to be special.

First, of crucial importance in today's context, is to ensure the viability of Exmoor hill farms.

Second, special places need special protection and proposed changes to the planning system are of concern.

Third, funding for public benefits should be supported in national parks. Reductions to core funding from national government to the Authorities is likely to occur and will have a knock-on effect on their work.

The fourth area is a call to improve the availability and quality of information and help the public's appreciation and understanding of Exmoor's qualities. Emphasis should be on the importance of Exmoor as a national park and the many benefits it provides.'

ENPDA draft Local Plan

The Exmoor Society was consulted on the ENPA draft Local Plan. On the whole the Society thought the newest draft Plan was good despite having to work with the moving targets of government changes. Some of the concerns that remain include 1) there is no policy which specifically constrains the use of signs in open country 2) it is not clear whether large-scale events have to apply for planning permission 3) concerns that new members of the authority will require extensive training in order to become familiar with the many details of the Local Plan. There are also some reservations about the link between the ENPA Local Plan covering the period up to 2031 and the Partnership Plan (Management Plan) which is a statutory requirement for a 5-year period. It is unclear how these two time-scales will be reconciled and whether there is flexibility between the two Plans.

Pinnacle Youth Award

This year's winner of the Exmoor Society Pinnacle Youth Award was Matthew Sharp. Matthew is a tree surgeon using small machinery to minimise damage to the areas in which he works. The award gives up to £3,000 and is awarded to a young person developing a business related and appropriate to Exmoor.

Exmoor National Park Authority (provided by Claire O'Connor)

Airband to deliver superfast broadband across Exmoor & Dartmoor National Parks

Connecting Devon and Somerset today announces that Airband will be the delivery partner for the next phase of the superfast broadband programme across Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks. The National Parks represent some of the most challenging terrain for connecting remote rural communities to superfast broadband.

Worcester-based Airband, founded in 2002 and a specialist in high speed wireless broadband for rural areas, will be responsible for connecting some 5,800 homes and businesses through a fixed wireless access network based in the National Parks. This is in addition to the existing phase 1 rollout which is on track to deliver superfast broadband to around 90% of homes and businesses across Devon and Somerset by the end of 2016.

The company will be deploying wireless broadband, which is designed to overcome physical conditions such as trees, hills or structures. Its technology works by passing a signal from a radio on a transmitter or mast to a radio attached to the final building. A cable then takes the connection into the building allowing the end-user to connect to the internet the same way as via fibre or an ADSL connection.

Its main benefit is that there is no need to dig up roads and lay cables to connect with the exchange points. In addition, due to the lack of dependence on third party infrastructure, fixed wireless has the added advantage of quick deployment times and low install costs.

Dr Nigel Stone, Chief Executive of Exmoor National Park Authority, said: "We are very pleased that this contract with Airband will improve the delivery of superfast broadband to a significant number of premises and in addition will ensure everybody across Exmoor will have access to improved broadband.

“We are hugely aware of the importance of connecting our rural communities and the provision of good broadband coverage has been, and continues to be, a top priority for Exmoor National Park Authority. We worked hard to secure additional funding for Phase 1 and have also put in match funding for this second phase which will allow premises and businesses to improve how they work and help reduce costs. We are grateful to Connecting Devon and Somerset for the work they have done to help us get to this exciting stage.”

Headwaters of the Exe – Upstream Thinking

Over the past few years South West Water has worked closely with Exmoor National Park Authority and farmers on the moor to improve the water quality and flow in the River Exe through the award-winning Exmoor Mires project. The work has largely been funded through an innovative scheme called Upstream Thinking, a five yearly planned expenditure of work to improve water catchments in the South West through land management interventions.

Following exploration of opportunities on Exmoor through the Wimbleball Project, the Holnicote Flood Relief Project, and discussions with farmers, landowners, fishing interests, Environment Agency and South West Water staff, in November last year Exmoor National Park Authority submitted a bid called the Headwaters of the Exe programme to South West Water for funding to improve water quality in the Exe Catchment 2015 – 2020. The bid focussed on improving water quality, in particular keeping silt, pesticides and other pollutants out of rivers and streams.

What’s next? The total cost of the Programme is £743,375, of which £472,180 has been secured in principle by Exmoor National Park from South West Water - £108,320 is match funding from existing rights of way and woodland budgets and £162,875 in-kind funding from ENPA staff and volunteers.

The Headwaters of the Exe programme will focus on water quality and wider ecosystem services in an area of 27,559 hectares of land, including the upper reaches of the Exe, the Barle, Quarme, Pulham, Haddeo and smaller tributaries, as well as Wimbleball Reservoir (see map). Water quality is generally good but this will be maintained and enhanced by encouraging and supporting sustainable land management practices.

For more information contact Bea Davis, Project Manager: bdavis@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk or phone 01398 322278.

LAKE DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

Friends of the Lake District

Government confirms both the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales national parks will be extended

Friends of the Lake District is delighted that the Secretary of State has finally confirmed the designation orders for the extensions to the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks and that the wait for the decision is over.

Friends of the Lake District played a major role in the run up to the Inquiry, and coordinated the Key Supporters Group’s evidence to the Public Inquiry in 2013. This Group represented a wide range of the interests of those who lived and worked in the proposed areas, including Parish and Town Councils, local businesses, farmers and landowners, conservation and recreational organisations and individuals.

A recent widespread media debate at national level was initiated by Friends of the Lake District's letter to the Times, written together with the Campaign for National Parks, Campaign to Protect Rural England and the Yorkshire Dales Society.

Martin Holdgate, President at Friends of the Lake District, said: "Of course we are delighted that the Secretary of State has finally confirmed the designation orders for the extensions to the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks. These are, and always have been, areas of superb scenery that deserved National Park status years ago. Friends of the Lake District has worked for years to achieve this outcome, and we are pleased that our efforts have borne fruit but now everyone must work together to ensure we reap the benefits.'

Douglas Chalmers, Director of Friends of the Lake District, said: "This really is a momentous decision, and one that reflects the wishes of many people. And now the real work starts. Everyone has been saying that designating this land will bring additional economic, environmental and community benefits to the area, and we now have to make sure that this happens.

"In the Secretary of State's announcement, Mrs Truss said, "National parks are fabulous national assets that welcome over 90 million tourists and contribute to our vibrant rural economy – we are committed to helping them thrive." It is reassuring to have such a positive statement on Government's support for National Parks going into the future.

"Let's savour this moment, but then start working to ensure that those in the areas start to see the benefits".

Say NO to pylons in the Lake District

The Lake District is under threat from the largest planned electricity infrastructure project in the UK. National Grid is proposing to erect 50 metre tall pylons to run a 400kV powerline through 24km of stunning Lake District National Park landscape. The pylons are the height of Nelson's Column and would be a dreadful addition to a National Park currently engaged in a bid to gain World Heritage Status.

The Friends of the Lake District has launched a campaign to stop the pylons being erected within the National Park and get power cables put underground. The powerline will affect Ravenglass, Bootle, Silecroft and the communities around the Duddon, including Broughton-in-Furness. National Grid is being asked to construct the powerlines to connect to a nuclear power plant at Moorside just north of Sellafield, the site chosen by the government in 2011 to host a nuclear power station.

The Friends of the Lake District has got together with a number of influential partners, including CNP, to urge people to write to their MPs and Government to demand that cables are put underground where they cross the Lake District National Park.

Kate Willshaw, Policy Officer, said: "This is not a case of preventing infrastructure development going ahead. There is an opportunity for everybody to benefit if we can persuade Government and National Grid that they can achieve the connection of the power station without compromising the natural beauty of the Lake District."

Douglas Chambers, Director, said: "National Grid have said the costs are too high to mitigate for the damage to the National Park by placing cables underground. If we were talking about solid rock and steep inclines they might have a case, but this land includes arable fields and improved grassland which makes undergrounding easier and recovery much faster."

National Grid is holding 27 communications events along the proposed route to discuss their plans and this may be the last opportunity for people to have their say. A decision by National Grid is expected by the start of December

To find out more go to the campaign site at www.saynotopylonsinthelakedistrict.org.uk

Blencathra benefits from huge volunteer effort

Blencathra and its surrounding countryside is sporting a spruced-up look thanks to over 140 volunteers and staff who took part in Friends of the Lake District's Blencathra Fell Care Day in September. It was the tenth mass volunteering Fell Care Day in five years.

A number of partner organisations were involved, including the Lake District National Park, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Fix the Fells, Forestry Commission and West Cumbria Rivers Trust. Among the impressive results were 100 metres of steps rebuilt near the foot of Blencathra, 26.5 km of upland path drains cleared and swept and 20 bags of rubbish collected.

Lake District National Park Authority (provided by Sarah Calderbank)

Fix the Fells project

One of the Lake District's best loved but blighted fell paths was given a £10,000 boost by a mystery benefactor. Walla Crag, above Keswick, is used by tens of thousands of walkers, who for years have had to navigate across a notorious 20-metre wide quagmire to get to the 1,000ft summit and a 'sensational viewpoint'.

Thanks to the anonymous local donation, work has been completed as part of the Fix the Fells project. Ancient techniques utilising existing sub-soil up to 10,000-years-old have been used, leaving a natural dry route to the panoramic peak. Fix the Fells ranger for the Lake District National Park, Richard Fox, said he had been staggered by the generosity of the gift, but not surprised that someone locally wanted to put right a troublesome blot on the landscape.

"The path at this point was 10 times wider than it needed to be, a really horrible area of ever-spreading wet bog which people had to plough through. This is a well-loved and much-used route, particularly for those living and staying in Keswick.

"I can imagine that someone who really loves the place wanted to make a real difference to all those who walk here by removing an unsightly and boggy obstacle, leaving Walla Crag to Bleaberry Fell a truly perfect experience."

Fix the Fells has repaired over 200 fell routes across the Lake District and depends on donations and legacies to continue the work. Richard said £10,000 was a massive contribution and there was an enormous debt of gratitude. LDNP and National Trust were responsible for the work which could not have been carried out without the generosity of a local person who paid for fixing 500m of path, at a cost of £20 a metre.

Making room for a view...

The iconic views of Ullswater's western shore are open to residents and visitors once more, thanks to a Valley Planning project to clear scrub and manage trees that were increasingly obscuring the view.

Local residents identified the views along the lake shore were becoming increasingly obscured by trees, with residents and visitors unable to fully appreciate the beauty of this special lake. This led to the launch of Felling for Views – a project led by the Lake District National Park and Eden Rivers Trust as part of the Ullswater Valley Plan.

Since August Eden Rivers Trust apprentices and National Park rangers and volunteers have undertaken work including tree thinning, scrub clearance and control to restore views across the lake. This will also help improve safety along the A592 and have a positive effect on the lake shore, preventing scrub and woodland encroachment onto the lake's ecology, hopefully restoring wetland flora.

Projects ranger for Lake District National Park, Dylan Jackman, said: "This has been a real success story for Valley Planning. We listened to the community and put Felling for Views into action, creating some stunning vistas from the northern section of the lake that are already benefitting visitors and residents. It's a great start and we plan to continue working with others to reveal further view across the lake."

Ullswater is the second largest lake in the English Lake District and is part of the River Eden and Tributaries Special Area of Conservation. The lake flows into the River Eamont, one of the major tributaries of the River Eden. The area is also designated in two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – the Pooley Bridge section and River Eden and tributaries.

New Lake District arts festival takes flight

The Lake District National Park has announced a partnership project to launch a new international outdoor arts festival taking place in Kendal and the Lake District next year.

The Arts Council, South Lakeland District Council and LDNP will co-ordinate the festival. Communication is underway with other funders and partners to make sure the new festival builds on the success of street arts festival, Mintfest.

A creative director with more than 10 years' experience delivering artistic programmes and festivals across the UK has been appointed as festival director to commission internationally and nationally acclaimed artists. They will stage a spectacular programme celebrating people's obsession with flight through the ages by utilising cutting-edge digital art, street theatre and visual arts at Brockhole, the Lake District Visitor Centre, Windermere and Kendal town centre.

The new festival launches in July 2016, opening with a large-scale site commission at Brockhole, by international artist Geraldine Pilgrim. This new work will be created along with local residents to celebrate Cumbria's contribution to aviation. A visual heritage trail will also link the site to Kendal where a new annual arts festival continues in the wider theme of flight on 26-28 August 2016.

Chief Executive of the Lake District National Park, Richard Leafe, said: "The Lake District has long been a source of artistic inspiration and this is one of the central themes of the bid for World Heritage status in 2016. The opportunity to bring a new, digital arts festival to the area will help to firmly establish the Lake District as a modern, cultural destination."

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

New Forest Association

Supporting the New Forest Water Blitz

The Clean Water for Wildlife project is looking for volunteers for the New Forest Water Blitz, a survey to take place next spring. The New Forest Association is promoting the study as a member of the New Forest Catchment Development Group, a clean water initiative between the National Park and the Freshwater Habitats Trust. Volunteers should be NFA members,

available during the survey period – running from 19 March – 3 April 2016 – to administer easy to use water test kits at key points across the New Forest.

Calls to ban fungi picking on Crown lands of the New Forest

Commercial picking on the New Forest is an unacceptable theft from the amenity of the autumn display and damaging to the habitat, the New Forest Association has warned.

The NFA says commercial pickers harvest indiscriminately, taking every bit of fungi they find and trampling everything in their way, taking foraging to an unsustainable level.

The NFA is calling on the Forestry Commission for an Epping Forest style ban on fungi foraging on the Crown Lands in the New Forest. It has also asked the National Park Authority and the Verderers of the New Forest to work with Natural England and rural policing initiatives to help Forestry Commission devise ways to implement the ban.

In a media release, the NFA says: “Foraging for fungi is no more acceptable on a SSSI and a National Park than carting away bushels of bluebells, or collecting butterflies or bird’s eggs.”

New Forest National Park Authority (provided by Hilary Makin)

New Forest MPs back anti-litter campaign

The New Forest’s two MPs have shown their support for an anti-litter campaign in the National Park. Social media updates, posters and reminder stickers on litter bins placed across the Forest have been asking people to “leave nothing but footprints” by using a bin or taking their litter away with them. The estimated cost of litter removal is over £250,000 a year.

The summer campaign for a “Litter Free Forest and Sea” has been a joint initiative between the New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority and the Forestry Commission. It was backed by Julian Lewis, New Forest East MP and Desmond Swayne, New Forest West MP during a visit to Burley arranged by the New Forest National Park Authority.

Mr Swayne said: “This is a forest where we have a great deal of livestock and litter is very damaging to the animals and wildlife. It wrecks the experience of the Forest that we all enjoy.”

Mr Lewis added: “It’s in everybody’s interest whether you live here or whether you are visiting to be sensible, considerate and not leave litter in these priceless surroundings and spoil this wonderful environment.”

Defra Director General visits New Forest National Park

A senior Government official has visited the National Park to discover more about its crucial role in helping one of the country’s most treasured landscapes to thrive.

Sonia Phippard, Defra Director General (Policy), spent a day seeing how the Authority works with its many partners to restore and protect vital habitats, support local communities and help visitors enjoy and understand its beautiful landscapes.

The tour included a visit to the New Forest Centre in Lyndhurst, a wetland restoration centre at Blackwater, the new Shipwright School at Buckler’s Hard and discovering more about the New Forest Marque local produce scheme.

The Defra visit was organised by National Parks England, to highlight the value of England's ten National Parks and some of the challenges they face with fewer resources available. Ms Phippard said: "It was a great introduction to the National Parks and an opportunity to discuss some of the issues and challenges. The visit certainly brought home the breadth and depth of the National Park Authority's involvement and care for the very special environment, but also for the local community and visitors."

Alison Barnes, Chief Executive of the New Forest National Park Authority, said: "We were delighted to host Sonia's visit to highlight some of our work and the difference it makes. The Government understands the importance of National Park Authorities in not only protecting unique and precious habitats for wildlife, but providing good value for money in its support for local economies. For every £1 we contributed to joint projects in 2014/5, it generated a further £13 from partner organisations. We'll continue to work hard to ensure there are adequate levels of funding to ensure National Parks continue to prosper for generations."

New Forest Walking Festival returns with 80 guided walks

Ramblers in the New Forest are currently enjoying the latest Walking Festival, with 80 guided walks, history hikes and wild play adventures taking place over two weeks at the end of October.

The Festival, which has been garden centre firm Stewarts, has grown hugely over the past couple of years. Two years ago, there were just 11 guided walks. New Forest National Park Authority deputy chairman Edward Heron said: "The beauty of the New Forest's Autumn scenery is plain to see but what really attracts people to the festival are the local experts, discovering surprising stories in the Forest's unique landscapes."

NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK

North Yorkshire Moors Association (provided by Tom Chadwick)

Mine development

A decision notice was issued by the North York Moors National Park on the 19 October, the signing –off of the Section 106 agreement and the issue of the notice completes the planning process for the mine head and mineral transport system (the tunnel to Teesside). The Harbour Facilities and the overhead conveyor which links it to the Teesside Handling Facility are currently being examined by the Planning Inspectorate as a separate application because this is regarded as an infrastructure project and after close examination will go directly to the government for a decision. This is not expected to happen until summer 2016. In the meantime we hold the view that no construction work should start before all the pieces of the planning jigsaw are in place. York Potash has said that they will start construction work at the mine head before summer 2016.

When the decision notice is issued it opens a window of just six weeks during which time a legal challenge can be made about the decision by the National Park Planning Committee by just one vote to approve the development.

Sirius Minerals have yet to produce a definitive feasibility study (DFS) to show in detail how the project will be set up and financed. The figure of £1.7 billion which has been made public in numerous statements seems on the face of it to be well below that which comparable mining and tunnelling projects have cost. If this is like the company's estimated volume of spoil which grew to more than double the amounts we were given to expect, the figure could be nearer to £3 billion. We are told that this money will largely be raised through the debt

market. We shall see what the DFS reveals when it emerges, this is expected to be before the end of 2015.

Cornfield Flowers Project

The prestigious Cornfield Flowers Project has had another successful year and after the changes made earlier this year it has now become centred at Ryedale Folk Museum. Tom Normandale, the Project officer, in his report to the volunteers and species custodians comments on the rare Small-flowered catchfly. This plant was rediscovered in 2014 after an absence in the area of 74 years and after careful growing-on by some of the volunteers, he says there is now sufficient seed to start trial sowings. The contact email address for enquiries about the project is (cornfield@ryedalefolkmuseum.co.uk) and the telephone number is 07543 540008.

NYMA change of legal status

After the support given by NYMA members at the AGM for the proposed change of status from that of an Unincorporated Association to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) progress has been made to complete the change. The Council meeting on the 19 October saw the final pieces put in place for an application to the Charities Commission to be made.

North York Moors National Park Authority (provided by Michael Graham)

New LEADER programme

The North York Moors National Park Authority has secured £2.336 million of European funding to support projects and activities in the area that will generate growth in the local economy. The funds are provided through the Rural Development Programme for England, which seeks to improve the quality of life in rural areas, diversify rural economies and make the agricultural and forestry sectors more competitive.

The North York Moors, Coast and Hills LEADER Programme will run from 2015 to 2020 and applications for funding from local businesses, individuals, communities and organisations are being accepted. All projects are required to make a positive and direct contribution to improving the local economy and must be connected to farming and forestry productivity, rural tourism or micro and small business development.

Anyone interested in applying for funding should contact Amy Thomas, LEADER Programme Manager, on 01439 772700 to discuss their ideas. More information on the Programme is available at: <http://www.moorscoastandhills.org.uk/>

All grant applications received will be overseen by the LEADER Executive Group, a group of representatives from the private sector and voluntary enterprises along with the NYMNPA, North Yorkshire County Council and Local Authorities.

The North York Moors, Coast and Hills LEADER area covers the North York Moors National Park, the Howardian Hills AONB, the Vale of Pickering, the Hambleton Hills, East Cleveland, and the Heritage Coast from Saltburn to Filey.

Slowing the flow

Pickering is an area known for flooding, with the most serious flood to date (2007) causing an estimated £7 million of damage to residential and commercial properties. The North York Moors National Park Authority (NYMNPA) has been working in partnership with various organisations to help hold water in the landscape and delay its passage downstream, thus reducing the risk of flooding. 'Slowing the Flow' (2009-2015), recently awarded a Judges' Special Prize in the Civic Voice Design Awards, was a pilot project funded by DEFRA, led by

Forest Research and closely supported by various organisations including the Forestry Commission Environment Agency and NYMNPA.

The project used the natural environment to slow the flow of water run-off and reduce flood risk by planting trees, constructing 'woody debris dams' in becks and streams, targeted blocking of moorland drains and tackling erosion of moor and footpaths.

These environmental improvements - combined with a large flood storage bund constructed to the north of the town - are designed to protect Pickering from at least a 1 in 25 year flood. As well as flood protection measures there have been other environmental improvements such as woodland planting, wildlife habitat creation and erosion repairs, and many opportunities for community engagement and learning.

The project is now complete and a final report is available on the Forestry Commission website: www.forestry.gov.uk

Retaining the past

The North York Moors host some wonderful and rare archaeological sites and monuments including 841 that are protected by law as Scheduled Monuments. However, some of these are considered 'at risk' and extremely vulnerable, such as those of the once important alum industry on the coast, now in danger from cliff collapse. The alum industry operated from c.1604 until 1871 and produced almost the entire supply of English alum until the early years of the 19th century when new techniques were developed.

We are unable to save some monuments and so we look to make a detailed record of them in order to capture the history of these precious sites. As part of the Monument Management Scheme (MMS), the NYMNPA commissioned a programme of archaeological excavation and survey of four key alum sites (Saltwick, Kettleless, Sandsend and Boulby). Highlights include some particularly well-built stone structures at Boulby, while at Saltwick some surviving flat wooden barrow boards (for the movement of materials) are the remains of a complex sequence of deposits and structures revealing a dynamic and developing industry. Kettleless demonstrated re-use by the ironstone industry after alum production had ceased, while at Sandsend, detailed up-to-date survey techniques including aerial and LiDAR were employed to reveal the full extent of the works. Due to the hazardous location of the sites on steep cliff edges, undertaking the work was quite dangerous with excavators needing to use climbing and safety equipment to gain access.

The second MMS programme (2012-2015) resulted in recommendations for 77 Scheduled Monuments to be removed from the Heritage at Risk register (approximately a 50% reduction) and improvements made to a further 30. The programme has been extended by a further grant from Historic England for the next three years.

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK

Northumberland National Park Authority (provided by Katy Jackson)

Construction of the Sill underway

The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre reached an historic milestone in September after receiving the green light to move into construction. Northumberland National Park Authority Members overwhelmingly approved the decision to move forward with the £14.8m development after agreeing proposals put forward by the contractors appointed for the scheme, Sir Robert M^cAlpine.

Construction has started, beginning with demolition of the current National Park Visitors' Centre and Youth Hostel at Once Brewed - the site of the Sill. Temporary National Park visitor information and other facilities, including the sale of local crafts and produce, are being offered from the Twice Brewed Inn (adjacent to the Sill site at Once Brewed) and from nearby Walltown Quarry, where people can also look forward to taking part in trial Sill activities and events.

The Sill's main purpose is to open up Northumberland National Park and the surrounding areas to more people, helping them learn about and explore one of Britain's finest landscapes. It will be open year-round and will offer a wide range of facilities including YHA accommodation, exhibition space, retail facilities and a café. In keeping with the heritage and environment of Northumberland National Park's treasured landscapes, every care and attention to detail will be taken to ensure the Sill lives up to its status as a building that is both inspired by the landscape and of the landscape.

The construction phase alone is set to bring in more than 100 new jobs to the region each year. When The Sill is fully operational from Summer 2017, it is predicted it will deliver substantial economic benefits to the region with around £5m of additional visitor spending every year. The Sill's Rural Growth Hub will support the development of rural enterprises, and the project will also offer a wide range of volunteering opportunities. The Sill has attracted significant support from a range of funding partners, including the Heritage Lottery Fund, North East Rural Growth Fund, Northumberland County Council and a number of philanthropic donors.

Conservation and restoration work underway at Simonside

The Simonside Hills are designated as a European Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and are extremely popular with visitors. However, the pressure from visitors presents some problems for the fragile vegetation and underlying peat. One of the consequences of this is that some areas of bare peat have developed on the steep north-facing side of Simonside summit and along the ridge itself in recent years. The area is now in urgent need of repair.

Northumberland National Park Authority has secured funding to carry out some path repair and bare peat stabilisation works. The repair work began with helicopter-lifting into position some 46 pallets of reclaimed mill flags onto the ridge for flagging along a defined path surface, as well as lifting 50 tonnes of local sandstone for pitching. Stone pitching in particular is a traditional skill undertaken by hand, and this section of route will be particularly challenging.

Simonside is one of the most important areas for blanket bog in Europe. Erosion of the peat means loss of the distinctive plant species which grow on the bog, release of extra carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and increased sediment run-off into adjacent rivers. The work being undertaken will address all of these issues and ensure that this iconic area is protected for future generations. Future plans for the site include some bog cotton transplants in summer 2016. The funding for the conservation and repair work has come from Natural England's 'Water Framework Directive' Grant in Aid and Geoff and Val Stoddart's legacy, as well as Northumberland National Park Authority's own project fund.

Parts of the ridge was flagged with reclaimed mill stones over 10 years ago, and at the same time the lower section of the north face near a large rock - known as Bob Pyle's Studdie - was pitched. However, a few sections were left. On the ridge, for example, wet areas in winter have meant walkers are taking a wider line, which results in a braided path and bare peat. At Bob Pyle's Studdie it is unclear to walkers coming down the hill which is the best route, so again a wider and wider route is being opened up in the heather, sandstone and

peat. This repair and conservation work will mean that the bare peat is stabilised to prevent further damage and walkers will now have a defined path to follow.

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

Friends of the Peak District (provided by Andy Tickle)

Backdale Quarry

After only 12 years of campaigning, we are close to seeing mineral extraction rights removed forever at Backdale Quarry at the eastern end of Longstone Edge. In December 2013, using legislation created in the wake of FPD and CNP's groundbreaking report on old mineral permissions in National Parks, the PDNPA served a prohibition notice on the infamous quarry where battles as to its planning status had gone as far as the Supreme and European Courts. Initially, both the landowner and the mineral rights owners (British Fluorspar Ltd) objected, thus causing an inquiry to be called. Although the inquiry may still convene in January 2016, both BFL and the landowner have now withdrawn their objection to mineral working being prohibited. So the "Battle of Backdale" is finally won but we must still wait for the Secretary of State to confirm the order before celebrating!

Pylon schemes

We were pleased that some of the pylons near Dunford Bridge in the Peak District longlisted by National Grid for undergrounding under their VIP scheme have now been shortlisted but we are still disappointed that the bigger and much more intrusive stretch to the west in Longdendale was not chosen despite it being prioritised by local stakeholders. Unfortunately, there appeared to be too many constraints and the costs could have been very high. We will continue to press the case for this stretch if the scheme is continued beyond 2023. Meantime, we look forward to working with National Grid and the PDNPA to maximise the landscape benefits of the Dunford Bridge stretch.

Peak District Boundary Walk

We are scoping out the option of establishing a new long distance walk around the boundary of the PDNP, which would carry the FPD imprimatur. Volunteers have already researched most of the sections and we are now talking to the PDNPA about how to take the proposal forward. The project is the brainchild of our fundraising and media coordinator, Julie Gough, herself a keen walker. It reflects our deep connection with the initial designation of the PDNP (the first National Park) as our founder, Ethel Haythornthwaite, did the initial mapping of the boundaries during World War 2, completing it in sections using her trusted pony Bracken.

Peak District National Park Authority (provided by David Todd)

Thousands of new trees are to be planted in the Peak District National Park through a partnership with the Woodland Trust.

The Peak District Small Woodland Creation Scheme will run from October for the start of the 2015/16 planting season with potential for a further two years. The aim is to establish a total of at least eight hectares (equivalent to ten football pitches) of woodland each year, with each hectare containing up to 1,000 native trees.

The new areas will be planted at no cost to landowners or farmers as all trees, tree guards and associated fencing will be supplied or funded through the scheme.

Eligible locations include farm shelterbelts and woodlands providing opportunities for wildlife, recreation, landscape enhancement and small scale wood fuel provision. Funding is limited

and will be awarded to appropriate proposals on a 'first come first served' basis. Where possible, funds from the national Countryside Stewardship Scheme will be used.

Suzanne Fletcher, countryside and economy manager at the Peak District National Park Authority, said: "We are really excited by this partnership with the Woodland Trust which could mean up to 8,000 new woodland trees in each year.

"Planting trees on upland farms can provide shelter and shade for livestock, and crops, reduce soil erosion on farms by helping water infiltration rates and reduce the risk of flooding. In time, these woodlands could also provide wood fuel and timber for sale or personal use. There are many additional benefits, including important new habitats for upland birds and improvements to the landscape."

Native tree species including beech, small leaved lime, field maple, English and sessile oak can be planted, depending on location, exposure of the site and soil conditions. Alternative species include alder, bird cherry, goat willow, mountain ash, silver birch, holly, whitebeam and crab apple, as well as shrubs like hawthorn, guelder rose, hazel and dogwood.

Doug Edmondson, Woodland Trust woodland creation advisor, said: "We have many years' experience working with landowners across the country and we're keen to hear from anyone wishing to explore the potential benefits from planting trees. Every tree planted works towards increasing the level of woodland cover across the UK, which at 13% is far less than the European average, which is over 40%."

The Monsal Trail in the Peak District National Park has been voted the UK's favourite National Cycle Network route under 30 miles.

And the Trans-Pennine Trail, which runs from Southport to Hornsea and crosses the Peak District National Park through the Longdendale Valley, was chosen as the top long-distance route in the poll by Sustrans, the transport charity.

The Monsal Trail is a traffic-free, easily accessible route for walkers, cyclists and horse riders through some of the Peak District's most spectacular limestone dales. The trail is owned and maintained by the Peak District National Park Authority.

It runs along the former Midland Railway line for 8.5 miles between Blackwell Mill, in Chee Dale, and Coombs Road, at Bakewell. Most of the route was opened to the public in 1981 but four former railway tunnels had to remain closed for safety reasons, with public footpaths taking people around them. In 2011 the four tunnels – Headstone, Cressbrook, Litton and Chee Tor – opened for trail users. Each is about 400 metres long and is lit during normal daylight hours. Two shorter tunnels – Chee Tor No 2 and Rusher Cutting – already formed part of the Monsal Trail.

Matt Burton, manager at the YHA Ravenstor, who backed the trail during the voting, said: "The Monsal Trail is the most beautiful cycle route in the Peak District in my opinion with views of the impressive limestone dales, beautiful wild flowers along the terraces that flank either side and the fascinating engineering structures that you pass along the route."

Emma Stone, trails manager for the Peak District National Park Authority, said: "Over 100,000 people enjoy the Monsal Trail every year so I am pleased that it's received this recognition. We have an important task on our hands to keep all of the viaducts, tunnels and bridges in a good state of repair and keep the trail alive so that future generations can experience its rich beauty and heritage."

The Trans-Pennine Trail incorporates the Longdendale Trail in the north of the national park, a 6.5-mile route from Hadfield to the Woodhead Tunnel, following the route of the Manchester to Sheffield railway line that closed in 1981. The scenic route follows the narrow valley next to Torside and Woodhead reservoirs with high moorland on both sides.

Pylons close to the village of Dunford Bridge in the Peak District National Park are to be removed as part of a £500m project to improve some of the most important landscapes in England and Wales.

Twelve sections of high voltage lines in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding National Beauty had been shortlisted to benefit from the scheme, including the six pylons near Dunford Bridge and a larger section in the Longdendale Valley.

Four projects have now been prioritised and, although the Longdendale stretch is not among them, the lines east of the Woodhead Tunnel at Dunford Bridge will now be buried underground alongside the Transpennine Trail.

Using the £500m allowance made available by Ofgem, National Grid plans to reduce the visual impact of sections of high voltage overhead lines in the four locations, which also include:

- Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty near Winterbourne Abbas
- New Forest National Park near Hale
- Snowdonia National Park near Porthmadog
-

Chris Baines, chair of the Stakeholder Advisory Group which made the decision, said: “Reducing the visual impact of pylons and power lines in our most precious landscapes is highly desirable, but it is also very expensive and technically complex so we have had to make some difficult decisions. Although four schemes have been prioritised, none of the locations on our original shortlist have been dropped and they will remain under consideration for future work to reduce the impact of National Grid’s transmission lines under the Visual Impact Provision project.”

Over the next 12 months, National Grid will be talking with local residents and community groups as plans for the work begin to take shape.

John Scott, director of planning for the Peak District National Park, said: “We are very pleased that the line close to Dunford Bridge has been chosen as one of the four projects because there is no doubt that the work will make a huge difference to the quality of the landscape. It’s disappointing that the Longdendale Valley was not one of the four sites to be prioritised, but it remains on the shortlist and we remain hopeful that it will be considered in the future.”

PEMBROKESHIRE COAST NATIONAL PARK

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (provided by Janet O’Toole)

New Sandy Haven crossing welcomed by local communities

A vital link between two communities in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park has been improved after works to construct a safer tidal crossing at Sandy Haven were completed in June this year.

The local community had raised safety concerns about the former ‘stepping stone’ crossing, which was made from cast concrete barrels. Efforts to stabilise the concrete barrels had failed to provide a long term solution.

The National Park Authority replaced the uneven barrels with a continuous path surface made from concrete culvert sections with the work completed ahead of time and on budget.

National Park Authority Head of Delivery, Charles Mathieson said: "Visitors to the area and local people now have a more reliable crossing which will be available for a longer window in the tidal cycle. The crossing will provide improved accessibility to the beach for families and is a useful link between the communities of Herbrandston and St Ishmaels.

"Although we understand some people were fond of the stepping stones, we could not ignore the safety concerns that were brought to our attention."

Sandy Haven is one of two major tidal crossings on the Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail, which is part of the Wales Coast Path. When accessible at low tide, the new crossing avoids the need to walk an inland diversion of around 5km.

The National Park Authority undertook a long consultation and consenting procedure before the ground work began on the project, which was funded by The Crown Estate's Marine Stewardship Fund, a Welsh Government Access Grant and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority.

Funding for the planning and survey works was provided by Natural Resources Wales, who grant aid the management of the whole National Trail.

National Park Authority Member Cllr Reg Owens was able to gain access to the new causeway using a specially designed beach wheelchair. For more details about beach wheelchair hire visit www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk/accessforall.

National Park Footpath User Survey launched

The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority launched a new Footpath User Survey in August to gather walkers' views on the condition of the country path network in the National Park.

The path network managed by the Park Authority includes the Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail and other public footpaths and bridleways that give access to the countryside in the National Park.

Those who fill out the short questionnaire will be in with a chance of winning three cash prizes of £100, £75 and £50.

National Park Authority Access Manager, Anthony Richards said: "We recognise the positive benefits walking brings to the local economy in terms of visitor spend and also to local people and visitors in terms of their health and well-being.

"The data gathered will provide the Authority with a better understanding of footpath use in the National Park, who is using the path network and what motivates and inspires people to get out walking.

"The results will help us plan for the future and tell us where we need to target our resources, in order to improve the general condition of public rights of way and how we promote the footpath network."

The Authority has placed seven boxes on the Coast Path and five on the inland paths in the

National Park, containing simple forms for people to fill out. Once the forms are filled out, they should be posted into the slot in the box for collection.

The survey boxes can be found at: Nevern, Pantmaenog, Gwaun Valley, Cwm yr Eglwys, Garn Fechan, Aberiddi, Newgale, near Broad Haven (North), West Angle, St Govan's, Saundersfoot and Minwear.

The last footpaths surveys were the Country Paths Survey 2005 and Coast Path User Survey 1996/7. Both these surveys provided useful data to prepare the Pembrokeshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007-17 (ROWIP), which identifies the priorities for the strategic management of public rights of way in the county.

The results of the new survey will be used to guide the future management of public rights of way in the Park and will help to prepare a new ten-year strategy to replace the current ROWIP.

The survey will last for 12 months with a prize draw made on 1 August 2016. The project is being part-funded by the Welsh Government's Rights Of Way Improvement Plan Grant.

Partially sighted walker completes Pembrokeshire Coast Path

A Milford Haven man who is registered blind recently walked the entire Pembrokeshire Coast Path and is now challenging people of all abilities to follow in his footsteps.

70-year-old Roger Barrett completed the 186-mile National Trail in just 17 days over a period of three months, walking eight to 16 miles a day with the help of Peter Royle, a Voluntary Activity Leader for the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority.

Roger was diagnosed with the hereditary degenerative eye disease *retinata pigmentosa* 30 years ago. However, he was not about to let his impaired vision stop him from conquering all the ascents, descents, twists and turns the Coast Path provides.

He said: "Overall it was a very enjoyable experience and I'd thoroughly recommend that everyone have a go at it, even if you do it in short stages.

"I talk to people who say it's always something they've fancied doing - I've shown that with help it's possible for anyone to do it and hopefully others will now think it's a good idea.

"The National Park volunteers are very generous with their time and energy and their willingness to take people out to enjoy the countryside and support them."

The trip was arranged after Roger had been put in touch with the National Park Authority's Walkability Project Co-ordinator Paul Casson, who put a call out for volunteers to accompany him on his walk. Peter initially volunteered to help out as part of a team but ended up completing the entire Coast Path.

The pair started their journey in June, setting off from Amroth in the south towards the north so the sun was behind them, which made it easier for Roger. The dynamic duo even returned to walk on the Castlemartin Range in August to make sure they had completed every section of the Path.

Peter, who has volunteered with the National Park Authority for nearly ten years, added: "It was great fun walking with Roger. It took us a while to work out how we were going to do it and there were a few teething problems. I realised if we came to a gate and I hadn't told him in advance, he would keep walking and I would end up wedged between him and the gate.

“One of the main messages I hope people take from the walk is that the Coast Path is for everyone, don't let any disability or restriction stop you enjoying the Path.”

SNOWDONIA NATIONAL PARK

Snowdonia Society

National Grid Pylons announcement

National Grid has announced the final shortlist of four sites for their £500m Visual Impact Provision project, and on that list is the Portmeirion to Trawsfynydd section – roughly 7km of highly intrusive pylons which dominate and degrade the landscape. The pylons in question march across the Dwyryd estuary, climb up a stunning valley past Moel Tecwyn to Llyn Tecwyn Uchaf before crossing Ceunant Llennyrch with its ancient woodland. The pylons have marched for over 50 years across outstanding landscapes, breathtaking views and nationally important wildlife habitats. Now this place is poised to be unshackled and transformed.

The Snowdonia Society is delighted that this special landscape will now go on to the final stage of detailed technical evaluation. If the project goes ahead, it will have a transformational impact. But we are also realistic about what lies ahead.

Putting high voltage cables underground in this varied terrain is a phenomenal technical challenge. We expect that even if possible, the work will be difficult and extremely expensive – potentially £20m per km. The route crosses through sensitive habitats for wildlife including Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Special Areas of Conservation. Solutions will be needed which balance the benefits to landscape against the risk to precious ecology.

On a wider scale, we hope that lessons will be learned. Welcome as it is, this undergrounding project will, we hope, solve one problem in one corner of Snowdonia. The extremely challenging nature of the work should throw a spotlight on the absurdity of recent decisions to install new swathes of pylons 160ft tall – miles and miles of them – across Anglesey and through the Lake District National Park.

Snowdonia National Park Authority (provided by Llinos Angharad)

Prestigious Award for School Design

Ysgol Craig y Deryn in Llanegryn, won one of the main Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)'s Awards at a ceremony in London in July.

RTPI awards recognise, applaud and publicise examples of good planning practice in the UK and winning the Excellence in Planning for the Community and Wellbeing Award is an important feather in the Authority's cap.

At this years' awards, judges noted that they were most impressed by the design; not only how the site for this school was selected to replace four schools from different communities, but also how the scheme was developed on the site and within the sensitive environment of Snowdonia National Park. It was also noted the central role of the planners to deliver a successful outcome in extremely challenging circumstances.

Ysgol Craig y Deryn is a good example of a low impact building, which is a large development, set within a rural area of national significance. Modern and traditional techniques, building materials and technology have been combined to create a sustainable building, using low levels of energy and carbon. The long-term cost of the building was also

considered, and its future impact on the environment, habitats and biodiversity of the area. It also reinforces the sense of place, as well as the social well-being and the linguistic heritage of the area which will in turn benefit and sustain future generations.

Ysgol Craig y Deryn was opened in 2013 and today, the school has 110 primary school pupils. The final design was a result of team work: Gwynedd Council as the applicant, Geraint Roberts from B3 Architects and Wynne Construction were responsible for building the school.

Celebrating 40 at Plas Tan y Bwlch

On September 1st, Plas Tan y Bwlch near Maentwrog celebrated 40 years since being established as the Snowdonia National Park Centre.

A house has been on the site of the mansion since the sixteenth century, but after being owned by various owners over the centuries, the house was finally purchased in 1969 by Meirionnydd County Council and then established in 1975 as the National Park Education Centre. Since then, at least fifty thousand adults and over a hundred thousand children have been to Plas and through courses, conferences and lectures, now appreciate and understand more about the countryside, and respect the environment.

During the celebrations local MP, Liz Saville Roberts, historian Dr Dafydd and the Chairman of Plas Tan y Bwlch Board, Owain Wyn, Plas addressed the invited audience and a book, History of Plas Tan y Bwlch, based on detailed research by the late Merfyn Williams, a former head of the Centre, and former Plas lecturer, Twm Elias was launched.

Following the celebrations, Emyr Williams, Snowdonia National Park's Chief Executive said, "Plas has made a major contribution to the local community. It has offered employment opportunities for local residents and today employs 35 full time and part time staff. It has contributed towards the businesses of local providers and many of its customers have returned to the area boosting the local tourism industry. Today, it has excellent facilities for adults and children courses and the new provision of opening the gardens to the public, the opening of a new Tearoom and providing Sunday lunch is an excellent attraction for local residents and visitors. As a public Authority, we are facing financial challenges, but with help and support we will make every effort to ensure the future success of Plas Tan y Bwlch."

Minister visits peatland restoration project

Natural Resources Minister Carl Sargeant visited Snowdonia National Park in September to see how a Welsh Government Nature Fund project to restore areas of peatland has come to fruition. The Welsh Government awarded £132,000 to the Snowdonia and Hiraethog Peatland Restoration led by SNPA to restore areas of peatland, a priority habitat in the Conwy Valley, Berwyn and Migneint & Llŷn Peninsula.

There are 4 main elements to the project:

- Treating unwanted invasive vegetation to enable appropriate grazing which will create better conditions for natural moorland habitat;
- Blocking artificial drainage ditches to create better conditions for peatland;
- Produce a strategy for the future protection of peatlands within Snowdonia and the surrounding area to be able to share with other organisations and local communities;
- Promotional work amongst local communities, including the production of a video to go alongside the project and work with local primary schools.

Carl Sargeant said: "Snowdonia National Park Authority has made a significant contribution in helping to support the development of the Nature Fund and in leading this important

project. I am particularly keen that we engage and include young people in taking forward this work and Snowdonia National Park has taken an approach that is innovative, refreshing and has clearly worked well. I am pleased to see that other organisations, local schools, and small businesses have also played key roles in the delivery of the project.”

The video produced as part of the project, with help from one of Wales’ most famous rappers Ed Holden (aka Mr Phormula), includes pupils from Ysbyty Ifan and Pentrefoelas rapping about the importance of peat and can be seen on <https://goo.gl/P21IRw>

South Downs National Park

South Downs Society (provided by Steve Ankers)

Society away day

The South Downs Society has organised an “away day” for around three dozen of its most active volunteers to discuss an update to its strategic plan to cover the period 2016-21. The current plan, prepared within the framework of its charitable objects and the statutory purposes and duty of national park designation, focuses on such areas as “champion and advocate of the national park”, “critical friend of the NPA” and “an informed and distinctive voice.” With contributions from South Downs NPA staff and the services of an external facilitator, members will consider the Society’s strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the light of the changing environment in which it operates and the activities of other national park societies and local organisations. Any amendments to the strategic priorities may need to be reflected in the Society’s allocation of resources and a revised action plan.

Unexpected housing allocation

The Inspector for the Lewes/NPA local plan (covering the whole of the district inside and outside the national park) accepted earlier in the year that the emerging plan would not be able to meet in full the “evidence based” local housing needs because of development constraints like flood risk and the national park, but that an increase in housing numbers of around 1,100 during the plan period over and above what was planned could reasonably be achieved. He asked that the District Council and the National Park Authority undertake a further consultation on his recommendations, including the suggestion that a site at Old Malling Farm, Lewes, within the national park, be allocated for around 200 new houses. The site is in agricultural use in the Ouse valley and constitutes part of an attractive green “lung” reaching into the heart of the town. The Society has mounted a vigorous objection to this proposal, with press coverage, in collaboration with the local Lewes civic society, because of the precedent that would be set for the use of other greenfield sites for housing in the South Downs and possibly other national parks if it is agreed. The National Park Authority, as the planning authority, has previously ruled out the site as inappropriate on landscape grounds but is obliged by the plan inspector to put it forward for consultation.

Gilbert White: 18th century parson, naturalist and ornithologist

The trustees of Gilbert White’s house in Selborne, Hampshire, have approached the Society seeking comment on, and planning support for, an ambitious project to refurbish parts of the house and grounds and improve the visitor experience at this well-known attraction. The plans seem well thought through and are the subject of public consultation prior to the submission of a planning application later this year. They appear to meet the objectives of the national park in terms of conservation and enjoyment and supporting the local economy in Selborne. The Society will be providing the trustees with a letter of support for the proposals for the purposes of seeking external funding and, subject to being satisfied with the scheme details, is likely to be able to support the planning application.

South Downs National Park Authority (provided by Joanna Glyde)

Development across the South Downs National park

New policies that set the course for development across the South Downs National Park were opened up for comment from September. The Local Plan for the South Downs National Park takes the radical approach of putting landscapes first while still serving the needs of communities and the local economy. The National Park Authority has now published its preferred options for these policies and is asking people – individuals and organisations – to give their feedback.

When the plan is adopted – expected to be 2017 – it will be the first time that a single set of planning policies have been applied across the 1,600sqkm area of the UK's newest National Park. The aim is to set high standards that all development proposed for the National Park must meet to ensure that nature is protected and valued both for its own sake and for the things it gives us.

The consultation closed on 28 October.

Otters boost wildlife

The first confirmed evidence of an otter on the upper Rother River in Hampshire since 2001 has been captured on film as part of work to boost local wildlife in the South Downs National Park. A camera trap, set up on the river, was put in place to monitor whether invasive species American mink, which threatens our native wildlife, was at large in the area. But instead, it recorded a young otter visiting the site.

Chris Gurney, Apprentice Ranger for the National Park, said it had been 14 years since the last confirmed sighting – “probably because the river hasn't been healthy enough to support the fish they eat.

“There's been a real community effort to improve the habitat with local fishing groups, landowners and volunteers all working together to restore the river and encourage more sympathetic land management. The hard work is paying off.”

Dark Skies Dan

Dark-skies Dan, South Downs National Park Authority ranger, is going to be very busy over the next few months putting together our final submission to become an International Dark skies reserve. While other UK reserves are known for their remoteness we would be the first to be found so close to large towns and cities such as Brighton and Portsmouth. He is currently collating letters of support and comments from our dark skies pledge and has received lots of support from local astronomers who have shared their photos with him. The application should be submitted in January 2016.

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK

Yorkshire Dales Society (YDS) (provided by Mark Corner)

“Capturing the Past”

YDS is delighted to have secured funding to sponsor a three year “Capturing the Past” project to train local heritage groups and others to be able to digitally store and make publically available on-line their archives. A local expert team will deliver this for us and will be funded through a Heritage Lottery Fund grant as part of an exciting series of projects called “Stories in Stone” coordinated by the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust.

The total award is worth over £2 million and the 27 individual projects will focus on the Ingleborough area of the Dales with the aim to conserve and restore some of our most important heritage assets. Other projects include the restoration of traditional farm buildings and dry stone walls, archaeological surveys of deserted settlements, woodland and limestone pavement restoration, and countryside management and heritage skills training for young people in the Ingleborough area.

Regarding the Capturing the Past project, many local groups and individuals in the area have archive material relating to the history of local communities and their use and management of the landscape but the range and content of this archival heritage is only partly understood and it remains an under-used resource - unseen, inaccessible or at risk of deterioration or loss. Based on the principle that a community's sense of place rests on an understanding of its past, we wish to enable wider, sustained, rigorous and ultimately more useful access to the archival heritage. The aim of the project is to equip volunteers, who are likely to include members of local heritage bodies, with the skills needed to assess and interpret these archives and to make them available through an online databank. A package of digitising equipment will be purchased and made available to our expert team for use within the project. The principal outcomes will be a team of trained volunteers who will have the skills and equipment to continue their work in subsequent years, and a tested online databank to which material can continue to be added. Staff at the North Yorkshire County Records Office will assist in project delivery.

Making the archival heritage available online will benefit all with an interest in the history of the project area, transforming intellectual access to the area's history. Beneficiaries will include professionals involved in landscape interpretation, school teachers developing local history projects, members of local heritage bodies, visitors to the Yorkshire Dales, and a wide public, including those with an interest in local and family history of the project area.

The Capturing the Past project fits wonderfully with YDS's purposes of both helping conserve the cultural heritage of the Dales and with our educational role and we are excited about delivering the project.

A new approach to our events programme

In an effort to refresh and make more attractive to members and others our events programme, we rebranded our "offer" last year and have enjoyed particular success with our "Vibrant Communities" events.

We traditionally offer around 20 events per year and decided to classify these in categories that align with our objects as a Society, making it clearer to members what to expect. These categories are:

- CLASSIC COUNTRYSIDE – medium to long, all day walks in the Dales based on a theme which might be geology, heritage, farming or whatever is of interest to the leader. Three or four per year.
- DALES INSIGHTS – very similar in format to the traditional "walk and talk" day event, involving a lecture given by an expert on Dales history, life and culture etc. in the afternoon and in the morning a short walk in the local area, possibly illustrating the theme of the afternoon. Three per year.
- VIBRANT COMMUNITIES – based on a specific village or town in the Dales, all day events which would focus on aspects of the settlement. They could involve walking around a town focussing on points of interest, using its facilities for lunch, and involving local people and organisations in discussions about items of local concern (e.g. housing, farming, industry, transport). Three or four per year.

- **FOCUS ON THE DALES** – a topic-based day on a subject of current interest to the whole of the Dales, for example affordable housing. One per year.

In a “market place” where lots of other organisations lead standard walks or talks, we have found that the two Vibrant Communities events we have run so far have offered something distinctive to participants and have been a great success, attracting 25-50 participants, one linked to our AGM.

Both the events, in Sedbergh and Leyburn, were designed and led by Society members and other volunteers local to the towns. They involved an informative walk around the town, guided by members of the local history group or the like, visits to local businesses, lunches in pubs/cafes, discussions with local civic or business leaders about the challenges facing the areas, and in the case of Sedbergh, privileged access to the local public school. Participants felt they gained real insights to the towns, the event leaders were proud to showcase their home patches, and local businesses gained some welcome custom. We believe these days offer a very positive way of engaging with our local communities and intend to continue with this approach.

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority

Food and drink heaven in National Park

Gastronauts will be licking their lips over the impressive choice of food on offer in the Yorkshire Dales National Park following the launch of The Yorkshire Dales Food Network, which has been set up to boost awareness of the huge variety of food producers in the Yorkshire Dales.

A new website – <http://eatthedales.co.uk> – has been launched with the help of a £10,000 grant from the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority’s Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

Andrea Burden, the National Park Authority’s Sustainable Development Officer, said: “This is a pilot project that aims to create a searchable, interactive, internet-based directory and network of local food producers connected to retailers, restaurants, hospitality businesses and consumers.

“It’s a fantastic chance to raise the profile of the National Park as a visitor destination and to boost tourism-related businesses all at the same time”

Carl Lis, the Authority’s Member Champion for Sustainable Development, said: “The National Park Management Plan contains a specific objective to improve the quality and value of farm produce and to promote local food. This project is a great way to help to do that.

The website provides information on where to eat and buy locally produced food and where to stay locally. Yorkshire Dales Food Network spokesman Ian Smith said: “The key to the success of the project is to get consumers involved as members – and the great thing is it’s absolutely free. As we build the trade membership, we hope to be able to give discounts and other incentives at great places to eat, drink and stay in the Dales, thereby encouraging trade and helping people enjoy what’s on offer.

“We’ve been trying to get this project off the ground for a number of years and the SDF grant has helped us to finally do it.”

Get star struck in the National Park

The Yorkshire Dales National Park is the place to visit for a spot of serious star gazing – and that's official.

Three new Milky Way class sites at Hawes, Malham and Buckden that were nominated by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) have been accepted by the Dark Sky Discovery site initiative, which identifies places with good public access where people can freely view the night sky.

National Park Authority Tourism Officer Tracey Lambert said: "We've known for a long time just how special the skies are above the Yorkshire Dales National Park but it's nice to have this recognised. "It's amazing what you can see – the Perseid meteor shower a few weeks ago was spectacular and earlier in the year it was possible to see the Northern lights."

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority has been working with local tourism businesses to help them promote stargazing as another reason to visit the area, particularly between the end of August and the beginning of March when the night sky is at its darkest.

Two recent events for tourism businesses were staged in September in the People's Hall in Sedbergh and in October at Kilnsey Park Estate. Both cost £10 per person and ran from 6.30pm to 9.30pm.

Richard Darn, an amateur astronomer and journalist who is running the events, says "The Yorkshire Dales is a stargazer's paradise. The Milky Way arches majestically across the sky on clear autumn evenings and star clusters sparkle like diamonds on black velvet. It's a breath taking scene that adds so much to the unspoilt character of the region and provides the stuff of holiday memories."

Grants open more of National Park for wheelchair users

Wheelchair users wanting to explore the breath-taking scenery of the Yorkshire Dales now have even more information and support at their fingertips to help them plan their trip.

Two £5,000 grants from the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) Sustainable Development Fund have given a big boost to Huddersfield-based Experience Community, which provides films and information about walks and other leisure activities for wheelchair users and the wider community.

The not-for-profit Community Interest Company is now producing four short films showing different walks or routes in the National Park that offer varying degrees of challenge to wheelchair users. Two – covering Malham Tarn and Aysgarth Falls – are already available to watch on Experience Community's website at www.experiencecommunity.co.uk and on YouTube. The films explain the route length, path surfaces, gradients and any other potential obstacles. The second SDF grant will help Experience Community to buy a third Mountain Trike that wheelchair users can use on rougher terrains.

Experience Community founder Craig Grimes, who became disabled in 1997, said: "Providing information to disabled people about routes they can use in the National Park is a great way to encourage them to visit. The films mean that people can see exactly what they're going into so they can make informed decisions about if a route is suitable for their needs or not.

Rachel Briggs, the National Park Authority's Access Development Officer, said: "The National Park covers 680 sq miles of stunning landscape and we want people to come out and enjoy it regardless of any mobility issues they may have. To that end, we are working

with a large number of organisations to develop as many routes as possible that are suitable for people with disabilities.”

SCOTTISH CAMPAIGN FOR NATIONAL PARKS

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

At Loch Lomond three initiatives have made good progress over recent months. Firstly, the comprehensive and controversial “**Your Park**” proposals have been submitted to the Minister. These will greatly extend the “no camping” byelaws to tackle the problems of irresponsible camping on busy loch shores. They follow on from the success of no camping and no drinking byelaws on East Loch Lomondside. The proposals have qualified support from SCNP and the Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs NP and local communities but are opposed by Ramblers Scotland and the Scottish Mountaineering Council. A ministerial decision is expected shortly.

Consultation on the latest version of the next 5 year Local Development Plan “**Live Park**” has been completed. Few changes to the plan are anticipated following significant consultation with local communities. The challenge, as always, will be to convert the Plan into action.

As part of a National Scenic Routes initiative, the Park Authority has been working with young designers to create new and unusual viewpoints at some of the Park’s most breathtaking locations.

The Friends completed the latest phase of work at the popular Tom Weir’s Rest at Balmaha which has attracted over 60,000 visitors since a statue of Tom, “Scotland’s most popular mountain man” was unveiled last December to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth. The statue and associated improvement works will have cost £120,000 when completed in December this year.

Cairngorms National Park

Much of the previous updates from Cairngorms National Park featured wall to wall concerns over planning issues and in particular the over-supply of land for housing. While such issues are still live, they have become less prominent as we await the long delayed masterplan for An Camas Mor, the 1,500 scale housing development adjoining Aviemore. One factor that may be at stake here is the massive decline in Fresh Water Pearl Mussels in the Spey related to sewage outfalls. Given the SAC status of the Spey, the NPA will have to assure the authorities that it can safeguard this population despite planning for more housing.

We are pleased to report that the NPA have done much good work on the conservation front, particularly in regard to capercaillie and wildcats. One issue which has surfaced though, is the lease given to Yorkshire-based Natural Retreats to manage Cairngorm Mountain and the Funicular. We await with interest their plans for development.

The long-time convener of the Park Board, Duncan Bryden, has stepped down to be replaced by Peter Argyle. We offer good wishes to both for the future.