

News from around the Parks

Any items in italics are from the CNP staff. Apologies for any stylistic errors, which are caused by the variety of formats in which the reports are received. Some reports have been edited for length.

International News – Adrian Phillips

Following the publication of new guidelines for the IUCN categories of protected areas in 2008, the UK Committee for IUCN is developing a project to classify all the areas in the UK that might be "Protected Areas" in the internationally-recognised sense. The project (known as Putting Nature on the Map) is being co-ordinated for the committee by Middlemarch Environmental, with funds from Natural England, the Sibthorp Trust and the John Muir Trust. The results, which should be available by the end of year, will be stored on the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre's database, available to all, and used by the government and others to demonstrate to the international community the UK's efforts to protect nature.

A difficult issue is the status of the UK's protected landscapes, including the National Parks. As CNP members will recall from talks that I have given on previous occasions, the current recognition given to the parks as Category V Protected Landscapes has to be re-examined in the light of the new guidelines. Middlemarch and the UK Committee are organising a workshop on 3 May to address this topic. CNP, ANPA (in its various forms) and some other public and voluntary sector bodies have been (or shortly will be) invited. I will report progress as the project proceeds.

Brecon Beacons NPA – Carys Howell

National Park Authority wins Talgarth tree replanting appeal

In what is thought to be the first case of its kind in the UK, an Independent Planning Inspector has backed Brecon Beacons National Park Authority's decision to issue a Tree Replacement Notice (TRN) to a developer to replace seven cherry trees felled in the Talgarth Conservation Area.

The Appeal Decision was received by the National Park Authority last month from the Planning Inspectorate, dismissing the appeal made by Wyro Developments Ltd and upholding the Tree Replacement Notice (TRN). The decision follows a lengthy battle with Wyro Developments Ltd to replace seven mature cherry trees which were felled in the Talgarth Conservation Area without permission in September 2008.

Mr Gwynedd P Thomas, the appointed Planning Inspector, said that in light of photographs taken of the area before the trees were felled, the mature cherry trees within the Talgarth Conservation Area made a significant and positive contribution to the town's character and appearance. Although he noted that there was no objection to the principle of the replanting he was not convinced by the argument that it would be appropriate to plant the replacement trees as part of a development scheme for the whole site. He concluded that the replacement trees are required in the interests of amenity - and in view of the fact that planting 7 cherry trees was not particularly onerous – there was a remaining 'window of opportunity' to carry out the requirements of the Tree Replacement Notice.

Innovative community groups receive funding boost from National Park Sustainable Development Fund

Earlier this year, seven small community groups and organisations working on sustainable development projects and initiatives which help to meet National Park objectives have been awarded grant funding totalling nearly £33,000.

At a Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Committee meeting held earlier this month, seven projects received approval for funding which included:

- Talgarth Mill Green Energy Group receiving a further £6,000 towards the project to re-install their waterwheel to generate power from water on that site in the centre of Talgarth once more.
- The Myddfai, Made in a Great Tradition project were awarded a further £12,000 towards the installation of ground source heat pumps as part of their village hall and community regeneration project. Myddfai were recently awarded the “Rural Enterprise of the Year” from the Countryside Alliance.
- Theatr Brycheiniog will become the first theatre in Wales to use LED lights on stage which will reduce their energy consumption in this area by 80% - £3,000 of funding will help with this.
- Llangattock Green Valleys CiC will use £1,625 of funding to help develop a three year business plan.
- The Black Mountain Centre in Brynaman will use £5,000 of grant funding award to create a Tourist Information point and arts and crafts selling area.
- Arts Alive were awarded £3,923 to build on the successful Green Fire project which was based in the Uplands area of Brecon, reaching out in Talgarth to explore more sustainable ways of living by engaging creatively with the natural world.
- The SDF will also support the European Geopark Conference with a grant of £1,000.

Generous funding supports major path improvements on the Beacons Way

With funding from the Welsh Assembly Government and the Countryside Council for Wales, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority has been able to complete major footpath improvements to the popular Beacons Way walking route.

Working with local contractors, volunteers and students from Gelli Aur College, National Park Authority Wardens and the Access Officer have tackled significant erosion problems that have damaged the Beacons Way footpath network to improve and upgrade its accessibility for walkers.

The improvements were made to three sections of the popular Beacons Way route which traverses nearly 100 miles across the Brecon Beacons National Park from the Skirrid Mountain in the East to Bethlehem in the West. The first section of repairs was undertaken at the foot of Craig y Fan Ddu in the central Beacons to replace part of the footpath that had become extremely eroded by creating a stone pitched path. A second section of the Beacons Way – the path from Llyn y Fan Fawr to Fan Brycheiniog – was also upgraded to minimise erosion and improve the visitor experience. A third section of the footpath in Carmarthenshire was also upgraded with the installation of a new non-slip walkway, along with way marking and sign posting improvements.

The project was funded through the Authority’s continuing Rights of Way Improvement Plan programme, a scheme which is grant aided by the Countryside Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government. The Authority received £92,000 through this scheme in 2010/11 and more repairs are planned for the coming financial year.

Cwrt y Gollen Public Inquiry awaiting Inspector’s decision

A Public Inquiry into the redevelopment of the former army camp at Cwrt y Gollen is awaiting a decision from an independent Planning Inspector.

The two week long independent Public Inquiry – which started on Tuesday 15th February at the Clarence Hall in Crickhowell – sees both parties now awaiting the decision on whether planning permission should be granted for the re-development of the former army camp at Cwrt y Gollen for comprehensive mixed use.

The mixed use development comprises residential development, employment provision, a pre-school nursery, a residential care home, open space provision including allotments, community orchard, sports provision and associated infrastructure works.

In June 2010, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority refused to grant planning permission to Crickhowell Estates Ltd for the development. Crickhowell Estates Ltd appealed the decision which was heard by an independent Planning Inspector appointed by the Welsh Assembly Government back in February. After hearing all the evidence, the Inspector is now expected to make a recommendation to the appropriate Welsh Assembly Government Minister in the next few months. The Minister will then decide whether to refuse or permit the development.

Brecon Beacons Park Society – Charles Henderson

Planning

There is considerable pressure on the Brecon Beacons from planning applications south of the park which would have an adverse visual impact on the park. We are keeping this situation under review, but may not be able to influence the outcome as we would wish.

CNP is also very concerned about the impact of these development proposals on the southern fringes of the National Park and hopes to meet the Society and Authority in June to discuss this.

Geopark

We are co- operating with the BBNPA on the upcoming European Geopark Conference.

Press and Publicity

We have appointed a Press and Publicity Officer to help to promote the society, raise our profile and to try to increase our membership.

Broads Authority – Rashmi Varma

Reorganisation

The Broads Authority has been significantly reorganised following Defra's funding cuts. From April 2013 four directorates will be reduced to two, with an interim structure of three directorates from May this year. One will bring all operational activity together, one will focus on planning and strategy and the third on change management and resources. Around 30 jobs have been lost. A new ranger service combines work on land and water. The Authority's budget focuses on protecting frontline delivery, in particular fen management and dredging for both conservation and navigation purposes and practical maintenance. This has entailed reviewing the allocation of shared costs so that it is on a fairer basis.

Broads chosen as 'Pathfinder' destination.

The Broads has been chosen as one of only four of Visit England's 'Pathfinder' destinations which are selected for special focus as international holiday hot spots. The Broads will work with the other three chosen destinations, the Peak District, Manchester and Bath to share knowledge and best practice.

Chief Executive of Visit England, James Berresford, made the announcement when he launched the official website of the Broads, www.enjoythebroads.com and its accompanying brochure for 2011 aboard the 'Vintage Broadsman' in Wroxham. Enjoythebroads is an annual collaborative campaign between the Broads Authority and Broads Tourism, which is made up of local businesses.

Visitor Hubs

Due to the funding cuts the Broads Authority has rationalised its visitor services to focus on three visitor hubs, each running an environmentally friendly boat trip. The solar boat 'Ra' is

moving from Barton Broad to Whitlingham Country Park near Norwich, where the visitor centre will now operate all year round. The electric launch 'Liana' is moving from Beccles to Hoveton, linking with the visitor centre there, and the Electric Eel wildlife water trail will run as normal at How Hill. Two new 42" touchscreens displaying 200 video images of Broads wildlife and habitats will be installed at Whitlingham and Hoveton.

For more information contact Hilary Franzen: 01603 756034 email: hilary.franzen@broads-authority.gov.uk

Broads Society – Peter Horsefield

No report received.

Dartmoor NPA – Diana Moyse**Consultation on New Design Guide for Dartmoor**

Encouraging high quality, sympathetic and well informed design is essential in protecting the special qualities of Dartmoor. Good design includes the consideration of such issues as appropriate quality, choice of materials, accessibility and layout all within the overall aim of conserving the distinctiveness of the built environment and reinforcing local character. Additionally, design will need to have regard to the increasing need for energy efficient development to meet the challenge of climate change. With this in mind, a new design guide for Dartmoor was published for public consultation at the end of February 2011. The guide has been published in partnership with Dartmoor National Park Authority by architects and planning consultants, Stride Treglown. When completed, the guide will be a supplementary planning document which will form part of the Authority's Local Development Framework

The guide is divided into four sections with the initial section providing an assessment of the building traditions of Dartmoor and what makes the area special. Subsequent sections provide advice on building design to help meet the challenges of climate change and design guidance on the most common types of development proposal. The final section offers ideas on best practice in the design and detailing of individual building elements such as doors and windows.

The main purpose of the guide is to provide advice for those seeking planning permission from the National Park Authority for their development proposals and it will be useful for applicant and their agents and architects. However, it is also hoped that the guide will influence those who are carrying out smaller changes to their buildings by providing them with ideas and inspiration and also encourage a greater interest in the built environment from all those who live and work in the national park and those who visit it. In view of the wide target audience, attention has been given to writing the guide in language that is accessible to different types of reader and the text is liberally illustrated with photographs and drawings

The guide can be viewed on the National Park Authority's web site www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk

Comments on the Dartmoor National Park Design Guide should be sent by post to:

Stephen Belli, Director of Planning
Dartmoor National Park Authority
Parke, Bovey Tracey
Devon TQ13 9JQ
Or by email to: forwardplanning@dartmoor-npa.gov.uk
The consultation period closes on 21 April 2011.

Dartmoor Cairn Repair and Survey Project wins National Archaeology Award!

A volunteer archaeology project based on Dartmoor has won this year's Marsh Archaeology Award. The award is organised by the Council for British Archaeology and this year the theme concentrated on Community Archaeology.

The result is fantastic recognition for the project which records and repairs damage inflicted to Dartmoor prehistoric cairns. The cairns are important archaeological features constructed during the Bronze Age over 4,000 years ago for the burial of the dead. The damage is often caused by visitor disturbance which has resulted in people moving around the stone material of the cairns to create hollows, shelters and mounds. All the cairns are scheduled ancient monuments and therefore protected by law.

The project is run jointly by the DNPA, Dartmoor Preservation Association and English Heritage. Volunteers carry out accurate archaeological surveys of the cairns and fully record all aspects of the damage before carefully undertaking the repairs. The repair work is supervised by the DNPA and local English Heritage archaeologist.

Over five seasons of work, the project volunteers have repaired 49 cairns and this has resulted in 31 scheduled ancient monuments being removed from the English Heritage "at risk" register. The work has been undertaken for no cost. There are around 15 regular volunteers and they have contributed over 500 working days.

The high quality of the volunteers' surveys is particularly impressive and many new facts about the cairns have emerged as a result. The volunteers are currently "inking up" their survey drawings for a report that will be published in the forthcoming year.

Dartmoor Mires Project

The Dartmoor Mires Project is a 5-year pilot to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of restoration of degraded blanket bog on Dartmoor. It is being undertaken by a public-private partnership of statutory agencies, commoners' organisations, the Duchy of Cornwall which owns the land and South West Water which is providing the majority of funding. It is led by Dartmoor National Park Authority which employs a Project Officer (in post) and a Historic Environment Officer (yet to be appointed.)

The project aims to explore the potential for benefits for biodiversity, water and carbon. Practical targets are modest and there is a strong emphasis on monitoring of outcomes in order to establish the case for a further programme of work.

The project was officially launched by Poul Christensen, Chair of Natural England, on 1 February 2011. It is managed by a Project Board and liaises with a wider group of partners through an Advisory Group who contribute to project progress.

A number of areas, totalling 120ha have been identified to consider for restoration during the 5 year term. Priority has been given to high quality blanket bog which is threatened by encroaching erosion gullies. A proposal for restoration of the first site has been agreed by partners with a view to undertaking work in late summer/autumn.

Setting up a monitoring site, which in particular will enable the effects of restoration on water quantity, movement and quality to be measured and analysed, is a further priority for 2011. Links have been made with local Universities which will undertake substantial elements of research.

Dartmoor Preservation Association – James Paxman**Meldon Reservoir footpath**

The loss of a popular and scenic path on the north-western shore of Meldon reservoir is an indirect consequence of Defra's policies on payment for public access.

A path, following the course of an old leat has been available to the public for many years and provides a scenic route along the north western shore of the reservoir. As the path is some two hundred feet above the water level it provides excellent views and the character of the path itself is unusual for Dartmoor.

To date, public access along the path has been provided by an access agreement between the landowner and Dartmoor National Park Authority. A couple of years ago DNPA decided to review the access payment they were making to bring them into line with the level of payments being provided by Defra under HLS schemes. The resulting scale of payments represented a cut of almost 50% for new or renewed agreements. The agreement for the path in question expires on March 31st 2011 and the landowner had declined to renew under the new rates and therefore the general public will be excluded from this popular path, forming an integral part of a circular route around Meldon reservoir.

Half a payment is better than none, you might think. But the withdrawal of the landowner's cooperation only mirrors the unfortunate withdrawal of the availability of public access payments from Defra under HLS agreements and the diminutive scale of available payments. This sits unhappily with the recent Upland Policy Review from Defra that outlines payment for ecosystem services (including recreation) as a lynchpin in safeguarding a viable future for the uplands.

Exmoor NPA – Andrea Davis

Low Carbon Communities Challenge

Television star, Dick Strawbridge, ("It's Not Easy Being Green"; Celebrity Masterchef; Scrapheap Challenge) provided an inspiring talk for residents of Exmoor at the Carbon Neutral Exmoor celebration event in the Moorland Hall, Wheddon Cross. Last year communities on Exmoor were asked to stake their claims for a share of up to £400,000 secured by Exmoor National Park through the through the Department of Energy and Climate Change's Low Carbon Communities Challenge. With the projects needing to be completed by the end of March this year, six villages in the National Park (including Wheddon Cross) took up the challenge and submitted low carbon projects which are now benefitting their communities. Projects funded include photovoltaic and wood pellet heating systems, log gasification boiler and through the same project, the National Park Authority itself has installed a 15kw wind turbine at its Pinkery Education Centre. It is intended that these demonstration projects will act as a catalyst for other low carbon projects in the National Park.

The projects will help to reduce fuel bills and make buildings warmer in winter. The use of local fuel in some instances will also help the local economy. For up to ten years, the Clean Energy Cashback payments received from these projects will be paid into a community fund so that more low carbon projects can be funded in the National Park every year.

Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership

In the first moorland event to be supported by the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership, a scrub-munching 'BioBaler' was seen in action recently tackling gorse on North Hill in Exmoor National Park.

The Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership supported the demonstration event with money from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Western Somerset Local Action, because scrub control is important in moorland management.

The Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership is a collaborative project of 11 organisations including local societies, government agencies and education and voluntary

bodies. Partners include West Somerset Community College, The Exmoor Society and Exmoor National Park Authority.

Scheme manager Jason Ball started work for the Partnership earlier this year and is based in offices above the National Park Centre in Dulverton, contact telephone number: 01398 322 164.

Spending Review

Defra has announced that the cash funding settlement to Exmoor National Park Authority is to reduce this financial year by 5.4%. Indications are that future years will show a cash reduction in the Defra Grant to National Park Authorities of 21.5% over the four years to 2014/15, in real terms, taking out the allowance for inflation, the overall cut is 28.5% on top of last year's 5%.

Dr Nigel Stone, chief executive of the National Park Authority, said: "The reduction in funding is in line with what we were expecting and had planned for. There are many other public services in the same sort of situation and we are keen to respond positively now that we know the funding settlement for this year."

The Authority is looking at the most cost-effective way of undertaking its work and already commissions services such as finance, legal services and listed building advice from other local authorities.

The reductions in the National Park Grant will not have an impact on partnership projects such as the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership being funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Exmoor Mires-on-the-Moors project being supported by South West Water. The National Park Authority also plans to complete the new National Park Information Centre in Lynmouth as the project will provide economic as well as environmental benefits and has benefited from funding from Devon County Council's 'Invest in Devon' scheme. Importantly, the project also has strong support from within the local community.

Moorland Management

Exmoor National Park Authority has completed its annual programme of swaling (controlled burning) thanks to a spell of dry weather. The field services and ranger teams worked together to complete the programme using the specially adapted "Supercat" to damp down the fires at the edges of burns in order to control them.

Sarah Bryan, Natural Environment Manager at the National Park Authority said, "We are particularly keen to support swaling on Exmoor. Swaling maintains the character of the landscape by rejuvenating moorland plants, which in turn provides grazing for livestock and habitats for wildlife. In order to help support this work, we are delighted that £20,000 has been secured through the Exmoor National Park Sustainable Development Fund, specifically to support moorland management."

Contact for more information on any of the above: Clare O'Connor
ckoconnor@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk DD 01398 322244

Exmoor Society – Arabella Amory

NPA Governance

In response to the Defra consultation on Governance the Exmoor National Park Authority has responded by stating that the size of the Authority should remain at 22 Members. However, they would like the number of Parish representatives to be increased at the expense of the National Members. The Exmoor Society feels that the number of County and District Members could be reduced and Parish membership could be increased without affecting the proportion of National Members. Reducing the overall number would also help

with spending cuts by reducing membership expense. The Exmoor Society has written to Defra to voice these concerns.

Spending Cuts

Some of the cuts being suggested by the ENPA may involve projects and the Exmoor Society feels that this is an opportunity for the NP Societies to form partnerships with their Authorities. This is the Big Society in action and could also help to raise the profile of the Societies.

The Exmoor Society already does an enormous amount to promote the National Park on its own and in partnership, for example with their special events and publications such as the annual Spring Conference and the 'Exmoor Review' magazine. It is also involved in working projects such as the Duster Action Group and the Exmoor Moorland Landscape partnership.

The NP Societies Conference

The National Park Societies Conference is being hosted by the Exmoor Society this year. Please put the date in your diaries – 4th-6th November. Invitations and programmes will be sent out in the near future.

Lake District NPA – TBA

Secretary of State makes the Lake District her first official National Park visit

Caroline Spelman MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs visited the Lake District on 10 March; her first visit to a National Park as Secretary of State. Our programme focused on our partnership work with 'Defra family' organisations such as Natural England and the Environment Agency, but also with private sector partners such as United Utilities on flood recovery and sustainable catchment management, and with Nurture Lakeland and Friends of the Lake District on our Fix the Fells upland landscapes repair programme. The Secretary of State then opened our refreshed Visitor Centre at Brockhole, which has benefitted from Rural Development Programme for England funding.

Byelaw Amendments on Windermere

In 2008, we sought to amend the navigation and registration scheme byelaws to make the lake safer for users, make the rules clearer, and make enforcement easier and cheaper. Wide-ranging consultation drew a spectrum of opposition. Some feared a relaxation of the hard-won speed limit while others wanted to see the speed limit removed altogether. Neither was on the agenda. Significantly, the Windermere Lake User Forum, established in 2001 to secure a broad base of user input into lake management, welcomed and supported the amendments. The Friends of the Lake District is a technical adviser to the Forum.

After almost two years, the Under-Secretary of State confirmed the changes to the registration scheme, which is a big step forward. But he decided not to confirm the amendments and consolidation of the navigation byelaws. He felt insufficient evidence had been adduced to justify the proposed regularisation of the speed limit at 10 knots, which would have eliminated the byelaw's arithmetical error in its conversion of 10 statute mph to nautical mph. As the amendments sought to consolidate several current byelaws, the Under-Secretary decided he could not confirm the byelaw, which had included many non-controversial changes that would have benefitted users and enforcers alike. We are now talking to all interested parties including the Friends of the Lake District, the Lake User Forum and Defra officials to assess our options.

For more information, contact Bob Cartwright, Director of Park Services:

Email: BobCartwright@lakedistrict.gov.uk

Tel: 01539 792 679

Friends of the Lake District – Andrew Forsyth**The Future of the Public Forest Estate**

FLD played a leading role in the campaign to prevent disposal of all the Forestry Commission's public forests. Thanks for everyone's support, including CNP, in securing this Yew-Turn! We're not 'out of the woods' yet. We are trying to ensure the independent panel who will report in the autumn to the Government has a cross section of people as well as a Cumbrian representative. We have made it clear to Government that the 15% disposal in the Spending Review October 2010 would have unacceptable consequences within the Lake District National Park and wider Cumbria. Finally, the cuts to the FC (including Forest Research) may prove to be a shortsighted mistake and we look to the Panel to advise Government on securing their future capacity. More positively we will be running a public appeal to create new woodlands in fantastic locations in the National Park to create a lasting legacy to this important victory.

CNP is in contact with the secretariat to the independent panel that will advise the Secretary of State on the future of forestry and will continue to liaise with Park Societies on this as the panel conducts its inquiry.

Windermere Byelaw Review – Disagreement with LDNPA

Minister Richard Benyon issued his decisions on the proposed changes to the Windermere Byelaws in February. FLD are having difficulty with the LDNPA which seems determined not to accept the Minister's decision letter that the speed limit should follow the Inquiry Inspector's recommendation for 10 statute mph as opposed to the Authority's preferred speed limit of 10 knots (equates to 11.5 mph). Defra agreed with our representations knowing that to veer from the previous decisions risks triggering a costly and unnecessary public inquiry. The LDNPA will need to produce significant new evidence to convince the Minister to change his mind, after gathering evidence from a wide range of organisations, including Friends of the Lake District and the Windermere Lake User Forum Members.

National Park Boundaries – Next Stage

We were pleased that Natural England's Board approved the papers for extending the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks on 2 March 2011. Changes to the boundaries of the five areas take account of FLD's representations. A second 12-week public consultation will commence in March/April seeking views on the new boundaries, including the decision that the Orton Fells should form part of the extension to the Yorkshire Dales National Park along with the northern Howgills and Mallerstang adjacent areas. A meeting of the 'Key Supporters Group' will take place on 13 April to agree the campaign plan to make sure this longstanding 'unfinished business' is not dropped by a cash-cutting government.

CNP is delighted with Natural England's decision, which edges the boundary extensions one step closer. We are fully supportive of Natural England's proposals, including on the Orton Fells, and look forward to working with FLD and others on this campaign.

New Forest NPA – Bob Morris**Rangers**

We now have the full complement of our ranger team who are doing a rather different job than the much larger ranger service run by the Forestry Commission over the Crown lands. Our team extends their activities to the many communities beyond the perambulation, working with parish councils and local groups on community projects. They also organise a wide range of training sessions in conjunction with the Land Advice Service, Hampshire County Council Countryside staff and our own specialists. During the summer months our mobile unit is a familiar sight at shows and around the Forest.

Volunteer Fair

Our first Volunteer Fair took place in Lyndhurst Community Centre on Saturday 5th March. Twenty eight organisations, including the New Forest Association, other charities and government bodies attended and around 300 people came to see how they could get involved in voluntary work within the National Park. Feedback from the exhibitors and visitors was very positive and there was a call for it to become a regular event.

Wartime Forest

The authority has been successful in its stage 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to deliver a World War II themed project. It involves comprehensively surveying sites within the Forest, recording memories and increasing the understanding of the role of the New Forest in the war.

New Forest Association – Peter Roberts**Consultation on the Forest Estate and Public Bodies Bill**

We were appalled at the consultation document produced by government which was so lacking in information that it was impossible to respond to. We immediately initiated a media campaign to highlight our concerns and met with both our Members of Parliament as well as contacting government ministers and members of the Lords. A hectic three weeks resulted in a virtually unique government u turn.

We welcomed the announcement of the Independent Panel into Forestry Policy and are seeking to provide them with information.

Internal structure

Our navel gazing continues with the final touches being added made to our revised policy document as well as changes to our committee structure. The first meeting of our new Finance & General Purposes Committee took place two days before Caroline Spelman's fateful announcement. It instantly became the Action Committee. Our chairman William Ziegler is standing down after the AGM in April after eleven years and has earned a well deserved rest from all the work he has put in. He led the Association through a tricky period when members were divided over the benefits of having a National Park.

Peter Roberts
peter.robertsnf@tiscali.co.uk

Northumberland NPA – Peter Nicholson**Hill farmers and trainees celebrate a pioneering year**

In February 2011, Northumberland National Park Authority celebrated the successful conclusion of its innovative pilot, the **Upland Farming Traineeship**, which provided essential vocational training for eight young people during 2010. It is now exploring ways of extended the benefits of the scheme into the future.

The Upland Farming Traineeship was established following widespread concern that traditional upland livestock farming skills could soon die out in the Northumberland hills with a consequent impact on the landscape. It involved both classroom and practical on-farm training, and received praise from Richard Benyon MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Natural Environmental and Fisheries during a visit to the National Park last summer.

Having completed twelve months of training and gained level 2 qualifications in livestock production, together with other practical skills such as sheep shearing and basic chainsaw, trainees gathered at a presentation and awards ceremony with farmers, funders, Northumberland College and National Park staff. The event was well attended and offered a rare opportunity for farmers and trainees to network with one another before lambing time commenced.

Northumberland National Park focuses on making the countryside work for young people

Northumberland National Park Authority has been selected by Changemakers, a national youth charity, to be one of only sixty nationwide Host Organisations for their Organisational Development Programme, which helps to unleash the leadership potential of young people of 16-25 years.

Changemakers, with input from the National Park Authority, will be recruiting one young person to be trained and supported over six months during 2011 to find ways to improve how the National Park listens to, communicates with and involves young people who live in and around the National Park.

Tony Gates, Chief Executive of Northumberland National Park Authority said: "Young people are the future of local communities in and around the protected areas of Northumberland National Park. They are also the future advocates, guardians and potential employees of the countryside. In an era when the rural uplands are increasingly essential for the wellbeing of the nation, engaging young people in shaping the future is vital."

National Park Authority installs first electric car charge points at HQ and staff trial electric pool car

Two new electric car charging points have been installed at the National Park Authority headquarters in Hexham – bringing the town into the North East's 1000-point e-vehicle charging network for the first time. The installation continues the Authority's programme to install charging point at eleven of its public car parks from Hadrian's Wall to the Cheviots.

The charging points will be put to use immediately for a new electric pool car which staff will use to get around the the National Park and its centres. Electronic cars are capable of driving between 90 and 120 miles on a single charge, are low noise, emission-free and low cost to run. Electronic all-terrain off-road utility vehicles, electric bicycles and scooters as well as mobility vehicles will also be able to take advantage of these charging points.

Rural areas are chronically short of petrol stations so fuel alternatives are important for the future of rural life and business. Tony Gates, Chief Executive of Northumberland National Park Authority said: "The Authority is keen to reduce the risk of investing in new technologies for its communities and businesses, so helping to install future infrastructure and trialling new vehicles is a practical role we can play. The benefits will come when communities are generating their own, renewable energy to provide for local vehicle needs."

The electric car is being leased through the Switch EV scheme operated by Future Transport Systems, who has coordinated the 3-year trial use of 49 electric vehicles amongst a mix of public bodies, businesses and private individuals in order to collect a wide range of data.

North York Moors NPA – Steve Scoffin**Slowing the Flow**

National Park volunteers are planting over 3,000 trees on the Authority-owned Levisham Estate as part of the Slowing the Flow partnership project. Tree planting is just one of a number of landscape changes being carried out under the project to slow the passage of water downstream in an attempt to reduce future floods in Pickering. Also 200 heather bales have been used to block eroding moorland gullies on the Estate.

The trees, all native broadleaved species, will create 4.1 hectares of new woodland in total. Funding for the trees has been provided by an English Woodland Grant Scheme from the Forestry Commission.

***For more information contact Rachel Pickering (Farm and Moorland Officer)
r.pickering@northyorkmoors-mpa.gov.uk or tel: 01439 770657***

Peatland restoration

Under the umbrella of the Yorkshire Peat Partnership, work to restore peatland on Glaisdale Moor is progressing well. A fire in 1976 severely damaged the peat layer and despite considerable restoration in the 1980s, the ground was still eroding in certain areas.

Locally harvested heather brash has been applied to just under 9 hectares of bare peat and around 17km of gullies are being blocked using heather bale dams. Peatland restoration work is also taking place on Baysdale Moor where around 11km of gullies are being blocked.

For more information contact Rona Charles (Ecologist) r.charles@northyorkmoors-mpa.gov.uk or tel: 01439 770657

New look Whitby TIC

The National Park Authority worked with Scarborough Borough Council and Whitby Disablement Action Group to revamp Whitby's Tourist Information Centre. Whitby is a very popular tourist destination and is one of the main gateways to the North York Moors.

The new-look centre includes a much greater presence for the National Park. In addition to a touch-screen facility with information on things to see and do in the North York Moors, visitors can watch an audio visual display broadcasting stunning footage of the landscape, heritage and wildlife of the National Park.

***For more information contact Jill Renney (Information & Interpretation Manager)
j.renney@northyorkmoors-mpa.gov.uk or tel: 01439 770657***

North Yorkshire Moors Association – Tom Chadwick

No report received.

Peak District NPA – Roger Clarke

Losehill Hall to be sold to YHA – but learning services continue

The Peak District National Park Authority has agreed to sell its Losehill Hall environmental learning and conference centre at Castleton to the YHA.

The agreement will also:

- See YHA invest £2 million in refurbishments, providing classrooms and accommodation for up to 144 guests
- Increase the number of young people learning at Losehill Hall from 3,000 to 30,000 a year
- Enable the PDNPA's learning and discovery team to continue operating from a base within Losehill Hall

Services committee chair Christopher Pennell said: "This enables Losehill Hall to continue as a centre of excellence that promotes understanding and enjoyment of the National Park. "The partnership with YHA offers opportunities to increase and jointly market a range of environmental education courses. It also ensures that Losehill Hall will continue to play an important part in the life and economy of the Hope Valley."

The decision will save the Authority £250,000 a year in running costs, but at the cost of 28 redundancies.

Temporary trail closures open way for new experience

Walkers, cyclists and riders on the Monsal Trail have been patient in February and March during temporary closures while work is carried out to re-open four former railway tunnels.

The work is part of the £2.25m Pedal Peak District project, which will create a continuous trail all the way from Bakewell to Wye Dale. Previously, users have had to divert around the four 400-metre long tunnels.

Rhonda Pursglove, project manager, said: "We are sorry for the temporary disruption but I'm sure people will realise it is worth it when the end result will bring a much better route for people to enjoy. "It will be an amazing experience to go through the tunnels and see the fantastic views of the countryside as you come out. "We are looking forward to completing the work so that cyclists, walkers and horse riders can experience that feeling for the first time since the tunnels closed in 1968."

The new route through the former railway tunnels (funded by Cycling England) is expected to open in May or June.

Peak District – destination of distinction

The Peak District has been selected as a pilot "Destination of Distinction" by Visit England, playing a key role in promoting England as a tourist destination before, during and after the 2012 Olympics.

In March an award-winning director was taking footage of the panoramas from Stange Edge (owned by the PDNPA) for a Visit Britain promotional film to be shown around the world in the run-up to the Games.

Visit England's chief executive James Berresford said: "We believe the Peak District has all the attributes needed – including a central, accessible location, superb landscapes and a rich history and heritage – to be an exemplary Destination of Distinction, representing England's unique appeal to visitors from all over the world in a positive way. "We hope that this potential will not only bring economic benefits in the lead up to the Olympic Games, but will also leave a lasting legacy in years to come."

Friends of the Peak District – Philip Hetherington

PDNPA Core strategy

FPD have just finalised our representations for the Examination in Public of the proposed PDNP Core Strategy, taking place in mid April. Whilst we were content with most policies, we have serious concerns about the PDNPA's overly-restrictive attitude to small scale renewable energy installations, which we are challenging hard.

Local Transport Sustainable Fund

All Local Transport Authorities can make a bid to the £560m Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) but those with a National Park within their boundaries can make two. In the Peak District, Derbyshire County Council and the NPA are working together on Derbyshire's second bid that would support sustainable tourism and cut carbon emissions. Bids can be for small scale projects or a package of measures. FPD has taken advantage of the Government's desire for local groups' involvement in these bids in two ways; first by encouraging both Derbyshire and the NPA to think big and go for a package of measures; second by contributing to the separate South Yorkshire PTE bid by preparing the evidence for a destination-based, Peak District-wide website that would integrate information from all modes of transport, a project which could also be supported by the Derbyshire and the NPA bid.

CNP is pleased that the Transport Minister has enabled local transport authorities to make two bids to the LSTF if they have a National Park within their area. Thanks go to CNP Vice President Lord Judd who led the CNP team that encouraged the Minister to recognise National Parks within the fund guidelines.

Take Back the Tracks

Peak District has continued its support for local groups in the National Park. We've focused our attention on the most sensitive routes where vehicle usage is causing significant ecological harm, landscape damage and disturbance to tranquility. Both the National Park and Derbyshire Dales have taken action since November 2010; this has included consulting on 4 possible TROs. However, no formal decision to close these routes to motorised vehicles has been made. DCC has thrown out a significant number of BOAT (Byways Open to All Traffic) applications as they failed the Winchester judgment. However, some of these routes are still being used and we hope signs will be erected to tell motorised users that they can no longer use them. Fencing has been erected besides two routes to prevent access onto moorland and damage to an Ancient Monument.

Pembrokeshire Coast NPA – David Ellis**Rolf Harris meets Graham Sutherland at Oriel y Parc**

A landscape by Rolf Harris painted especially for the BBC Cymru Wales TV series *Rolf on Welsh Art*, was recently unveiled at Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's Oriel y Parc Gallery and Visitor Centre in February.

The painting depicts a landscape in the style of renowned 20th century British artist Graham Sutherland, whose work has a permanent home at Oriel y Parc. The gallery is run in partnership with National Museum Wales – Amgueddfa Cymru.

Rolf Harris said: "I knew of Graham Sutherland and had admired his work immensely but had never been to Pembrokeshire. To see all the different areas and the way it inspired Sutherland was a revelation to me."

For more information contact Alan Hare: alanh@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk or tel 01646 624 810.

Digital Tourism Wales Steering Group

A £17m Digital Tourism Wales Programme managed by the Welsh Assembly Government held its inaugural Steering Group meeting in March. Marie Edwards, the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's Head of Marketing & Communications has been selected as one of ten Members from across Wales to be represented on the group.

The three-year programme aims to move Wales' tourism industry firmly into the digital business age by encouraging the exchange of best practice and research and skill development across tourism businesses and organisations.

The programme is being co-ordinated by Visit Wales, with funding provided by the European Regional Development Fund, WAG and private contributions.

For more information contact Marie Edwards: mariee@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk or tel 01646 624 824.

Coast Path scoops gold at Pembrokeshire tourism Oscars

'A day out on the Pembrokeshire Coast Path' clinched the top spot in the Best Day Out category at the Pembrokeshire Tourism Awards ceremony in February.

The Coast Path, a National Trail, is managed by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and runs 186 miles along the county's rugged coastline.

The international appeal of the Coast Path was recently recognised when experts from *National Geographic Traveler* magazine voted Pembrokeshire as the second best coastal destination in the world.

Charles Mathieson, the Authority's Head of Recreation and Tourism, said: "As well as showing the significant contribution the path makes to the tourism industry, this is a testament to the work of our staff who look after it and the landowners with whom we work."

For more information contact Charles Mathieson: charlesm@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk or tel 01646 624 807.

Friends of Pembrokeshire National Park – Graham Morgan

No report received.

Scottish Campaign for National Parks – Robert Maund

A National Park Strategy for Scotland – Joint Project with APRS

Our three year project to promote a Strategy for National Parks across Scotland is nearing the end of its first year. We have now secured further funding and have committed ourselves to year 2 through the good offices of the **Scottish Mountaineering Trust**. We are now starting further fundraising to ensure year 3 can go ahead.

Cairngorms National Park – proposed legal action

In the company of Cairngorms Campaign and Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group, SCNP has lodged an appeal with the Court of Session in Edinburgh for Judicial Review of the decision to adopt the Plan. The basis of the Review will rest on demonstrating the incompetence of the NPA in arriving at the housing allocations and their location vis-a-vis sensitive natural heritage areas. The NPA was heavily criticised by the Reporters to the Local Inquiry of 2009 for its housing policies. However, under the terms of the Inquiry at that time, the findings were only advisory.

The initial cost of this action is being met entirely by the Cairngorms Campaign. However, we are threatened by the possibility of third parties, namely developers and land owners coming in on the side of the NPA. We wait to see whether this is a real threat and therefore an additional cost or whether the courts will give this additional dimension short shrift as has already happened in England and Wales.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park – Local Plan Inquiry

Two PLIs are in the offing – the first into the LL&TT NP Local Plan commencing on 5 April and the second into the Cononish goldmine refusal which will be a real test of the commitment to and understanding of National Parks and conservation in Scotland.

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park Campaign

An application for 24 turbines at Wings Law adjoining the SSSI and SPA was due to come to a public inquiry in January but at the last minute, the appellants withdrew because their position was untenable. All 'relevant persons' in opposition to the scheme are now claiming costs against the appellants because of their unreasonable behaviour.

We also joined with SYRP in resisting a proposed anaerobic digester in the Park. The application was based on figures which can best be described as creative. The application was refused by Renfrewshire Council's Planning Committee against the Planning Officer's recommendation and went to appeal. The Reporter found in our favour and refused the application.

Snowdonia NPA – Denis McAteer

Cwm Cywarch to the Sky

Due to the popularity of Cwm Cywarch to walkers, especially the footpath to the summit of Aran Fawddwy, traffic problems developed at Fawnog Fawr in Cwm Cywarch, near Dinas Mawddwy as a result of severe parking problems in the valley. In co-operation with SNPA, local landowner Hedd Pugh established a car park in Cwm Cywarch. Parking is free,

however an honesty box was placed on site inviting visitors to contribute to a charity. One year later, over £1,300 was collected and presented to Wales Air Ambulance.

Help to Improve Paths

Monitoring figures collected by the Authority recently showed that there was an 18% increase of visitors on the footpaths of Snowdon compared to 2009. With so many walkers using the footpaths, many have to be repaired and restored on a regular basis. With the help of SNPA staff, Outdoor Education Students from Coleg Llandrillo and volunteers from the Snowdonia Society, improvement work was undertaken last November on sections of the Miners and PYG Path. Rocks and loose gravel were removed, ditches were cleaned to improve drainage and in one section, large rocks were placed at either side of the path to encourage walkers to follow the line of the footpath, reducing the amount of erosion.

Park Planning Continues to Improve

Recently, Chief Executive Aneurin Phillips highlighted the findings of recent reports which looked at the performance of SNPA's Planning Service. Wales Audit Office reports recognised that the Authority has made "*good progress in producing a Local Development Plan and its built heritage work*" and that "*customer satisfaction is high*", "*the speed of processing applications has improved*" and that "*overall the NPA is performing well and improving*". Significant improvements made by the Planning Service were recognised, particularly in defending appeals, speed of determination of planning applications and responsiveness in dealing with compliance cases.

SNPA will continue to improve its Planning Service. It will be more effective and clearer when undertaking enforcement responsibilities and in giving guidance to users on matters involving planning policies. A new Improvement Plan will be published, planning surgeries held in Betws y Coed, Dolgellau and Aberdyfi will continue, and an open day for Community Council clerks will be held in the near future.

Footnote: It was announced in January that the Authority's Director of Communication had requested early retirement and that had been accepted. John Ablitt has been with the Authority for 18 years and in Countryside Management for 33 years and the Authority wishes to extend its gratitude and thanks to him for his services.

Cymdeithas Eryri/Snowdonia Society – David Lewis

Electricity transmission lines

The Society is working closely with CNP to influence the government's and National Grid's approach to undergrounding of transmission lines and avert threats posed by the enhanced network that will be required by a new nuclear power station on Anglesey and a major wind power scheme in the Irish Sea. The National Park is already badly defaced by the transmission lines built to serve the nuclear power stations at Trawsfynydd and Wylfa; one stretch was put underground to protect a view of Snowdon, but in the worst case we would have to fight even that battle all over again. The Society, together with CPRW, is pressing for construction of subsea links.

Former Llanbedr airfield

A new application for a certificate of lawful use has been submitted for the former Llanbedr airfield, this time by the Welsh Government (albeit using the prospective lessee's agent) and for 'Use of Airfield as a Research and Development Establishment for the Testing, Evaluation and Development of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) including ancillary B1, B2 and B8 activities thereat'. While that was indeed the purpose for which the site was previously used the Society is concerned that grant of a certificate would be a Trojan horse for introducing the previously claimed use of general aviation. We have submitted detailed representations, which CNP has supported. We face the difficulty, however, that the Society is presented as stopping employment coming to a deprived area. SNPA has sought legal advice on the new application. The Society has also written to the Welsh

Government questioning whether it is fulfilling its statutory duty to have regard to National Park purposes.

New Life for the Ugly House

Following the move of our office we are seeking grants from CCW's EU-funded Communities and Nature programme and the Heritage Lottery Fund to convert Tŷ Hyll (the Ugly House) into a centre for the protection and promotion of the Welsh honey bee, which will also raise awareness of the crucial ecological services provided by bees and other pollinators. The building will be restored and made more environmentally sustainable; there will be a franchised tearoom to provide income for future maintenance; and the grounds will be managed in partnership with the National Beekeeping Centre for Wales.

Contact: David Lewis drlewis27@yahoo.com

South Downs NPA – Ken Bodfish

No report received.

South Downs Society – Richard Reed

Relations with the National Park Authority

On 1 April the South Downs NPA will have become fully operational and the Society, both on its own account and through the South Downs Network of which it is a principal member, has held continuing discussions with the NPA Interim Chief Executive. It is also getting the benefit of advice from the Interim Head of Planning, in particular over the complexities of the untried delegation arrangements.

Renewable energy

The obtrusive Glyndebourne wind turbine is expected to be constructed this spring and will be an unwelcome landmark on a spur of the eastern Downs. The possible construction of five turbines near Eastbourne is being explored. The site is just two miles outside the National Park, close to the urban settlement of Polegate, and the Society and its allies will have to decide how to respond. Our Council has a farming member, who is also on the South Downs Land Managers' group. He reports that many farmers are considering supplementing income through wind energy and photo-voltaic panels on roofs or on a field scale; further possible threats to the integrity of the landscape.

Environmental Stewardship and the Higher Level Scheme (HLS)

The ESA scheme ends in 2012 and unless other funding is provided there could be widespread reversion from grass to arable, a critical factor for the Downs and their wildlife. Another concern is that the HLS will no longer be offering payments for permissive paths and access land, which may be withdrawn. The Society would like to see Rights of Way created to replace permissive paths. The permissive paths provided valuable links for access through farmed areas and it will be a big test for the NPA to respond effectively.

2012 Park Societies Conference

The Society has now booked accommodation at Brighton University from 31 August to 2 September 2012 to host the annual conference and is working with CNP to ensure an informative and enjoyable programme.

Richard Reed may be contacted on: enquiries@southdownssociety.org.uk

Yorkshire Dales NPA – Malcolm Petyt

The cuts

Members of the public, local communities and organisations have been invited to comment on draft budget plans to reduce the YDNPA work programmes following Government cuts. Consultation is underway on the draft document, which contains proposals to save money

after the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs reduced the Authority's grant over the next four years by nearly £1.9m (or 31 per cent) including inflation.

The Authority has sought to reduce staff costs by inviting officers to seek early retirement, reduced hours or voluntary redundancy. It has taken the decision to make all changes "up front" rather than in stages, and as far as possible to maintain its front line services and activities that are "visible" (such as the Rangers and works on rights of way), while accepting that it must reduce or cut out other activities (such as education or the Definitive Map).

The proposals include only three compulsory redundancies, but the scrapping of 12 work programmes and a reorganisation of the Authority's structure from five departments into three "Directorates".

Advice on energy efficiency in buildings

A Guide to Development for Sustainable Energy Production in the Yorkshire Dales National Park has been produced by the National Park Authority. This publication is intended to be a useful guide and reference document for people interested in sustainable energy production. It outlines the Authority's views on the use of various sustainable energy methods within the National Park and contains details of various options from solar panels to biomass boilers. It also signposts readers to reference documents, websites and support organisations who may be able to help further.

Out of Oblivion

YDNPA staff have just completed a massive overhaul of the Authority's Out of Oblivion website spanning thousands of years of human history. The result is a more up-to-date and comprehensive library of fascinating facts for everyone from schoolchildren to professional historians. The website is called Out of Oblivion because a lot of the facts it contains were not that well known and have been made public over the last few years. It opens a window on prehistoric life in the National Park, a period we don't know a lot about, as well as events as recent as the Cold War. The new-look website has an impressive collection of maps and photos to help visitors to identify ancient sites in the National Park.

Yorkshire Dales Society – Colin Speakman

No report received.