

Workshop session at July 2011 Council meeting

At the July Council meeting we ran a session looking at four issues:

- Threats to National Parks
- Collaboration between National Parks and AONBs
- Devolution and the protected landscapes network
- The role of National Parks as role models for sustainable development

The note below summarises the main discussion points of the workshops (given the nature of the discussions these are not in the same format).

Workshop 1 – National Park threats

The top threats identified for National Parks were:

- Funding – weakening effectiveness of National Parks, increased competition with natural partners, unrealistic expectations from Government
- Planning/policy – decline in rural bus services, decline in upland farming, traffic congestion, increase in carbon emissions, localism promoted over national considerations, lack of investment in sustainable transport and broadband, slackening of development controls, developments on boundaries of National Parks, definition of sustainable development within the draft National Planning Policy Framework – a green light to build, pressure to give planning back to local authorities, pressure for commercialisation of the Parks
- Energy – new electricity transmission infrastructure, drive for forms of green energy pursued whatever the effect on National Parks
- Lack of interest – don't see National Parks as relevant for today, involvement of younger people essential
- Governance – pressure from specific interest groups, actual power of NPAs, pressure of direct elections for NPA members, sustainable development consultation could lead to National Park purposes losing out, diverging National Park models in the UK confuse the concept

The group decided to focus its discussion on the lack of interest in National Parks:

- Lack of interest in National Parks is most important in relation to the public, less so in central and local government
- It's worrying that CNP has had to intervene to get National Parks mentioned in legislation
- There is a need for joined-up working and CNP's role is to talk to the various interested organisations, to bring together a bigger constituency
- CNP could "sell" National Parks to the people who live in them, local communities
- CNP needs to engage with a new, younger generation of supporters, encourage them to take part in outdoor activities
- CNP has a responsibility to turn the threats into opportunities in the mind of the public

Workshop 2 – collaboration between National Parks and AONBs

The main issues identified were:

- Risks – diluting credibility of the designations, greater collaboration suggests blurring in public perception of the distinction between the designations
- Involving the community – need to involve people (particularly young people) and communities and increase the breadth of public interest in CNP's work
- Joint messages and communication – joint publications on protected landscapes (e.g. regional brochures showing locations of National Parks and AONBs), a joint logo for Britain's protected landscapes, better awareness of AONBs with the public, shared communications/info, encourage Ordnance Survey to mark AONB boundaries on maps, united messages, should the name AONB be simplified?
- Management – shared management plan for neighbouring AONBs and National Parks, joint management of the areas
- Collaboration – learning from each other, combine organisations for better exploitation of synergies, develop joint conferences CNP/NAAONBs, interchange of experience between National Parks and AONBs and co-ordination when they have common boundaries, help in the development of AONB Societies (like National Park socs), invite reps of AONB Joint Advisory Committees as visitors to CNP, National Park member sitting on AONB partnership, sharing of back office functions e.g. planning, HR, extending best practice
- Collaboration on issues – nature mitigation, biodiversity, greater opportunity for wildlife conservation (corridors etc), tourism opportunities – walking, cycling trails
- Joint campaigning – extending areas of influence, joint lobbying on current and future policy issues, opportunity for CNP to campaign on big issues now all of National Parks are in place
- Possible changing CNP role – CNP 'custodian' of more of UK landscape 'safe pair of hands'

The top three opportunities for action identified were:

- Joint campaigning – forests, planning, marine, funding, energy transmission
- Joint management planning – CNP role to encourage best practice
- Joint messages and communications

Other discussion points:

- If National Parks and AONBs are 'competing' it dilutes in the public's mind the quality and importance of protected landscapes
- Single definition under IUCN – question asked why are there 2 organisations
- What is the distinction between AONBs and National Parks – does there need to be one?
- No CNP equivalent for AONBs – should there be one and is there a role for CNP? Now that AONBs are a part of Defra will NAAONBs be able to sign up to our press releases and statements as it has been doing (e.g. on electricity transmission)?

Workshop 3 – devolution and protected landscapes

The main issues identified were:

- Need for NPAs to embrace environmental services ecosystem approach and ecological connectivity agendas
- Stress the opportunities for National Parks in Wales to fulfil the Welsh Government's ambitions
- Proper recognition of National Parks in the new single environmental body
- The lack of high level political support is worrying and the future of the National Park designation was felt to be under threat
- Opportunity for funding and to boost wildlife through the Natural Environment Framework
- NPAs becoming increasingly introverted
- The value of National Parks for the services they provide to city dwellers, and to policy makers should be emphasised
- Concern that the emphasis in Wales on urban communities might undermine the National Park concept
- The brand is important and the UK structure adds strength
- Engagement of the local population will help to counter the pervasive tendency towards centralisation in Welsh Government

The top issues identified were:

- National Parks are under threat in Wales and their value is not properly recognised
- National Parks and AONBs need to continue their journey of collaboration – this will strengthen the position of protected landscapes overall
- Engagement on the Natural Environment Framework and Single Environmental Body will be crucial
- Campaigning on the value of National Parks and the links to the economic health and regeneration is important
- The value of National Parks should be promoted to local communities as well as national government

Workshop 4 – promoting the sustainability benefits of National Parks beyond their boundaries?

Delivery of Sustainable Development (SD) projects: CNP delivering actual projects (alone or in partnership) on the ground in National Parks that contribute directly to sustainable development

- a. Develop micro-businesses in the National Parks, e.g. by developing micro-business Champions
 - b. Projects that improve and support sustainable transport in National Parks
 - c. Demonstrate projects on energy, transport and/or local business enterprise
 - d. Climate change projects
 - e. Access projects
 - f. Projects around local / traditional food, which could also expand to other products, such as clothing made from local wool
 - g. “Open Air College” in National Parks
- 2) **Information/research:** CNP delivering research/monitoring/evaluation/information collection, regarding sustainable development in the National Parks
- a. What lessons in best practice in SD from inside the National Parks, could be transferable outside the NPs?
 - b. Define what are the sustainability benefits of National Parks?
 - c. Identify what elements of SD the National Parks are particularly good at (it might not be all; NPs might have particular strengths)
 - d. Identify those NPs that are failing to make the most of the opportunities to take sustainable options and hold them to account; expect high standards
 - e. Create an annual list / league table of which National Parks are delivering best practice in SD
- 3) **Profile-raising:** CNP raising the profile of sustainable activities in the National Parks
- a. Promote the heritage of National Parks
 - b. Promote the health benefits of National Parks
 - c. Promote the aesthetic value of National Parks
 - d. Shape the debate on sustainable development and National Parks, e.g. through the government consultation on SD
 - e. Publicise case studies of sustainable business success stories on CNP’s website and via other routes, so that those outside National Parks are aware of and can look at replicating the ideas

→ A cross-cutting theme of all of the above, was the need to bridge and make links between the National Parks and outside the National Parks, e.g. linking the SD benefits of the National Parks with the beneficiaries outside the National Parks

Summary of discussion

- Articulating the value of National Parks should remain a crucial part of our work programme
- We must continue our drive on proactive campaigning and identify resources and partners to deliver this
- Is it time for a new watch over the National Parks campaign?