



# COUNTRY PARKS

2003 Seminar Proceedings  
of the  
Countryside Recreation Network

in association with



Edited by Melanie Bull  
Network Manager

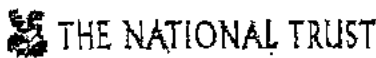
Held at Lydiard Park, Swindon  
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## Countryside Recreation Network

The CRN is a network which:

- o Covers the UK and the Republic of Ireland
- o Gives easy access to information on countryside and related recreation matters
- o Reaches organisations and individuals in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- o Networks thousands of interested people

The Network helps the work of agencies and individuals in three areas:

### Research:

to encourage cooperation between members in identifying and promoting the need for research related to countryside access and recreation, to encourage joint ventures in undertaking research and to disseminate information about members' recreation programmes.

### Liaison:

to promote information exchange relating to countryside recreation, and to foster general debate about relevant trends and issues

### Good Practice:

to spread information to develop best practice through training and professional development in provision for and management of countryside recreation.

### Chair:

Geoff Hughes, Sport England

### Vice Chair:

Jo Burgon, National Trust

Countryside Recreation Network  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Unit 1, Sheffield Science Park  
Howard Street  
Sheffield  
S1 2LX

Tel: 0114 225 4494

Fax: 0114 225 4488

Email: m.bull@shu.ac.uk

Editor: Melanie Bull

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Countryside Recreation Network

Sheffield Hallam University

Unit 1, Sheffield Science Park

Howard Street

Sheffield

S1 2LX

Tel: 0114 225 4494

Fax: 0114 225 4488

e-mail: [m.bull@shu.ac.uk](mailto:m.bull@shu.ac.uk)

Website: [www.CountrysideRecreation.org.uk](http://www.CountrysideRecreation.org.uk)

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## **Countryside Recreation Network Seminar**

### **COUNTRY PARKS**

#### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

*Wendy Thompson  
Programme Manager, Countryside Recreation  
Countryside Agency*

I'm very pleased to welcome you all to this Country Parks seminar today, on behalf of both the Countryside Research Network and the Countryside Agency.

CRN is a network of organisations from across the British Isles with an interest in countryside recreation, and associated economic activity. Its purpose is to share information on research and good practice. It encourages joint ventures and also helps to disseminate research and information. It does this through meetings, journals, 4 seminars a year and via its web site.

This seminar is the first CRN event this year and the first to be arranged by the new CRN management team at Sheffield Hallam University. So my thanks to the team (Melanie Bull, Suzanne Leckie and Lynn Crowe) for picking up the proposal for this event and running with it so quickly.

Lydiard Country Park is an ideal setting for the event today. It is one of three Country Parks with which the Countryside Agency is supporting the development of pilot restoration plans for the Heritage Lottery Fund's Public Paths Initiative. There will be a chance to hear more about this at the end of the day if you are able to stay to join the tour of the site. Thank you to Sarah Finch-Crisp, and the team here, for hosting this event.

My thanks also go to Liz Gaunt and Fin Mulholland, of GreenSpace, who on behalf of the Countryside Agency worked with CRN to put together an excellent programme covering a range of issues relevant to Country Parks. I look forward to hearing from all of the speakers today and to hearing about the workshop discussions after lunch.

I am particularly pleased to be here today because it was almost exactly four years ago when I first joined the Recreation and Tourism bit of the newly formed Countryside Agency, and I was given the task of preparing evidence to the Select Committee inquiry into Town and Country parks. I don't know whether I should own up to this, but it was an interesting exercise and revealed to me how patchy the information we had on Country Parks was at the time – although there were a number of experienced people in the Agency to help me out. Since then, the Agency has developed a programme of work to support Country Parks and the renaissance report which our next speaker will tell you about is a crucial part of this. I am very pleased that Stewart Harding has agreed to present the report to you because he personally has been instrumental in

making it possible to get to the stage we are at today. The report has been published and is available on the Countryside Agency web site ([www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk)) and a summary is also available in the seminar pack.

# **Countryside Recreation Network Seminar**

## **COUNTRY PARKS**

### **COUNTRY PARKS - PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

*Dr Stewart Harding  
Director  
GreenSpace*

Since the Countryside Commission effectively withdrew from core funding Country Parks in 1991 they have had no identifiable champion. This has put them in the same position that urban parks have been in for 25 years and there is clear evidence that, like urban parks, many Country Parks have been in decline.

Fortunately that situation is beginning to change. The Countryside Agency, following up pledges made to the 1999 Parliamentary Select Committee Enquiry into 'Town and Country Parks', set up the Country Parks Renaissance Advisory Panel in 2000. The work of this panel is coming to fruition with the publication on the Web of the report *Towards a Country Parks Renaissance*, with the appointment to GreenSpace of Liz Gaunt as facilitator of the Country Parks Network, and with this conference which I hope will be the first of a series aimed at engendering and strengthening a recognisable 'family' of Country Parks.

#### **Research**

The Panel felt that the background and current position of Country Parks was not well known and commissioned the Urban Parks Forum, now GreenSpace, and the Garden History Society to produce a report which told the story behind their evolution and development as the context for research into how they were faring today.

The Urban Parks Forum had produced the Public Parks Assessment for the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2001, with financial support from the DTLR, English Heritage and the Countryside Agency. This report discovered that Country Parks were in generally better condition than their impoverished urban counterparts and more of them were thought to be improving (43% compared to 27%). They were found to exhibit the same trends as urban parks – the good ones were getting better, while the bad ones were getting worse. As usual the bad ones were commonly located in the poorer areas of the country.

It also became clear from that research that the perception that Country Parks were improving was predominantly based on the gains in biodiversity and good ecological management. When it came to the built infrastructure of Country Parks the picture was markedly different and the responses hid a disproportionate decline in, and loss of, built structures and public facilities. In some cases the decline in the condition of park buildings, roads and boundaries was more severe than in urban parks.

This new report *Towards a Country Parks Renaissance* is based on data gathered through 137 detailed questionnaires returned from 267 Country Parks. The research found the same situation. While managers reported that 65% of Country Parks were good overall, only 43% said this of the built infrastructure.

It is clear from the report that Country Parks face a mounting problem of diminishing resources at a time when, for many, their built infrastructure is in need of renewal. During my time running the Heritage Lottery Fund's Urban Parks Programme, we also supported a few Country Parks. This work showed that, like urban parks, a close inspection revealed the level of repair and re-provision to be addressed. In each case multi-million pound investment is required to bring them up to standard.

Part of the work of the Country Parks Renaissance Panel was to support some pilot studies to establish the costs of restoration and to apply for major project funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is wholly appropriate that this seminar is being held in Lydiard Park as the site of one of the pilot projects. Swindon Borough Council is leading the way, with support by the Countryside Agency, English Heritage and one of the area's most important employers, Innogy PLC, in establishing the importance of Country Parks to the people that use them, and the contribution they can make to the quality of life, to recreation, health, social inclusion, life-long learning, biodiversity and the conservation of historic landscapes.

### **The Country Park family**

Through my work over the last twenty years in the promotion of parks and gardens, I have come to the firm conclusion that the management issues of all landscapes managed for public recreation are pretty much the same, whether we are talking about urban parks, country parks or historic parks and gardens. The public tend to want the same things from all sites, from the Lost Gardens of Heligan to local authority parks and National Trust and private estates – safety, cleanliness, tea and a pee, places for the children to enjoy, peace and quiet, good horticulture and well maintained facilities.

For those reasons I believe that all managers of 'public parks' should see their common interests and join together to exchange experiences and best practice and to campaign for the means to improve their provision – capital and revenue resources, independence to make decisions and act on them, training, outreach and so on. The best response from government will be to a unified lobby of park managers from all sectors. It is heart-warming to see the demand for places at this and the next seminar as this was one of the first aims of the Renaissance Panel.

We must build on this as there is a real danger that Country Parks will miss out on the attention now being paid to the regenerative potential of urban spaces by CABI Space. The Urban Parks Forum has recently changed its name to GreenSpace and has broadened its remit to include all parks, gardens and open spaces used by the public and now has a dedicated liaison officer,



supported by the Countryside Agency. This is a good start which we must now support and promote.

### **Towards a Country Parks Renaissance Report**

The report, which I commend to you, consists of three main parts:

- an audit containing hard data of the extent of the resource, its condition and trend in condition, finance, use and users, management;
- discussion of the future of Country Parks, their development, improvement and delivery;
- recommendations for a renaissance.

It also contains very useful appendices. David Lambert has written (for the Garden History Society) a perceptive and insightful history which all Country Park managers should know. There are also appendices on standards and performance indicators, target groups, needs and provision, and a review of management plan advice.

The report makes it clear that the Countryside Agency will not be taking the funding lead, but will support promotion of the campaign in all the ways it can. The Agency is also helping to fund the Green Flag Awards in order to promote applications from Country Parks. However, major project funding will have to come from other sources, which is why the pilot projects have focused on historically important Country Parks as there is the prospect of funds from the HLF's Public Parks Initiative. The Renaissance Panel has already sought and secured a policy change from HLF to explicitly support the restoration of historic Country Parks (pilot projects at Lydiard Park, Swindon; Coombe Abbey, Coventry; and Reddish Vale, Stockport).

### **The audit**

You'll have to read the report yourselves, but some headlines follow.

- Country Parks cover 39,000 hectares and 65% of them are located in the urban fringe, with 1% in urban areas.
- 29% are of acknowledged heritage interest (many more probably have their history unrecognised) and 64% have nature conservation designations.
- There has been a consistent and unrelenting decline in capital and revenue funding, but there have been substantial new funds from Lottery distributors.
- 1999/2000 budgets would need a 28% increase to match their 1984/1985 values.
- There has been a steady upward trend in the introduction of charges for facilities and activities, indicating a drift from their original aims.
- There are an estimated 73m annual visits – 270,000 per park (6% of visits to countryside)

- 64% of Country Parks have management plans but only 46% of these are updated within two years – many are left on the shelf - 36% have no management plan at all.
- Parks with management plans tend to be in better condition and more likely to be improving but plans are generally too place focused, not visitor focused.
- The two topics least likely to feature in management plans are social inclusion, transport (accessibility).
- Country Park workers suffer from poor pay, ill-defined career structures, limited training opportunities and consequent recruitment and retention problems.
- There is an average of 3.5 volunteer groups per park, amounting to an average of 315 volunteer workdays per park/year.

Research, as yet unpublished, by English Heritage, Sport England and the Countryside Agency, *The use of public parks in England* (2003) makes clear the existing customer base of Country Parks as a whole. This omnibus survey shows that the clientele is mostly white from social classes AB, comprising predominantly 25-44 year olds. Country Parks, as a sector, are currently almost no-go areas for non-whites (14% of the non-white population use Country Parks compared with 38% of the population as a whole) and score very low for people in social classes DE (24% against 48% in AB).

### **The future**

The report recognises the need for:

- a champion – unfortunately CABE Space is interested only in urban regeneration issues;
- to restore the Country Park brand and image;
- to develop a shared vision and shared support for the family of Country Parks and a set of minimum standards of provision;
- to adopt the 'gateway' concept of what many Country Parks do and to assimilate wider socially progressive aims;
- to establish a partnership-based strategic working group;
- to exchange information through GreenSpace's Country Parks Network;
- to promote staff training and career improvements;
- to promote better quality and more integrated management plans.

Four essential ingredients to the success of Country Parks:

- adequate, predictable and ring-fenced revenue funding;
- appropriate staff structure and career development opportunities (raise status, wages, skills, training);
- detailed, integrated, costed and public management plans;
- genuine community involvement (including Friends, businesses etc).

This report, the setting up of the Country Parks Network and the pilot projects give us reason for optimism. As the report will underpin much of what comes next I would like to see it published as a hard copy book, preferably jointly by the Countryside Agency and GreenSpace. Where we go from here will depend on the people attending this seminar and the ones to follow.

# **Countryside Recreation Network Seminar**

## **COUNTRY PARKS**

### **REVIEW OF COUNTRY PARKS IN SCOTLAND**

*Mairi Caughey  
National Strategy Officer  
Scottish Natural Heritage*

#### **Introduction**

The review of Country Parks in Scotland has now reached the stage where there is a draft policy setting out revised purposes for Country Parks and offering guidance to managing authorities on key issues. The next stage of the process will see this draft policy being discussed at an event later this year with the managing authorities.

#### **Background**

The review of Country Parks in Scotland has assessed their achievements against the objectives of the Countryside Commission for Scotland's 1970 policy. It also examined their costs, compared with other publicly funded recreation services, and sought evidence concerning their popularity with the public. The conclusion reached is that they have broadly achieved their objectives, provide value for money and continue to attract significant numbers of visitors.

It is believed that the mix of formal and informal activities, an atmosphere of peace and quiet, and the mainly rural character are central to their continuing popularity with the public and reasons for many repeat visits. A further strength of Country Parks is thought to be the reassurance offered by evidence of good management and maintenance which creates a safe and welcoming environment.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) therefore concludes that Country Parks are a valuable contribution to provision for recreation in Scotland and worthy of our continued support. As a consequence the original objectives of Country Parks have been revisited and revised as follows:

- to provide readily accessible, high quality, opportunities for open-air recreation, mainly of an informal nature, in pleasant, well managed surroundings of a predominantly rural character; and

- to foster understanding, enjoyment and the sustainable use of the natural heritage through environmental education, and confidence in taking access to the wider countryside.

Essentially, these are very similar to two of the objectives in the former Countryside Commission for Scotland's (CCS) original policy of 1970, although they have been modernised to reflect national policy themes such as sustainability (including education for sustainability) social inclusion and environmental justice. The second objective also reflects the need for the Scottish Outdoor Access Code to be promoted as a means of helping to implement the provisions of the Land Reform Act 2003.

However, a number of policy issues attend these revised objectives and five of these are outlined below.

### **What is a Country Park?**

Given the diversity amongst Country Parks in Scotland in terms of nature and location, opportunities and attractions, it is perhaps not surprising that one of the main difficulties SNH has faced has been in deciding how to define a County Park.

Ultimately, SNH has decided to restrict its definition to the existing suite of 36 Country Parks, which are those sites that are already on SNH's Register which are largely owned and managed by the public sector. However, it is worth noting that the draft policy makes provision for the addition of new sites in local authority ownership.

### **What sort of recreational pursuits are appropriate in Country Parks?**

Whilst the former CCS policy encouraged the development of both formal and informal pursuits, SNH's interests lie predominantly with informal activities – such as walking, horse-riding, cycling, and general enjoyment of the countryside. However, there is considerable variation amongst Country Parks, with some being essentially places in the countryside for taking a quiet walk, and others where the main emphasis is on a formal sport, such as golf or water sports.

This raises a question as to what SNH policy should be saying about Parks that have developed their recreational provision predominantly towards the formal end of the spectrum (e.g. for golf or water sports).

Local authorities are in the best position to take an overview of their area and determine the recreational needs of their population. Moreover, it makes sense that Local Authorities should capitalise on the natural assets of their Parks, and if this means that they are well suited to more formal activities, so be it.

Nevertheless, SNH takes the view that a balance should be struck between these pursuits, and that the balance should favour informal ways of enjoying the

outdoors. Therefore, where the balance of provision currently favours formal interests, SNH's proposed policy will encourage managing bodies to explore opportunities to adjust the balance.

### **How can Country Parks remain attractive and relevant to the public?**

The range of opportunities for recreation in the wider countryside in Scotland has been growing steadily for many years. Equally, there has been growth in the numbers of privately owned countryside destinations attracting high numbers of visitors who are prepared to pay an entrance fee. More often than not, these private sector destinations also contain attractions such as garden centres, craft and gift shops alongside opportunities for enjoying the countryside.

So, whilst SNH's review has found that Country Parks continue to attract significant numbers of visitors, SNH is concerned that if public provision for recreation is to secure its position in this dynamic, diverse and highly competitive market place, Country Parks must echo what makes private sector attractions popular and successful.

The challenge, however, is to find a way of helping Country Parks to do this that allows them to adhere to their essential purposes and retain their countryside character. SNH's draft policy therefore contains a commitment to exploring the ways and means that this might be done.

For example, SNH will be looking at how to define the notion of 'quality' in terms of infrastructure, facilities, equipment and service (this is perhaps another way of saying SNH will be looking at minimum standards). SNH will also be looking at what new attractions and experiences could be introduced that would be compatible with the key characteristics of Country Parks.

### **Is there a continuing role for the Register?**

When the CCS introduced its original policy on Country Parks in 1970, it introduced a system of registration to go hand in hand with the creation of new Country Parks. This was a means of encouraging high standards of provision at the outset and was a kind of accolade. Criteria were set and those proposals that met the criteria were given substantial grant assistance and formally registered in a ceremony.

Latterly, however, the Register and idea of a registration process has come into question for a variety of reasons:

- few proposals are being discussed with SNH and no Parks have been registered since 1985;
- SNH grants are no longer normally available for works such as visitor centres, new roads, public conveniences, car and bus parks;
- Country Parks do not have access to ring fenced monies in SNH's budget – all applicants for capital grants are considered on their merits and on a first come first served basis; and lastly



- there is uncertainty about whether the Register is still a guarantee of what the public can expect to find at Country Parks.

SNH has considered how the Register might be updated, for example, by considering how the idea might be linked to a set of common standards and a kind of kite marking system to ensure quality in provision.

However, a direct connection between standards, the Register, and kite marking would inevitably result in difficult decisions about which Parks deserved to be on the Register and which did not, and SNH does not believe that this is an appropriate way forward. Such an approach would also require a high level of administration, which could be excessively onerous with little proportionate benefit. Moreover, without financial incentives tied to the achievement of standards, such a mechanism might have little attraction for managing authorities.

The draft policy therefore proposes to retain the Register simply as a means of identifying those Parks which SNH recognises and therefore to which the policy applies. However, the formal process of registering any new Parks that come forward in the future is to be dropped.

### **Are there enough Country Parks and in the right places?**

The question of whether there are enough Country Parks raises questions about SNH's role. Should SNH still be offering major financial incentives to encourage their creation? Should it be identifying broad areas where there are none but should be some? Should it be looking at disadvantaged places in the central belt of Scotland where people have very few opportunities for recreation in pleasant countryside surroundings?

Regarding incentives, SNH is not well placed to initiate the creation of new Country Parks because it no longer offer grants for major infrastructure. As for a role in broadly identifying new areas for Country Parks, an initiative undertaken by the CCS in the 1970s to relate population against possible locations for new Country Parks was unsuccessful. However, this is perhaps work that SNH should be thinking about reviving in future in order to stimulate debate. Lastly, regarding the environmental justice and social inclusion angle, SNH considers that local authorities are better placed to determine whether the establishment of a Country Park could help to address issues of this nature.

SNH therefore sees its role as continuing to provide information and advice to local authorities from a national perspective, and stimulating debate on the need for new Country Parks. The policy will encourage Local Authorities to take a strategic view of provision across their area by preparing Country Recreation and Access Strategies or Open Space Strategies as a context for the creation of new Country Parks and management of existing ones.

## **Do Country Parks need financial assistance and if so, what is available?**

One of the key questions of interest to managing authorities in Scotland is likely to concern the financial benefits associated with the new SNH policy.

SNH continues to provide capital grants for works relating to the natural heritage, although the focus of our grants has shifted in recent years from assisting the creation of major infrastructure to works more directly related to our remit. Grant for maintenance or replacement of facilities and infrastructure has never been available and SNH is reluctant to set a precedent which might become a significant financial burden in the future. But for some, this is thought to be the main issue.

However, contrary to some dire predictions in research undertaken in the late 1990s, there is little sign of Country Parks needing major injections of money to replace aging infrastructure. Indeed, SNH's perception about the condition of Country Parks is that they continue to be well managed and maintained, and this suggests that managing authorities value Country Parks and continue to be able to justify expenditure on them.

Nonetheless, SNH recognises that local authority budgets are always under pressure and that leisure and recreation budgets are usually particularly vulnerable. SNH is sensitive to these facts and recognises also that some aspects of our policy carry a price tag, albeit a relatively small one.

In response to these considerations, SNH will use its own grants for capital works as far as possible to assist with the development and management of Country Parks. The draft policy will acknowledge that some commercialisation within Parks might be necessary, not only as a response to changing public expectations, but also as a means of generating income.

Beyond that, SNH has attempted to identify the sources of funding that might be available to managing authorities. As in England, this means the identification of several potential sources including Transforming Your Space, Greenspace for Communities, and Heritage Lottery Funds

In conclusion, SNH's role might broadly be described as:

- championing Country Parks;
- providing guidance on key issues concerning development and management; and
- identifying new sources of funding.



# **Countryside Recreation Network Seminar**

## **COUNTRY PARKS**

### **HEALTH, WEALTH AND HAPPINESS**

*Patrick Norris  
Community Forest Field Officer  
Great Western Community Forest*

#### **The role of country parks in improving the health of the nation**

In 2003, a brand new hospital opened in Swindon. Built under a Private Finance Initiative, to very high environmental standards, it has its own travel plan, new cycle and walking routes and spin-offs for the natural environment with an s106 agreement under the Town and Country Planning Act. It looks good, but like all new buildings of this scale, the landscaping has yet to establish and soften the impact of all that concrete.

One week after opening, there were reports in the local press that it had run out of beds. Whether this is an accurate report of what actually happened may never be known, but it could be concluded that they will never build a hospital that will ever have enough beds.

No one ever fully recovers from a heart attack, physically the scars will heal; mentally there remains a doubt. If you have a heart attack the NHS will cure you, people genuinely believe that and it's not unreasonable. The same general belief of 'it will never happen to me' holds good for most of the chronic illnesses of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer and mental health that government want to see decreasing, but are difficult to budge. It may take a generation or two, before any real decrease in these illnesses is seen in the UK population, if we start now that is.

Therefore, I would suggest that there has to be an increasing role for preventative medicine to reduce the level of chronic illness in the community. This should lead to a reduction in the demand for hospital beds. I believe that government understand this and it is a long-term goal. I believe that Country Parks as well as urban greenspace and the people who manage them have a role to play in making this happen.

Government want a reduction in chronic illness; then there will be enough beds in the hospitals. They want evidence that clearly demonstrates that preventative health care programmes are working. The seat belt law introduced in 1983 is a good example of measurable and effective action. Most important of all, they want to do it through partnership.

Sustrans have suggested that the National Cycle Network is making the biggest contribution towards improving the health of the nation, simply because it

encourages more people to be more physically active, more often. In many ways this is true. They would like people to challenge that claim, well I do, Country Parks and urban greenspace have been doing that for years; sadly no one can prove if this is true. In these days where evidence is the key to unlocking so much, there is very little written down that can prove the case for open spaces.

Country Park managers need to be able to identify where the target audiences are, they do exist and it is surprising how much work is done within a local authority that can help this identification process. There is the Poverty Index, it comes under different names, but every local authority should have one and it is a wealth of information. Often they use GIS based information to identify need, for example, cardiac disease when plotted on a map base for an area frequently shows that the highest rates of cardiac illness tend to be in the deprived areas of a town or city.

A nearby Country Park could perhaps be the key to unlocking funding to initiate a health initiative in partnership with the Ranger Service, a GP surgery, the Primary Care Trust and the local authority. Other departments within a local authority may already be doing something. Public health, for example, are beginning to look at wider public health initiatives, as well as their usual work. Don't get missed out when they are looking for support.

Finally, are other local organisations getting ahead in the health game? BTCV with Green Gyms for example, is purely a health improvement programme, targeted and specific. Businesses in the private sector are interested in providing support, facilities and even money to give their employees the benefit of physical activity. Can a Country Park near an industrial or business park be a provider to a demand from the private sector?

Country Parks can offer a great deal to a client based audience; dedicated staff, people who are good with people, facilities such as car parks, cafes and toilets, public transport, close to large populations and staff who have lots of local knowledge who are frequently passionate about their work and capable of sharing that. Country Parks and the Rangers who work there are important, not just to the natural features but to a society that needs to make itself better, it needs a little help to get there.

To finish, don't re-invent the wheel, use the network to learn and develop your own programmes. One thing I have learned is that Countryside Managers, because we have got used to the isolation, work in isolated ways. Don't! Partnerships work and they are a good way to do business. The health of the nation and a shortage of hospital beds depend on it.

# **Countryside Recreation Network Seminar**

## **COUNTRY PARKS**

### **UNDER-REPRESENTATION IN COUNTRY PARKS**

*Freddie D'Souza  
Countryside Access Officer  
Northamptonshire County Council*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

A growing amount of research shows that contact with the natural world can benefit both mental and physical health (1) and reduce stress (2).

Research also suggests that disconnection with nature is harmful to individuals, societies and cultures (1). This evidence means it is imperative that we find ways to reach under-represented people and offer them opportunities to make that reconnection with nature.

In Northamptonshire we are not blessed with National Parks or coastline, therefore the Country Parks and green spaces that we do have are vital to the well-being of the people of this county and should be conserved at all cost. We have found that under-represented groups do not visit our Country Parks as frequently as other groups, but we are attempting to address the problem in a variety of ways.

We have some excellent facilities on offer through the "Countryside Access For All Project" at Brixworth Country Park, and the "access for all" ethos runs through all our work. However, it is not just the provision of accessible buildings and facilities that make "access for all" a reality – it requires awareness, organisational commitment and vision to resource and develop accessible services.

The project consists of purpose-built accessible facilities and services at the Park and is unique in that it sets the standards for improving access to the countryside for others to follow. This fact has been recognised by the award of the prestigious Heart Of England Tourist Board Award of "Tourism for All" in 1999.

The Brixworth Country Park project aims to break down the cultural, physical and socio-economic barriers that exist in today's world by providing access to the countryside and inexpensive forms of recreation.

## **COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FOR ALL**

### **1. The "Countryside Access For All" Project at Brixworth Country Park and Pitsford Water.**

In Sept 1995 the "Countryside Access For All Project" was awarded the sum of £736,000 from the Millennium Commission. A consortium was set up to manage the project involving the Public, Private and Voluntary sectors consisting of: Northamptonshire County Council, Anglian Water Services, Toc H, and BTCV. The total capital cost of the project was £1,472,000. Every facility at Brixworth has been developed with guidance from the Fieldfare Trust, using the BT Countryside For All Guidelines and is geared towards improving access, for people of all ages, cultures, backgrounds and abilities.

Facilities at Brixworth include:

- the Mackintosh centre (purpose built residential accommodation);
- a visitor centre;
- a cafeteria;
- a gazebo (featuring a traditional Northants Long Straw thatched roof);
- a sensory garden;
- a sculpture trail;
- cycle tracks;
- an accessible bird hide;
- surfaced way-marked trails with regular seating provision.

All these features have been developed in consultation with disabled people.

Other aspects of the project include:

- "Sailability" in which ten boats were provided to the local sailing club for use by people visiting the centre.
- The "Countryside Discovery Bus", an accessible minibus available for use by groups to visit the country parks within the county.
- There are also a number of battery powered vehicles and manual wheelchairs available for use by the general public.

The Countryside For All project would not have been completed without the invaluable support of local groups and the community.

## **MAKING OUR SERVICES MORE ACCESSIBLE**

### **2 Pathways to Partnership**

This project was set up in 1995 between Countryside Services and Social Services to improve links and information between the two departments and "to



provide opportunities for groups and individuals to discover and enjoy the countryside" (3) for themselves.

Initially, a social worker was seconded to Countryside Services for six months to facilitate the project. Countryside Rangers were given disability awareness training prior to visiting day centres for adults with physical or learning disabilities and sensory impairment. They provided displays and workshops and explained their role in the management of Country Parks. Day centre users then visited the Country Parks to take part in Discovery Days and learn about the countryside with the rangers. The rangers found that the number of visits from day centres increased, and day centres users found that contact with rangers transformed their experience of Country Parks.

The project was so successful that in 1966 it won the National BT Countryside For All Award, and the county council decided to create a full time post of Countryside Network Officer (now Countryside Access Officer) to continue the progress made by the project.

It is unusual, when local authorities are experiencing severe financial pressures for such posts to exist, along with a dedicated budget to address access issues. The Countryside & Tourism Section of Northamptonshire County Council recognise the value and importance of working with under-represented groups and continue to make this commitment.

## **FINDING UNDER- REPRESENTED GROUPS**

### **3 "Target" Groups**

It was through a Mori Poll carried out in 1994 that under represented groups were identified in visitor numbers to the Country Parks. The Mori Poll is an annual survey carried out with 15,000 households in the county to determine levels of use and satisfaction with Northamptonshire County Council services.

The poll showed that certain groups of people were failing to access the country parks. In order to discover the reasons for this, a series of focus groups were held, and representatives from the following groups (identified in the poll) were invited:

- disabled people;
- older People;
- people with sensory impairment;
- black and minority ethnic people;
- young people;
- young families;
- people from disadvantaged areas.

These groups have also been identified in research carried out by Aberdeen University for the Countryside Recreation Network (4).

The focus groups were successful and able to identify many barriers that they believed prevented them from accessing the countryside, including:

- lack of transport;
- lack of information;
- lack of confidence;
- financial problems;
- language;
- cultural differences;
- social isolation.

It was decided to call those groups "target groups", because we believe that by identifying and contacting under-represented groups in the local community, we are able to target our services to those areas more effectively.

Using information from those early focus groups and from regular park access audits carried out for us by a wide section of the public, our aim is to identify, reduce and wherever possible, remove barriers preventing people from visiting the Country Parks.

We offer subsidised rates to target groups for residential bookings and for ranger led activities. Where groups are unable to obtain or provide funding for their initial visit to the Country Parks, free provision can be arranged at the discretion of the Countryside Access Officer, through a subsidy from the access budget.

Having identified our target or under-represented groups in the community – how do we reach them?

Through existing internal networks within the county council and externally by liaising with other organisations, such as local disability groups, MIND, Mencap, etc, and by building up a database of contacts. It is possible to borrow contact lists from other organisations, such as volunteer bureaux - where permissible under data protection. Networking at every opportunity helps to build up contacts, as do telephone directories, the internet, libraries, GP surgeries - and lateral thinking!

## **MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

### **4. Examples of work with target groups**

#### **Operation Reindeer**

A festive winter event arising from the Pathways to Partnership project – Operation Reindeer is now in its 8th year. The day centres that took part in the original project continue to attend the event and other groups are invited every year to widen the potential audience. The event has proved to be very popular and has of necessity evolved from a three-day event at one park, to a three-day event at three different parks, making a total of nine days.

This provides more opportunities for new groups to attend and increases the sustainability of the event by reducing the distance that groups need to travel.

- In December 1996 a total of 55 adults with learning disabilities attended Operation Reindeer.
- In December 2002 a total of 138 adults and children from 13 different special needs groups attended Operation Reindeer.

### **Roots Culturefest**

A truly multicultural festival held annually in a Country Park, the idea for which arose from the black and minority ethnic focus groups.

"Roots" is now in its 7th year and has progressed to the point where the communities involved in organising the event have formed themselves into a constituted group.

The Roots Environmental Network (Northants) group now raise funds and organise the event themselves. Northamptonshire County Council provides the venue, environmental activities, along with advice and support to the planning group.

The event is usually attended by anything between 2,000 - 5,000 people from all over the country.

### **Customer Care Panels and Focus Groups**

Annual access audits of the Country Parks where consultation takes place with a group of individuals drawn from the various target groups. Sometimes several different groups will be consulted rather than taking a member from each group and putting them together – this will vary depending on which features of the park we are auditing.

People are generally only too pleased to be consulted – many have never been consulted about anything before and give up their free time willingly to help us audit the parks. The overall findings of the group are always fed back to them individually and incorporated into improvements carried out at the parks through the access budget. This ensures that important access information gained from customer care panels does not sit and gather dust on a shelf somewhere!

Access audits at the Country Parks include all aspects of access, including information and interpretation.

### **Outreach work with Target Groups.**

Research carried out by Aberdeen University for the Countryside Recreation Network entitled "The Role of the Countryside in Addressing Social Exclusion" featured Brixworth Country Park and showed that having "Outreach" as opposed to just "Countryside staff" was a positive factor in countering social exclusion in countryside recreation (4).

Vital to the Countryside Access Officer role is the concept of outreach work, through which target groups are identified and personal contact maintained. (Black and minority ethnic groups particularly appreciate this way of working.)

Often, well meaning carers or service providers will act as gatekeepers to the people that we are trying to reach. Personal contact can help break down those barriers, build up relationships and ensure that we reach the actual service users. We can then provide them with information and opportunities to discover and enjoy the country parks and wider countryside.

Groups are visited in their own setting in the community which allows me to assess their particular needs, and to ensure that information is in the appropriate format for their needs. Information may consist of talks, slide shows, pictorial information, audio-tapes or sensory materials, in addition to the usual leaflets, fliers etc. The group are given some idea of what a particular Country Park is like prior to their visit and helps them to make connections, better informed choices, and hopefully improves the quality of their experience when they do visit the parks.

Wherever possible, target groups are encouraged to join in with mainstream activities on offer. However, if group leaders request taster sessions or activities exclusively for their group, I liaise closely with the group leaders and rangers, to ensure that the activities are appropriate and relevant to each groups needs.

Target groups are now returning each spring and summer to set up new programmes of activities for their groups. Many of them have developed the confidence to visit parks at other times of the year, and some groups have become involved in valuable conservation work, acquiring and demonstrating practical and social skills that surprised even their group leaders.

We are currently considering setting up training sessions for group leaders to give them the confidence to lead environmental activities for their groups.

### MEASURING UP

It is not good enough to state that our Country Parks are for everyone and then simply assume that those groups under-represented in our visitor numbers do not wish to visit the countryside. We have a duty to explore with them whether they do wish to visit the Country Parks, and try to discover what their particular barriers are - and make every effort to address them.

In addition to the Mori Poll, all six Country Parks gather their own visitor profile statistics.

Over the last few years visitor numbers for target groups have shown a gradual but steady rise:



*1995 - 1996 : a total of 20 target groups made 34 visits to NCC country parks*

*2001- 2002 : a total of 43 target groups made 124 visits to NCC country parks*

*2002-2003 : a total of 63 target groups made 162 visits to NCC country parks.*

Although we know that the number of ethnic visitors to the parks have increased, the evidence is anecdotal, and we have failed to find a satisfactory method for recording this information.

Visits by known ethnic groups are recorded, either for ranger led activities at the parks or visits to the residential centre, but when groups consist of mixed ethnicity this becomes impossible.

We also find that approaching unknown visiting groups to establish ethnicity verbally or to ask them to complete a questionnaire can be too intrusive.

We would welcome any ideas or solutions to this problem from other parks!

We know that we have more work to do in this area and that we still need to actively encourage greater involvement in the Country Parks by black and ethnic groups.

#### **AND FINALLY**

We must not forget that while it is important to collect statistics about the numbers of visitors, we also need to think about qualitative measures, which is more problematic.

One possible benchmark for customer satisfaction could be the number of repeat visits to the park. If people have had a positive experience during their first visit they are more likely to return – and to tell others about their experience. This is no different for under-represented groups, many of whom have very efficient networks for distributing information amongst themselves.

Research recently commissioned by Northamptonshire County Council on the Country Parks (6) showed that:

The country parks receive a total of 1.6 million visits per annum.

9% of those visits originate from out of county.

86% - 90% of visits were by local people.

93% - 95% of visits were repeat visits.

Word of mouth is still one of the most effective ways of marketing an attraction – particularly among under-represented groups - so let's make sure we are giving them the right message!

References:

- 1 *Green Exercise: Complementary Roles of Nature, Exercise and Diet in Physical and Emotional Well-Being and Implications for Public Health Policy – Essex University - March 2003*
- 2 *Your Parks: The benefits of parks and greenspace – Urban Parks Forum - October 2002*
- 3 *Pathways to Partnership: Enabling people with disabilities to make informed choices about their discovery and enjoyment of the countryside - Lindsey Wool more 1995*
- 4 *Countryside Recreation Network report: Social Inclusion in Countryside Leisure in the United Kingdom -The role of Countryside in Addressing Social Exclusion – Aberdeen University 2001*
- 5 *BT Countryside For All Standards and Guidelines: a good practice guide to disabled people's access to the countryside.*
- 6 *Country Parks Development Study – WS Atkins March 2002 (NB: this study was carried out on only 3 of the 5 parks)*

# **Countryside Recreation Network Seminar**

## **COUNTRY PARKS**

### **"DON'T BOTHER" CAR CRIME IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

*Katy Menday  
Country Park Co-Ordinator  
Ham Hill Country Park  
South Somerset District Council*

#### **The problem**

After two summers of escalating incidents, including car break-ins and thefts, it was time to take action.

Open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, Ham Hill Country Park is often more popular at night than through the day. With six main car parks and many other subsidiary areas, most of which are remote from any areas of occupation, vehicles both day and night are targeted by bold thieves whilst their owners are out enjoying the park. Gangs of thieves travel out from the local town and target these car parks, at worst breaking into as many as five vehicles in any one day.

This was not a new problem, and has not been helped by dwindling police numbers in rural areas. As the local press started to cover more and more on the awful regularity of break-ins and every day we found ourselves clearing up glass, it became obvious that we could no longer continue with our heads in the sand.

#### **What was the solution?**

In the past the ranger team reacted to increased incidents by erecting warning signs "thieves operate in this area", cutting back scrub growth to open sight lines from car parks to the main road and even trying to close the car park most prone to incidents – but local uproar forced its re-opening and abandonment of this plan! Nothing we tried had any significant impact on crime levels.

It became obvious that a bold proactive project was required. It needed to be two pronged: something to encourage and educate park users into taking responsibility for their own belongings; and additionally as a community we needed to increase incident reporting and therefore increase the likelihood of catching the perpetrators of criminal and anti-social behaviour.

The ranger team needed to enlist more pairs of eyes and ears. The problem was how to gather information and disseminate advice, all at nominal costs and without littering the countryside with more signs.

The best way forward was in partnership with Avon and Somerset Police. More people brought greater expertise and also joint funding. Discussions produced a project plan with three main courses of action.

1. Increase police patrols and observations at the park, including use of traffic wardens, special constables, dog handlers and CID officers, all primed to carry out Vulnerable Vehicle Checks. When any vehicle is left with valuable items on show the owner will receive a letter through the post advising them to empty their vehicle in the future.
2. Formation of a Ham Hill Neighbourhood Watch group – stemming from regular park users who already reported incidents to the rangers. The team has developed strong links with a number of park users, generally those regular dog walkers who visit us two to three times per day. They were asked to report any signs of criminal activity or suspicious behaviour.
3. Creation of a new site specific information leaflet – based on an existing police initiative called “Don’t Bother”.

### **The Project**

The leaflet really was the core of the project, the means by which we could spearhead a media launch and impress upon people how seriously crime at Ham Hill needs to be taken. The leaflet aims to achieve the following:

1. get individuals to take responsibility for their vehicle and belongings;
2. encourage visitors to report all incidents by providing all the relevant contact points, and explaining that even if they do not require an incident number the police will record and use crime figures to help secure funding and officers for the area in the future;
3. help the public provide the police with accurate information about crime on site; helping the police locate crime hotspots and focus officer time and resources, whilst guiding the rangers in practical management of these areas.

In order for the leaflet to achieve its goals we realised that people would have to have it to hand immediately should they witness anything or become a victim of crime. We needed to incorporate into the leaflet an incentive for individuals to pick it up at outlets, and also a reason to keep it in your car – the police suggested a “Don’t Bother” card. Available widely from police stations the “Don’t Bother” card is placed on your car dashboard to tell would be thieves:

**DON'T BOTHER  
THIS VEHICLE HAD BEEN EMPTIED OF ALL VALUABLE ITEMS**

It serves the additional purpose of reminding owners when they leave the vehicle to remove and secure their belongings. The design of the leaflet is such

that two different pages can be displayed as the front of the leaflet – making a bolder impact in dispensers.

Primarily it was, and still is, a public awareness campaign. By its nature the idea simply would not succeed without the support of park users, parishes and importantly the police. The consultation was relatively straightforward. Parish Councils were a little surprised at the leaflet proofs they were being asked to comment upon – when you are used to flora, fauna and archaeology it is a slight difference! But they took it all in their stride and provided some extremely constructive comments on how to make site maps and text user friendly. There was initially an expectation that the villages of the hill would object to such an unsavoury topic being associated with their parish – however once the scope and severity of the problem had been explained they were incredibly supportive.

South Somerset District Council undertook all the actual design of the leaflet in house and proofs were sent to Avon and Somerset Constabulary for comment.

### **The finished product**

By March of this year the leaflet had been printed – we had a multi-purpose, bold and high profile education tool unique to the site for just £400. Five thousand leaflets were printed, in two colours at a cost of 8p per leaflet; sticking to one colour could reduce costs. Expenses were split 50/50 with the police. A media launch was needed to ensure that the public knew about the new measures being taken, and that their help was needed. It was a sensitive issue on which to organise a launch, as no countryside site necessarily wants its name synonymous with crime, however recent negative press and comments were mounting, so such a move could really only become beneficial. The press were fantastic and the thoughtfully worded news release was not twisted or tampered with.

The same day that the papers were released many people dropped into the rangers' office to pick up a new leaflet – providing us with excellent contact with park users and those extra eyes and ears. All this occurred just prior to the Easter holidays when traditionally spates of car crime increase with more families visiting the park.

Simultaneously the Vulnerable Vehicle Scheme was running well: if ever the constabulary had any spare officers they were sent to Ham Hill to carry out patrols. We now often receive indignant visits from members of the public shortly after receiving an advice letter after visiting the hill and leaving valuables on show. They are not overly keen on the initiative, but it certainly makes an impression!

Whenever rangers or volunteers are out on site they now carry the leaflet to distribute to the public. This was particularly effective during this summer's visitor survey, with many positive comments about the scheme noted, and pleasure that the District Council were making an effort to protect park users. It is also pleasing to see the number of "Don't Bother" cards that are now used in vehicles.

It was vitally important to ensure that the leaflets were distributed as widely as possible, and to the various user groups associated with the park. We utilised the partnership links as fully as possible, using mailing lists from both organisations. Working with the police, leaflets were sent to all parishioners' part of any Neighbourhood Watch Scheme for the villages surrounding the park – with an explanatory covering letter. Shops, pubs and tourist outlets were also mail shot and the Country Park mailing list was used. Further leaflets are available from both the rangers and police, and at least once a week I send out another bundle.

### **But has it actually reduced car crime?**

Well something has! Break-ins are dramatically reduced this year. This could mainly be attributed to the successful capture and prosecution of a gang of regular thieves who visited Ham Hill Country Park. Four members of the public spotted the vehicle acting suspiciously and reported it, a fifth then called through after actually witnessing a break in – this fast and accurate information meant that officers could give chase and apprehend the individuals. Two members of the public then subsequently visited our office and said that they had used the leaflet for contact numbers and location information to pass onto the police. Since this incident no break-ins have been reported to the rangers, and we have seen no broken glass in the car parks. As the summer holidays approach, the campaign will be tested to its limits, last year we dealt with an average three break-ins per week.

What certainly has been positive for us is the reverse in press coverage, from highly negative to positive with the proactive stance against crime. We are also grateful not to be constantly receiving complaints and requests for help after break-ins; it's nice to actually be able to work in the countryside again!

### **Top Tips and Handy Hints**

- Contact your local crime reduction officer – they should have ideas on awareness techniques and have access to budgets for projects. The main project was not the end of partnership working; we are now investigating some large temporary signs for busy weekends and events, warning of the hazards of leaving valuables in your car.
- Find out if your constabulary has a mobile unit. To date we have received many visits from this unit where people can simply drop in and discuss with officers their concerns and comments. It was used as a launch pad for the new leaflet.
- Make sure a distribution system is in place for any new literature you produce – there is no point in doing it if you don't tell anyone!
- Don't hide from it – crime is an unsavoury and difficult to deal with problem – but ignoring it doesn't make it go away. Since we admitted there was a problem and started the public awareness campaign the press and park users have been very supportive, making the scheme the success that it has been.

- In addition to formal partnerships ensure that you have good informal relations with the police. Most mobile officers, and the four local dog handlers all now visit Ham Hill for their lunch – their presence is highly visible and comforting to park users.
- Print leaflets on glossy paper if you can find the budget. We have found people are less likely to try and light BBQs with this paper – it simply doesn't burn well!
- Keep a log of "dodgy number plates", you may not witness an incident but you never know when that car may be spotted again. Regularly cross-reference your information with the police, they are usually able to trace the vehicles owner and may wish for you to keep a further eye out.
- The police call centre network is still an anathema to me, and can be very frustrating. I would suggest that faxing through incidents and using email is by far the most successful way of contacting police officers with non-urgent enquiries. For incident reporting we jointly designed a form that is simply faxed through to our local station missing out the regional call centre.

# **Countryside Recreation Network Seminar**

COUNTRY PARKS

EDUCATION

*Mary Bagley  
Country Parks Manager  
Essex County Council*

Presentation attached under Annex D



# Countryside Recreation Network Seminar

## COUNTRY PARKS

### EDUCATION

*Les McCadden  
Site Manager  
Thorndon Country Park  
Essex County Council*

#### **Casual Education Rangers**

In 1997 after years of fruitless battles to get more staff to extend our environmental education I was beginning to give up hope of ever changing things. For several years we had been turning schools away during the summer term and site staff were complaining that there was no time for other duties. We had already been charging for some years at this point. Then a new boss suggested that there was no freeze on income generating posts and we were off. We created the following advert to recruit casual education assistants:

#### ***Staff Vacancy: Casual Education Assistant***

***Do you have experience of working or teaching in the outdoors?***

*Do you have knowledge of environmental education and ecological principles, together with a basic understanding of the National Curriculum? Do you have the ability to*

*work on your own initiative and have good communication skills and a flexible approach to work?*

*The Casual Education Assistant will:*

- *Lead educational environmental activities*
  - *Prepare site and equipment*
- *Clear away equipment and keep records*
- *Assist with development of new activities*
- *Comply with Health and Safety regulations.*

*Employment: on an 'as and when required' basis; requirements are seasonal: mostly during the school summer term.*

***Payment: by number of hours worked, approx £6.10 per hour:  
usually 8.30am to 3.00pm.***

*For further details and an application form  
contact:.....*

We hoped we would get ex teachers who had retired but had an interest in conservation. We ended up with three people with formal training, two of whom are still with us plus eight others with 'potential'. We understood that we would have to train everyone anyway so we made it part of the recruitment process. We used the following training programme:

*Programme*

09.30 *Tea / coffee*

09.45 *Introduction*

*Brief description of the day; the type of education used in Country Parks; our system of booking schools; the system for using the Casual Education Assistants including what they can expect from us. Game: What Animal am I?*

10.15 *Health and Safety*

*What are our H & S responsibilities? - short brainstorm  
Duty of Care; Codes of Practice; daily site checks, safety talk  
Practicalities  
Outside session.  
Brainstorm about site awareness and equipment.*

11.30 *Motivation - 'who's it for?'*

12.00 *Lunch*

12.45 *Leading, Flow and Delivery*

13.00 *Activities : pond dip; food chains; seed dispersal mime; land art; co-operative games; reviewing*

15.00 *Tea*

15.15 *Activities - trainees to lead one short activity each with the rest of the group; details on the day*

16.30 *Review; help and support*

16.45 *Close*

There were also two sessions of shadowing to be completed and two sessions of on the job assessment. The participants were paid during all of this.

## **The Education Support Group**

This was a group formed by staff for staff, to encourage workers on distant sites to share best practice. At first this was run quarterly, but now twice yearly. It's popular with the Casual Education Rangers too because they get the chance to meet up as well. Please see below the first Education Support Group Announcement.

***Attention all Ranger Service staff.  
Are you interested in Environmental Education! In Making a Difference!  
Then this is for you.***

### **Education Support Group.**

*This is for anyone leading school groups in country parks and would like to:-*

- *exchange ideas*
- *discuss good practice*
- *swap new activities*
- *be reminded of what a good and worthwhile job you are doing*

*If you're interested come along to Thorndon on Thursday 16 Jan 97 10.00 am.*

*For more information contact Les.*

Other areas of the Ranger Service copied the idea and we now have a wildlife support group and an H & S group. These have all proven to be great forums for specific issues e.g. biodiversity monitoring.

## **The Outcomes For Us**

We now have a pool of 5 Education Rangers who can be called upon by any of the parks. These Rangers are available for other events for example play days. We, at Thorndon, have not been able to increase our numbers because we were already at capacity. But we have been able to increase time on site work by 25%. Other sites have been able to increase their numbers in some cases by 30%. There is a small income too.

In conclusion the main benefits are the added flexibility and the high quality of the Education Ranger's Service provision.

# **Countryside Recreation Network Seminar**

## **COUNTRY PARKS**

### **WORKSHOP PAPER**

#### **DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION FOR COUNTRY PARKS**

*Liz Gaunt*

*Project Officer - Country Parks Network*

*GreenSpace*

The Countryside Agency report *Towards a Country Park Renaissance* explores the need for a family, or brand, of country parks. To identify the aims of this family a draft, shared vision is offered in the final chapter.

This workshop was intended to determine the existence of a Country Park brand. If such a brand was felt to be valid then its potential aims could be discussed. Utilising the draft vision from the report as a starting point, a shared vision could be formed which would reflect the aims and objectives of this family of Country Parks.

The time restrictions on both workshop sessions disallowed full discussion of many points, for example, the role of Country Parks in tourism, but despite these difficulties a positive stance was reached by each session.

#### **The benefits and need for a family or brand of country parks**

It was widely agreed that Country Parks do, and should, belong to a family or brand. Within this family it is imperative that each park is encouraged to retain its local character and distinctiveness. The links between parks are essential for: addressing visitor expectations; networking; the sharing of information regarding good practice, funding sources and successes and to address the demotivating isolation experienced by many practitioners.

Although the name 'Country Park' can be used by sites such as privately owned caravan parks, the symbol is patented and could be used to identify the parks belonging to this family. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) have addressed this issue and felt the best way forward was to ensure that any promotion of country parks identifies the parks involved and this approach could be adopted.

#### **Who is the shared vision for and what benefits would be derived?**

It was felt that a shared vision for Country Parks would be of benefit to the public. When all parks embrace the same vision, users will have a clear idea of what to expect from their visit and, therefore, their expectations will be met. For example, anecdotal evidence was offered to demonstrate that Country Park users expect Country Parks to be 'training grounds' for the wider countryside and this could be addressed by all Country Parks. It was agreed that more

research should be undertaken to identify the needs and expectations of visitors to Country Parks. A shared vision would be of benefit to practitioners. The clear identification of purpose and aspiration would greatly assist in the process of funding applications to both Government and other sources. Funding bodies, whose aims and objectives were met by the vision, could be encouraged to look favourably on applications from all Country Parks within the 'family'.

**What are the disadvantages to a shared vision?**

It was felt that if the vision were too prescriptive the progress and development of Country Parks could be hindered. The wide diversity of sites prompted the exploration of different visions for sites with a main focus on, for example, heritage or nature conservation. This could dilute the vision and, ultimately, the family and, therefore, would defeat the object of a shared vision. Although Country Parks are unique sites and should be operating as a family it is important that a shared vision does not sever the existing links to sites such as urban parks and Local Nature Reserves, and does not seek to isolate Country Parks from other green space provision.

**How should the draft vision be amended and what should be included in a shared vision for Country Parks?**

As a Country Park, we welcome and encourage all visitors. We will try to ensure that our visitors' experience is as enjoyable and informative as possible. We will actively seek to provide visitors with a safe and clean park that caters for the needs of individuals and family groups. We will seek to accommodate and provide for the recreational needs of visitors, whilst managing the land in a sustainable way that conserves, protects, and improves the landscape, natural environment and wildlife.

We will respect and support local culture and heritage, and encourage the involvement of visitors and the local community in the management and maintenance of the park. We are stewards of this land and will ensure that its many benefits are conserved for the enjoyment of the generations yet to come.

**Draft shared vision taken from *Towards a Country Park Renaissance* Report, Countryside Agency 2003**

The above draft vision was discussed and generally felt to be a useful statement. Several changes and clarifications were suggested. The use of 'all' in the opening sentence was felt to be misleading as Country Parks would not welcome those who wilfully damaged property or disrupted others enjoyment of the park. An alternative would be to replace 'all' with 'regardless of gender, age, religious belief, race, socio-economic background, sexual orientation or mental or physical ability.' It was generally felt that 'individuals and family groups' was too restrictive and should be amended. The final sentence should include 'enhance' as many practitioners felt this was the main focus of their work.

The 'gateway' concept was discussed and felt by many to be a relevant and useful way of describing the Country Park ethos: both on a physical and intellectual level. Country Parks are countryside belonging to the people, as opposed to landowners or agriculture and the majority offer free access. They offer a diverse range of opportunities such as:

- re-connecting people with nature and heritage;
- formal and informal recreation in a countryside setting;
- enhancing quality of life;
- a welcoming environment which feels 'safe';
- countryside behaviour and information education.

It was felt that Country Parks were unique in that people could visit for a specific reason i.e. to enjoy a quiet stroll and chose to take advantage of one of the many other possibilities open to them, for example, a ranger-led educational activity. This defined Country Parks as true value-added visitor attractions, with visitors being offered benefits which they may not have expected.

More work is required to form a comprehensive vision which all Country Park practitioners and stakeholders feel truly reflects their aims and aspirations and captures the essence of these diverse and valuable sites.

# **Countryside Recreation Network Seminar**

## **COUNTRY PARKS WORKSHOP PAPER**

### **MINIMUM STANDARDS**

*Andy Maginnis  
Countryside Estates Manager  
Worcestershire County Council*

The workshop was concerned with three principle questions:

- 1) **Should Country Parks be expected to have a minimum range of facilities and services to be considered a Country Park?**
- 2) **Should these facilities be managed to recognised standards and if so do appropriate "off the shelf" standards already exist?**
- 3) **Can meeting standards help to attract or maintain funding?**

The bulleted points which follow were either the consensus view or agreed by the great majority of participants.

#### **Should Country Parks be expected to have a minimum range of facilities and services to be considered a Country Park?**

- In an ideal world, yes. It was agreed that the public have a reasonably consistent view of what they expect from a Country Park and that, by and large, those expectations should be met if the brand is to remain strong. It was also agreed that there would be merit in providers and agencies sharing a common vision for what the term means.
- A number of facilities and services were identified that one might expect to find at a Country Park. It was agreed that certain core facilities and services should be expected at every Country Park and that others could be selected from a wider menu. The menu included:
  - visitor centre
  - café
  - shop
  - toilets
  - waymarked trails
  - information and interpretation
  - car park
  - directional signage to locate the site
  - staff presence
  - events and activities such as walks and talks
  - play area
  - picnic facilities
  - open greenspace
  - opportunities for community involvement

- some conservation interest
- overall size greater than 10 ha
- It was agreed that there could be merit in recognising two grades of Country Park in much the same way that hotels, restaurants and B&B's are awarded keys or stars. It was felt that such a system would need to be administered by an organisation such as the Country Parks Network.
- It was recognised that some providers would continue to call their sites Country Parks despite not providing the minimum level of facilities and services. Clearly these providers could not be prevented from using the title; however, these sites would not be awarded "stars".
- Most participants manage a range of sites other than Country Parks and it was agreed that there was no intention to imply that other sites were inferior or less important in any way.

**Should these facilities be managed to recognised standards and if so do appropriate "off the shelf" standards already exist?**

- It was strongly felt that facilities and services should be managed to recognised common standards. This would help meet visitor expectations, set clear objectives for managers and provide a rationale for resource allocation.
- It was agreed that "minimum standards" was an unhelpful and potentially misleading term and that standards should be realistic yet challenging.
- However, it was not felt that a Country Park should be declassified or downgraded as a result of failing to meet the standards. Rather, an improvement plan should be developed by the provider in order to meet them.
- A number of "off the shelf" standards were mentioned including:
  - Green Flag
  - Visitor Welcome
  - Chartermark
  - BT Access For All
  - Investors In People
  - Accredited Membership of the Countryside Management Association
- It was agreed that there would be some merit in the Visitor Welcome initiative being updated and extended with signposting to other relevant standards such as those listed above.



- It was noted that standards and continuous improvement are key features of any Best Value Review and standards are also relevant to Best Value Performance Indicators..
- It was also recognised that a number of standards are imposed by legislation such as the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, Disability Discrimination Act and the Health and Safety at Work Act.

#### **Can meeting standards help to attract or maintain funding?**

- Most participants could cite examples where meeting standards had helped to maintain or increase funding.
- It was agreed that this was because:
  - Standards, particularly those with an award, were readily understood by elected Members and senior officers
  - Elected Members and senior officers were extremely reluctant to lose awards once achieved
  - The achievement of standards and awards (or a commitment to meeting them) often gives confidence to potential external funders

#### **Conclusion**

It was agreed that:

- visitors have reasonably consistent views on what they want and expect from Country Parks
- the brand "Country Park" is worth protecting and promoting
- ideally the title should only be used for sites providing certain core facilities and services
- the facilities and services should meet common largely existing standards
- a commitment to meeting common standards would help to protect and enhance funding

# **Countryside Recreation Network Seminar**

## **COUNTRY PARKS WORKSHOP PAPER**

### **EXPLORING RESOURCES AND FUNDING**

*Finbar Mulholland  
Project Officer - Country Parks Network  
GreenSpace*

This workshop had the initial aim of reviewing what sources of funding Country Park staff were using and to what degree those funds covered their needs and requirements. However, early on it was clear that most attendees dismissed this intention due to fact that the majority did not have the resources or time to fill in applications for funding or even to review what funding schemes existed.

Therefore, the workshop took a slightly different focus. Attendees were encouraged to bring up their experiences of funding activities, which instigated a considerable amount of debate. The following are the main topic areas which were raised during the two workshops and will be addressed separately:

1. establishing a champion for Country Parks;
2. exploring the capabilities of Charitable Trusts;
3. lack of resources and time;
4. income generating activities;
5. exploring 'friends of' Country Parks;
6. identifying and meeting government agendas;
7. dissemination of information to other Country Parks.

#### **1. Establishing a champion for Country Parks**

From the outset it was clear that all attendees shared the view that Country Parks should have a national champion who could actually lobby for things such as ring fenced budgets from the government. Many organisations were put forward and discussed including the Countryside Agency and the Country Parks Network. Attendees stressed the need for this champion to act as the 'face' of Country Parks.

As the issue of Country Parks increases, as does the need for an organisation which can stand up and represent all practitioners and stakeholders involved in Country Parks. The workshop proved that very few organisations could fulfil this role due to lack of resources, finance, experience or general knowledge about the sector.

The workshops final feeling was that more research was needed to find out which organisations could actually carry out the task as champion, and more importantly, which organisation wanted the responsibility.

## **2. Exploring the capabilities of charitable trusts**

Whilst discussing and exploring the avenues for funding, one main solution kept coming up – Charitable Trusts. Many of the attendees had already heard of these but very few knew any exact details about how they operate. However, one attendee had first hand experience of working in a Charitable Trust for Milton Keynes Parks.

Milton Keynes Parks Trust is one of the largest charitable trusts managing urban parks on behalf of a town or a city in the United Kingdom. The Trust is almost entirely self-funding from the income generated from its commercial property, investments, recreational tenants, graziers and events. It receives no revenue aid from the local authority but has a good record of successful grant aid for specific projects.

It is obvious that Charitable Trusts offer some value to Country Parks. However, it was agreed that some research should be carried out into what the process of gaining status is and what the potential benefits and disadvantages to Country Parks are.

## **3. Lack of resources and funding**

It was felt by the majority of the workshop attendees that Country Parks are under-staffed, under-resourced and under-funded. The attendees felt that they had neither the time or experience to fill in complex and time consuming applications.

Resources within Country Parks brought a vast amount of debate. The attendees raised the point that they had a lack of staff to manage the park, some with only one ranger on duty at any one time.

It was suggested that Country Park staff should try to enhance their relations with their local authority colleagues. For example, one member of the group discussed how they worked together with a member of their marketing team to design, create and deliver interpretation material.

## **4. Income generation activities**

From both workshop groups it was clear that Country Parks were carrying out a great deal of income generating activities. The depth and variety of activities which are taking place throughout country parks is immense. It was clear that many parks felt that these activities were vital to their future. Income generation is also something which was highlighted in the recent Countryside Agency publication *Towards a renaissance of Country Parks*, which suggested that some parks were generating more than 85% of their income, whilst others generated less than 1%.

**Some of the activities carried out by attendees included:**

- running activities, events and car parking;

- creating events such as weddings and tree planting for married couples and new births;
- educational events and visits;
- filming;
- cycle and other sport equipment hire;
- catering and;
- retailing.

What was evident from the workshops was that events and activities are a clear form of income generation. However, it was pointed out that parks not only have to deal with competition from other parks but, also from other retail outlets.

It was stressed by all attendees that the quality of merchandising products offered at Country Parks should be higher. Also, it was raised that park managers should try and establish links with local craft makers as well as local food produce for catering of events and activities. This would enhance the parks relationship with the local community as a whole.

#### **5. Exploring 'friends of' groups**

The majority of attendees agreed that 'friends of' groups played a vital role within Country Parks. One attendee stated that their group gave more than £25,000 to the park for improvements and general maintenance. Not only can 'friends' groups give financial assistance but many actually volunteer their time and services to the parks, often providing essential staffing.

#### **6. Identifying government agendas**

Identifying government agendas was one of the main issues raised throughout the workshops. It is apparent that country parks are, and have done for years, hitting government agendas such as health, education and recreation.

By doing so, many Country Parks could benefit from other departmental budgets, which in the past would not have been possible. However, local authorities are now aware of the role country parks can play in reaching set government targets.

There are many Country Parks which have seen this potential and as such have capitalised by providing a critically needed service but not actually paying for it out of their existing limited budget.

#### **7. Dissemination of information to other Country Parks**

The most important factor which was learnt by all groups was the need for information sharing. Throughout both workshops many park managers learnt that they have been in the same situation, some coping better than

others. However, it's clear that all Country Parks could learn a great deal from each other.

It is vital that Country Parks keep in contact with each other, sharing ideas, experiences, negatives and positives.

### **Conclusion**

Both workshops proved to be very productive and facilitated the sharing of ideas and experiences of country parks staff. The above are the main issues and topics which were raised throughout both workshops. It is clear that with increasing budget cuts Country Parks have to be more proactive in their ability to sustain funding, whilst making the most of resources which are at their disposal.

# Countryside Recreation Network Seminar

## COUNTRY PARKS

### CONCLUSIONS

*Wendy Thompson  
Programme Manager, Countryside Recreation  
Countryside Agency*

This session is an opportunity for me to draw together the conclusions from today and to say something about what the Countryside Agency will do in response to the renaissance report. Don't forget that this is available on the Agency web site ([www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk)) and I will arrange for a direct link to be sent to you all by email.

When I read the renaissance report part of me was asking "so what is the problem here?" Only 15% of the 267 Country Parks seem to be in decline with about 6% already in a poor condition. Of course I would like that figure to be 0% but don't we need to be realistic? In all walks of life a % of all new initiatives are likely to fail. 85% of Country Parks were succeeding – that's excellent news!

But overall I was still concerned. Of the parks in an average condition, more than a ¼ said that the condition was declining, and Country Parks are vulnerable:

- Vulnerable to budgetary cuts (there's evidence of that in the report);
- Vulnerable because the staff are often isolated away from main stream decision making, and are undervalued; and
- Vulnerable to pressures on land for development/roads etc.

In some ways the 85% seemed to be doing well to middling – against all the odds!!

It seems to me that we should be proud of Country Parks and they are something to shout about. They are great to get people more active and healthy. They are accessible free of charge (mostly) and are generally close to where people live. They provide plenty of opportunities for under-represented groups to enjoy the countryside and they also encourage day visits and spending by visitors bringing revenue to the local economy. Unfortunately the successes go largely unnoticed and it is only when there is a serious threat that people do notice. We don't want to salvage Country Parks from a severe crisis – so what can we do?

This morning Stewart Harding presented the findings of the work undertaken for the Agency by the Urban Parks Forum and Garden History Society and he emphasised the need for:



- a champion;
- a system of support for all Country Parks;
- a shared identity (restored brand and image) and vision;
- minimum standards;
- finance and funding;
- motivated and trained staff; and
- better quality and more integrated management plans.

In England the Countryside Agency will help to put some of those processes in place. We will champion Country Parks nationally - and we'll help Country Park managers to champion their own parks locally. To do this we will support a Country Parks network for a further 2 years, from October 2003, which will:

- provide a focus for all Country Parks to share experience and good practice;
- help Country Park staff to feel less isolated and more supported;
- develop and share information on minimum standards – building on the material from Andy Maginnis' workshop this afternoon;
- share information about sources of funding – building on the material from Fin Mulholland's workshop this afternoon;
- in partnership with the Countryside Management Association, work to develop a system of competence levels for all Country Park managers.

The Country Parks Network is an important job and I am very pleased to announce that following competitive tender that GreenSpace are to be awarded the contract to do this. So the team will be able to build on the momentum they have already begun.

In Scotland, it was a pleasure to hear Mairi Caughey talk about the work SNH are doing. There are many similar issues and I hope that we can build on today to support each other in taking things forward both sides of the border.

Then we heard from Patrick Norris, Freddie D'Souza, Katy Menday, Mary Bagley and Les McCadden about the potential for Country Parks to become ever more relevant to national and local targets for health, education and learning, crime prevention and social inclusion. A number of parks are already demonstrating what can be achieved linking to all of these as well as to sport, culture and the arts; heritage and tourism and much more.

I believe that more recognition of these links and a commitment at both national and local level will help to secure a better future for Country Parks. I hope that today has secured a further commitment from all of us to do what we can to push this agenda forward.

At the local level Country Parks should form a part of Community Strategies; Cultural Strategies and all the other strategies are prepared at the local authority level. Positive media stories and events all help to raise the profile and get local councillors involved and on side too!

And how about persuading your authority to use the new CROW Act provision 'to dedicate land to the public to make Country Parks a permanent legacy for the public to enjoy'. More information about this is available from the Countryside Agency if you want to follow that up.

But it's not all for you to do locally. There is much more that we and others could do nationally as well. We need to make sure that Country Parks are noticed in Government policies and advice. I hope that other CRN members will also rise to this challenge with the Countryside Agency, SNH and CCW.

If there are ways of linking into investment programmes we need to be looking out for those opportunities too and arguing the case for Country Parks.

And a final word on the shared vision. I believe that this is incredibly important. Country Parks are varied - multi-faceted, multi-functional – multi whatever!! And we seem to want them to be even more able to deal with a range of different agendas to make them ever more relevant to society. But there are common aims and I think strength in being a part of a Country Park family. So, we'll build on the material from Liz Gaunt's workshop this afternoon on a shared vision and we'll communicate through the Country Park Network.

So my final, final word is to thank all of the speakers and workshop facilitators, to thank the CRN management team, to thank Sarah and the team here at Lydiard Country Park and to thank all of you for attending and participating.



# **ANNEX A**

## COUNTRY PARKS

### PROGRAMME

#### **09.30 Registration and refreshments**

10.00 Welcome by chair (*Wendy Thompson, Countryside Agency*)

10.05 Country Parks: Past, Present and Future

Summary of the "Towards a Renaissance of Country Parks" Report  
(*Dr Stewart Harding, Urban Parks Forum*)

10.30 Progress on reviewing Country Parks in Scotland (*Mairi Caughey, Scottish Natural Heritage*)

#### **10.45 Refreshments**

#### **Four short presentations on initiatives in Country Parks that tackle wider social agendas**

11.15 Health (*Patrick Norris, Great Western Community Forest*)

11.30 Under-representation (*Freddie D'Souza, Northampton CC*)

11.45 Crime (*Katy Munday, Ham Hill Country Park*)

12.00 Education (*Mary Bagley and Les McCadden, Essex County Council*)

#### **12.15 Lunch**

13.15 Workshop 1/2/3 (delegates choose one workshop session)

14.15 Workshop 1/2/3 (delegates choose one workshop session)

*Workshop 1 chaired by Liz Gaunt, Urban Parks Forum*

*Workshop 2 chaired by Andy Maginnis, Worcestershire County Council*

*Workshop 3 chaired by Fin Mulholland, Urban Parks Forum*

#### **15.15 Refreshments**

15.30 Reports and discussions from workshops - *workshop chairs feed to the Chair who presents findings from workshop discussions*

15.45 Moving forward - next steps

16.00 Site visit - case study of Lydiard Country Park (OPTIONAL)  
(*Sarah Finch-Crisp, Keeper of Lydiard House*)

**17.00 CLOSE**

## WORKSHOPS

#### **Workshop 1: Developing a shared vision for Country Parks**

The 'Renaissance' report contains a draft vision - wider consultation will help refine the proposed role of country parks. The workshop will consider questions such as 'Should Country Parks become more visitor focused?'; 'Should they operate as a single entity or be more diverse' and 'Where do we see them in ten years time?'

#### **Workshop 2: Minimum standards**

What defines a Country Park? What services and facilities should a Country Park have? How do/would minimum standards affect funding? Should minimum standards exist?

#### **Workshop 3: Exploring resources and funding**

What resources exist? How can Country Parks become the recipients of various funding streams?

## **ANNEX B**

## **BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS**

### **CHAIR**

**Wendy Thompson**  
**Senior Countryside Officer**  
**Countryside Agency**

Wendy Thompson has worked at the Countryside Agency, and formerly the Countryside Commission for 15 years covering policy development work relating to designated areas, town and country planning, community participation, public rights of way and countryside recreation.

### **SPEAKERS**

**Stewart Harding, PhD, BA (Hons), MILAM**  
**Director**  
**Urban Parks Forum**

Dr Harding is a Director of The Urban Parks Forum and The Parks Agency. In his professional and voluntary capacities he has been in the forefront of the movement to repair, restore and improve parks and gardens since 1985. These roles have included:

- Designing the Green Heritage Accreditation, part of the Green Flag Awards and training judges.
- Upgrading register entries for historic parks and gardens in Somerset and the former County of Avon for English Heritage.
- Setting up and chairing the Country Parks Renaissance Advisory Panel for the Countryside Agency.
- Monitoring and advising on Heritage Lottery Funded projects to restore public parks and countryside.
- Establishing and managing the Urban Parks Programme for the Heritage Lottery Fund, awarding £170 million to 250 urban park restoration projects all over the United Kingdom.
- Running the Task Force Trees historic parks and gardens scheme for the Countryside Commission on more than 50 restoration projects in the South West, including the Lost Gardens of Heligan, Trebah Gardens and Hestercombe Gardens.
- Advising for the Commission on the historic parks element of Countryside Stewardship and leading in a joint initiative with English Nature to record and preserve veteran trees.
- Managing the Commission's input to sustaining new community forests around Bristol and Swindon
- Supervising the survey of historic parks and gardens in the County of Avon for the County Council

Dr Harding also has extensive experience in the voluntary and academic sectors:

- Trustee of Hestercombe Gardens
- Member of Garden History Society Conservation Committee
- Past member of Urban Green Spaces Task Force working group (2001-02)
- Past member of the Local Government Association's Parks and Open Spaces Panel (2000-01)
- Past member of Greater London Authority's Open Spaces Forum (2000 - 01)
- Past observer member of English Heritage Parks and Gardens Committee (2000-01)
- Past chairman and conservation officer of Avon Gardens Trust (1986-1994)
- Past chairman of Stoke Park Restoration Trust, achieving the restoration of derelict garden buildings, ornate gates and recreation of a large lake (1988-1996)
- PhD for thesis on conservation issues raised by the disposal of health authority owned historic parks around redundant mental hospitals (1993)
- Lecturer at the University of the West of England, Bristol University, York University and the University of Warwick
- Certificate in Planning Law with Distinction (1988)
- Author of many articles on historic parks and gardens and co-authored, with David Lambert, *Parks and Gardens of Avon*.
- Speaker at international and national conferences on all aspects of the restoration and renaissance of historic parks and gardens.

**Gareth Roberts**  
**Head of Recreation, Access and European Affairs**  
**Countryside Council for Wales**

Gareth Roberts is head of Recreation, Access and European Affairs with the Countryside Council for Wales. He studied art history and civic design before embarking on a career in town and country planning with local authorities in the south east and the midlands of England. He moved to Wales in 1980 as the principal planner with the Snowdonia National Park Authority before joining CCW in 1991.

Gareth retains a particular interest in the development, provision and design of open space for open air recreation and outdoor leisure. He was a member of the Regional Advisory Committee of the Forestry Commission in Wales, and is a Director of Artworks Wales and the Landscape Research Group.

**Mairi Caughey  
National Strategy Officer  
Scottish Natural Heritage**

Mairi Caughey works for Scottish Natural Heritage as a policy officer with responsibilities for matters such as country parks, planning, design issues in protected areas, and designations. This role has also included involvement in the development of advice to the Scottish Executive on legislation for new access arrangements and National Parks. Her other roles in SNH have been as an advisor on planning casework and an Area Officer with responsibilities Countryside Around Towns projects, Paths For All, LBAPs and environmental education.

Prior to joining SNH in 1995 Mairi worked as a Town Planner for local authorities in England in both Development Control and Local Plans. Work in the latter included urban regeneration work and co-ordination of a major project to restore derelict land to informal public open space.

**Patrick Norris  
Community Forest Field Officer  
Great Western Community Forest**

Patrick began his countryside management career at Mount Edgcombe House and Country Park in Cornwall as a seasonal ranger. Then, after attending Seale Hayne in South Devon for three years and a brief spell with ADAS, he joined the Countryside Management Service in Hertfordshire; beginning as a Ranger, but after a restructuring programme was given the title of Countryside Management Service Projects Officer. Long job titles have followed him around and he is now the Community Forest Field Officer with the Great Western Community Forest in and around Swindon, North Wiltshire and the Vale of White Horse.

Primarily working with farmers and landowners to implement Woodland Grant and Countryside Stewardship Schemes, there is still time to support community initiatives, develop access projects, secure external funding and support the Community Forest team.

An enduring interest in health issues, the role that Country Parks and urban greenspace have in changing the attitudes that people have to their local countryside and their own health, means that this a subject that remains at the top of his agenda.

As well as his work with the Community Forest, he is the editor of Ranger, the magazine of the Countryside Management Association, a voluntary job he has held for almost seven years.

**Freddie D'Souza  
Countryside Access Officer  
Northamptonshire County Council**

Freddie D'Souza works as a Countryside Access Officer in the Countryside & Tourism Department of Northamptonshire County Council.

Freddie was born near Rye – an ancient Cinque Ports town overlooking the Romney Marshes - where she lived for 26 years and developed a deep and abiding love of the beautiful Sussex and Kent countryside. On leaving school she trained as a ceramic artist under the tuition of Walley Cole at Rye pottery.

Moving to Northamptonshire in 1972 with a husband and three children to bring up, she discovered that Northamptonshire was also a beautiful county. It was here at Nene University College that she gained a BSc Honours degree as a mature student, and entered full time work as a residential social worker with adults with learning disabilities.

Three years later Freddie gained a secondment from Social Services to take up a place on a one year course at Warwick University in 1985: the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work & MA in Applied Social Studies.

After gaining her social work qualification, Freddie worked with people with mental health problems and a wide spectrum of people needing home care services for a total of 14 years. With the introduction of the Care Management system in Social Services in 1996 which completely changed the nature of the social work role, she became disenchanted and began to look for more rewarding work.

Freddie was delighted to succeed in gaining the innovative new post of Network Officer with Countryside Services in December 1996, which seemed to offer greater potential for an enabling role than the Care Management system. (The title of Network Officer has since changed to Access Officer)

The remit of the post (which is full time and permanent) is to work with all the six Country Parks owned and managed by Northamptonshire County Council to improve access to the countryside for everyone, to research and contact under-represented groups and individuals; providing information, opportunities and where necessary, support, to discover and enjoy the countryside.

**Katy Menday  
Country Park Coordinator  
South Somerset District Council**

Katy Menday is the Country Park Coordinator at Ham Hill Country Park, Stoke sub Hamdon, Somerset. She is employed by South Somerset District Council.

Katy has worked at Ham Hill as the coordinator for the last year; previous to this she was the education and interpretation ranger for the site for a year and a half. Katy started her environmental career as a field studies tutor and then environmental coordinator on the Isle of Wight.

**Mary Bagley  
Country Parks Manager  
Essex County Council**

Mary Bagley trained initially as a Landscape Architect. Having designed a new Country Park for a Millennium Lottery award and developed the education programme for volunteers she is committed to life long learning programmes.

**Les McCadden  
Thorndon Country Park Site Manager  
Essex County Council**

Les McCadden has a background in ecology and the Wildlife Trusts. Having moved to Essex he has championed the development of the Country Park's education service to its present state of excellence.



## **BIOGRAPHIES OF WORKSHOP LEADERS**

**Liz Gaunt  
Project Officer  
Urban Parks Forum**

Liz Gaunt is the Country Parks Network Project Officer for the Urban Parks Forum. She has had overall responsibility for the creation, delivery and management of the Country Parks Networking Project since 2001. Liz is an affiliate member of the Countryside Management Association and is passionate about improving Country Parks for the benefit of all.

**Finbar Mulholland  
Communications Officer  
Urban Parks Forum**

Finbar Mulholland joined the Country Parks Network in February 2003. His main responsibilities lie in the development and management of online communications for the network. In the past 5 months Finbar has researched funding opportunities available for country parks as well as the ongoing development of web material. Finbar is fully committed to raising the awareness and importance of country parks at a local, regional and national level.

**Andy Maginnis  
Countryside Estates Manager  
Worcestershire County Council**

Andy Maginnis is Countryside Estates Manager for Worcestershire County Council with responsibility for country parks, picnic places, local nature reserves, commons and the forest estate. He is the lead local authority officer for the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and manages the County Council's Gypsy Service. Andy is the Local Government Association (England) representative on the Countryside Recreation Network (CRN) and is vice chairman of the Countryside Management Association (CMA) of England and Wales. He has previously worked as a volunteer, contractor, consultant and ranger.

## **ANNEX C**

## Delegate List

Title	Name	Surname	Job/Position	Organisation
Mr	David	Adkins	Manager, Ranger Service	London Borough of Bromley
Mr	Mike	Anderson	Country Parks Officer	Northamptonshire County Council
	Judith	Arnold	Senior Ranger	Huntingdonshire District Council
Mr	Matthew	Axford	Countryside Ranger	Cheshire County Council
Ms	Mary	Bagley	Country Parks Manager	Essex County Council
Mr	Ian	Bamforth	Countryside Manager	Worcestershire County Council
Mr	Dan	Barnett	Countryside Sites Officer	Worcestershire County Council
Mr	Andy	Beattie	Area Manager	Sussex Downs Conservation Board
Mr	Robert	Bleakley	Assistant Director, Regional Operations	Environment & Heritage Service, N.Ireland
Mr	Nic	Broomhead	Head of Country Parks	Nottinghamshire Country Parks
Mr	George	Broughton	Countryside Support Officer	Whitegate Station
	Melanie	Bull	Countryside Recreation Network Manager	Countryside Recreation Network
Mr	Andrew	Burns	Countryside Adviser	Countryside Agency
Mr	Malcom	Busby	Ranger-Milton Country Park	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Mrs	Andrea	Byerley	Senior Countryside Officer	Countryside Agency
Mr	Henry	Campbell Ricketts	Country Park Ranger	Lancashire County Council
Mr	M	Carlisle	The Agent	Mapledurham Trust
Ms	Mairi	Caughy	National Strategy Officer	Scottish Natural Heritage
Mr	Richard	Clough	Country Parks Officer	Northamptonshire County Council
Mr	Ian	Coburn	Service Manager, Community Development	City of Sunderland
Mr	Arron	Cox	Outdoor Activities Development Officer	Derbyshire Sports Development
Mr	Peter	Creasey	Head Warden	National Trust
Ms	Rachel	Datlen	Assistant Conservation & Landscape Manager	Worcestershire County Council
Mr	Russell	De'ath	Area Countryside Officer	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr	Oliver	DeSolssons	Countryside Manager	Oxford City Council
Mr	Tim	Dixon	Countryside Manager	East Dorset District Council
Mrs	Ruth	Dodds	Senior Ranger	Oldham Countryside Service
Mr	Tony	Down	Assistant Parks & Countryside Manager	Surrey Heath Borough Council

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Title	Name	Surname	Job/Position	Organisation
	Freddie	D'Souza	Countryside Access Officer	Northamptonshire County Council
Mr	Gareth	Evans	Countryside Warden	Isle of Anglesey County Council
Ms	Sarah	Finch-Crisp	Project Officer	Lydiard Park
Mr	Andrew	Fowler	Country Parks Manager	Buckinghamshire County Council
Mrs	Jackie	Fraser	Park Liaison Officer	Bedford Borough Council
Ms	Liz	Gaunt	Country Parks Network Project Officer	Urban Parks Forum
Mr	John	Gorrod	Head Sited Warden	Gloucestershire County Council
Mrs	Leila	Griffiths	Environment Officer	British Waterways
Mr	Chris	Haines	Country Parks Team Leader	Northamptonshire County Council
Mr	Nick	Hall	Conservation Officer	Bedford Borough Council
Dr	Stewart	Harding	Director	Urban Parks Forum
Mr	Martin	Harris	Head Countryside Warden	Horsham District Council
Mr	Joe	Hayden	Head Ranger	Birmingham City Council
Mr	John	Holmes	Area Manager	Derbyshire County Council
Mrs	Dawn	Holmes	Interpretation & Information Officer	Essex County Council
Mrs	Eirwen	Hopwood	Acting Head Ranger	Oldham Countryside Service
Mr	Geoff	Hughes	Senior Development Manager	Sport England
Mr	Stuart	Hunt	Trees and Woodlands Officer	London Borough of Hillingdon
Miss	Liz	Kelly	Visitor Services Manager	British Waterways
Mr	Giles	Kempzell	Assistant Ranger	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Mrs	Suzanne	Leckie	Principal Lecturer	Sheffield Hallam University
Ms	Sue	Mabberley	Senior Area Countryside Officer	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr	Ivan	Machin	Manager of Ulley & Thrybergh Country Parks	Rotherham M.B.C.
Mr	Andy	Maginnis	Countryside Sites Manager	Worcestershire County Council
Mr	Andrew	Mailphant	Recreation Adviser	Countryside Agency
Mr	Ron	Marquand	Countryside Management and Access Officer	Derbyshire County Council
Mr	Les	McCadden	Site Manager	Essex County Council
Mr	Leo	McEvitt	Head Ranger - Project Kingfisher	Birmingham City Council
Ms	Katy	Menday	Country Park Coordinator	South Somerset District Council
Miss	Esther	Milne	Countryside Ranger	The Greensand Trust
Mr	Finbar	Mulholland	Country Parks Network Project Officer	Urban Parks Forum
Mr	Patrick	Norris	Community Forest Field Officer	Great Western Community Forest

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Title	Name	Surname	Job/Position	Organisation
Mr	Chris	Peet	Rural Land Manager	Essex County Council
Mr	Ian	Richardson	Parks & Estates Manager	Milton Keynes Park Trust
Mr	Gareth	Roberts	Head of Recreation, Access & European Affairs	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr	Peter	Robinson	Tourism Development Officer	West Oxfordshire District Council
Mr	Jeremy	Sacha	Landscape Services Manager	Cherwell District Services
Miss	Briony	Serginson	Countryside Officer	Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
Mr	Tim	Sharratt	Heigh Hall and Country Park Manager	Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust
Mr	Chris	Soans	Country Parks Officer	Northamptonshire County Council
Mr	Jim	Stevenson	Senior Ranger	Huntingdonshire District Council
Mr	Jonathan	Taylor	Head Ranger	Coventry City Council
Ms	Wendy	Thompson	Senior Countryside Officer	Countryside Agency
Miss	Helen	Townsend	Recreation, Access and Tourism Advisor	Forestry Commission, England
Mr	Chris	Valdus	Country Parks Development Officer	Medway Council
Mr	Andrew	Woodhouse	Senior Ranger	Essex County Council
Mr	Robert	Wytchard	Estate Manager	Mapledurham Trust

## **ANNEX D**

# Education – Essex County Council Country Parks

Mary Bagley – Country Parks Manager, Essex County Council  
Les MacCadden – Site Manager, Thorndon Country Park



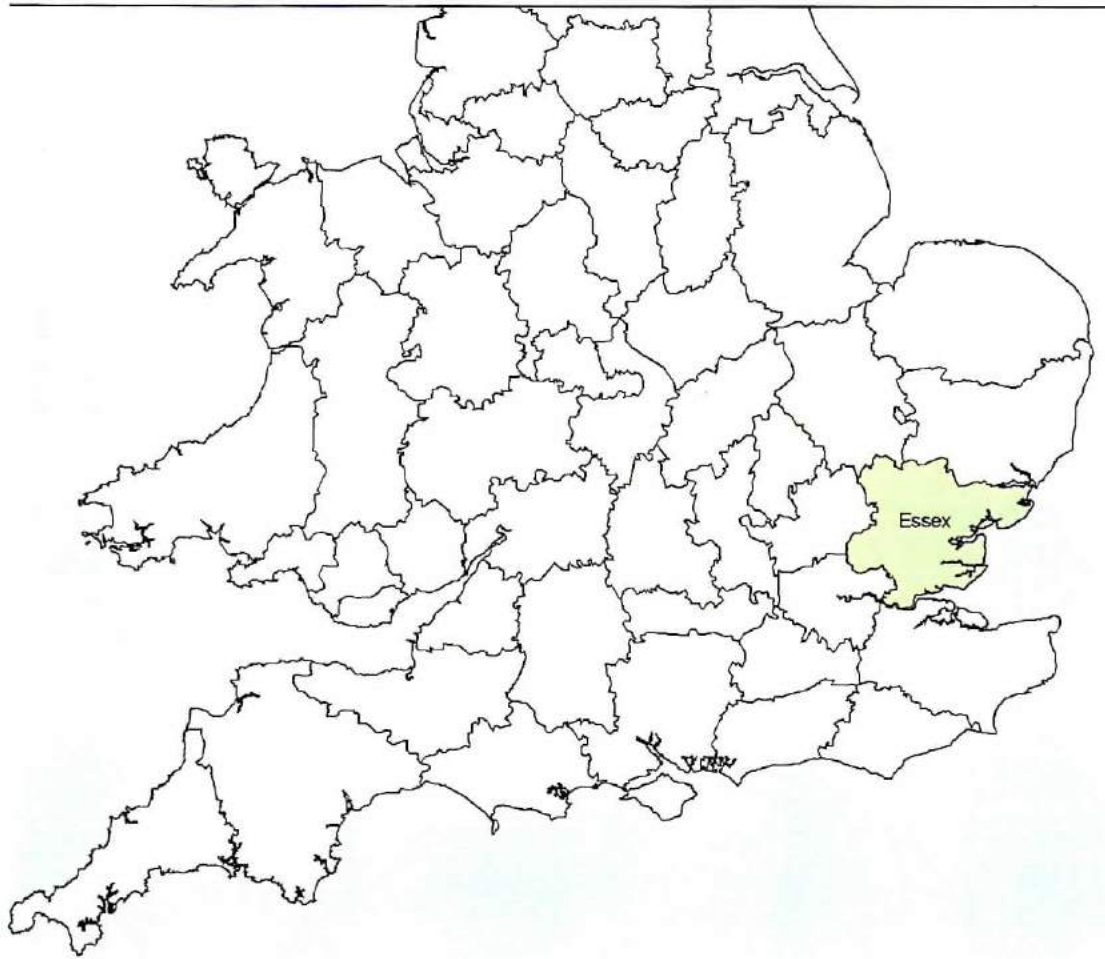
Essex County Council

# Education for the Future

- Essex Country Parks vision
- What we do and how we embrace change
- How we fund it
- The nitty gritty of how we make it work

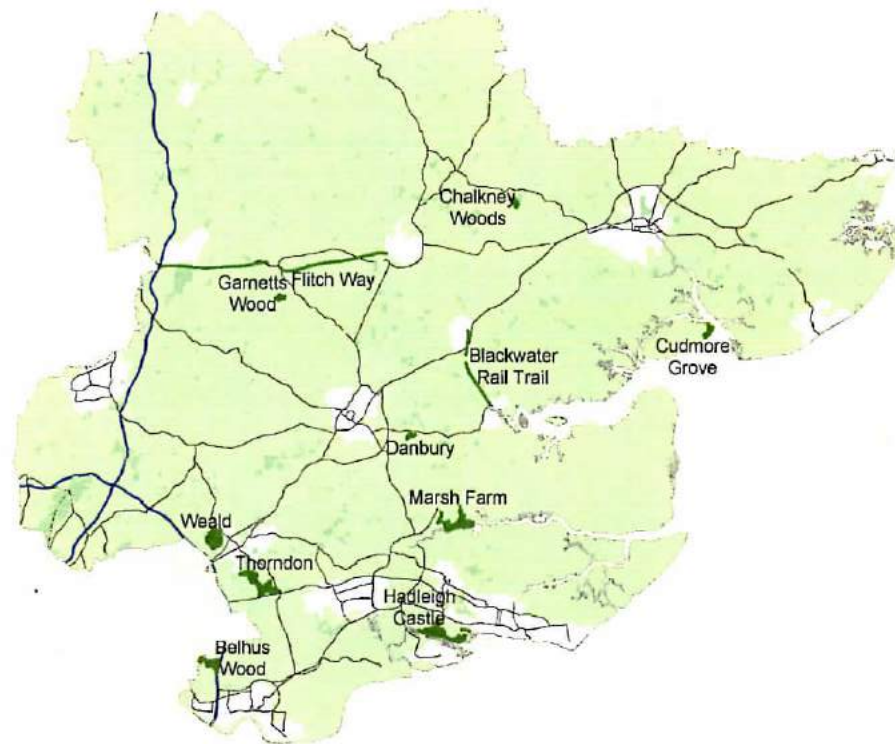


# Essex



Essex County Council

# Our Vision

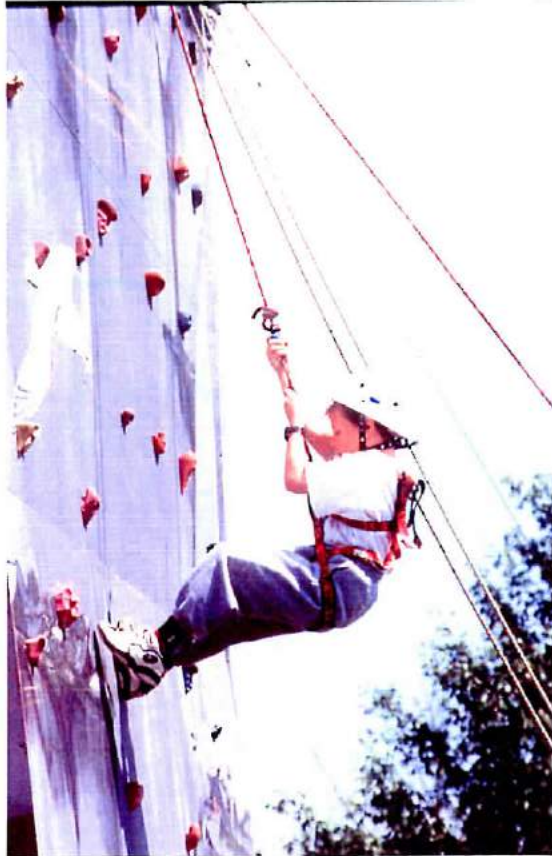


# Exploring new territories





# Inspiring confidence and achievement



## Team work





# Ecological Concepts



## Education for all ages





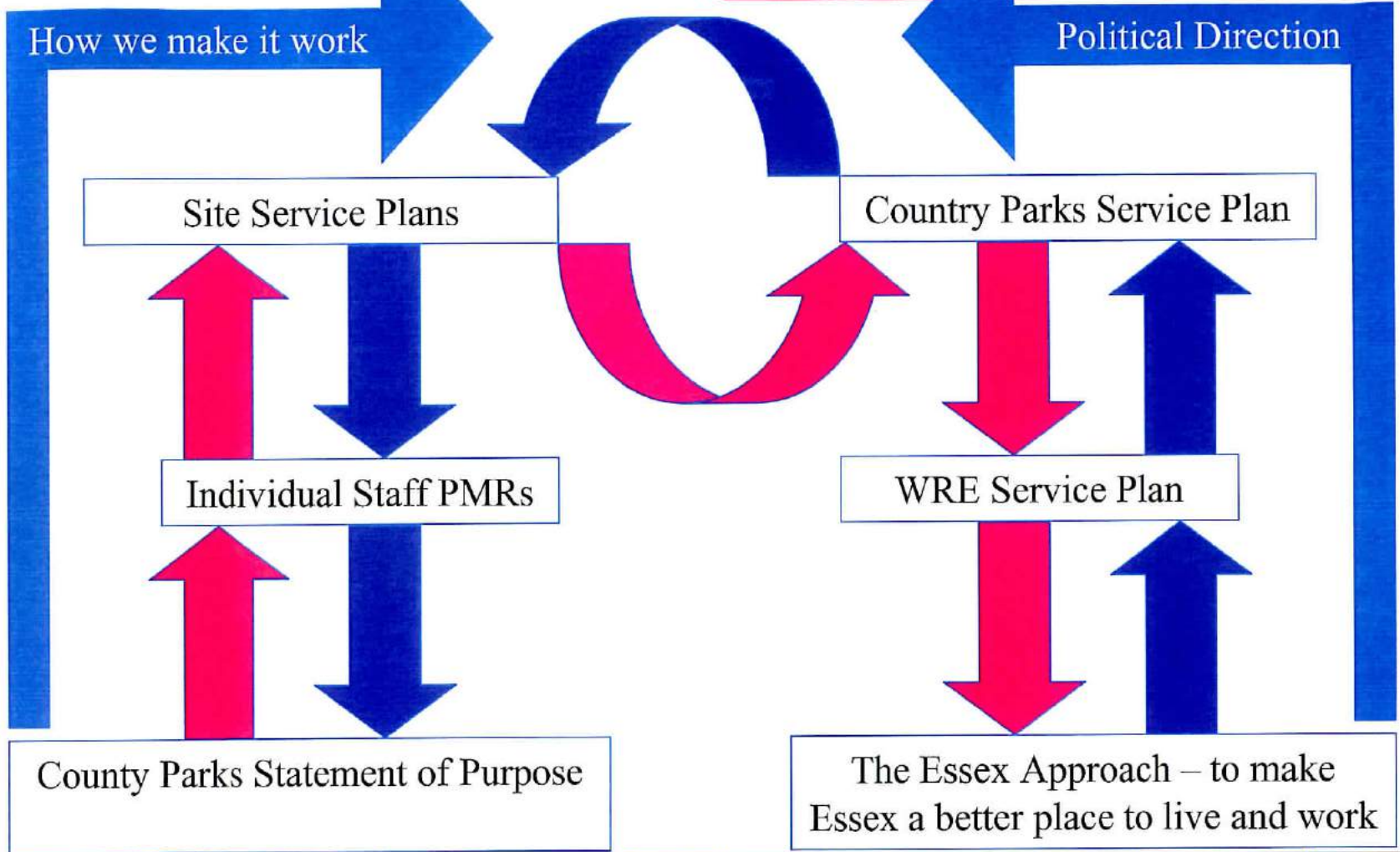
# Our Planet's Future





How we make it work

Political Direction



County Parks Statement of Purpose

The Essex Approach – to make Essex a better place to live and work

		Education Statement of Aims		
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								Improve the Environment	Children and young people
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# The Range of Essex County Council Country Parks Education Service

- Schools Programme
- Life Long Learning
- Waste & Recycling
  - Sharing resources for this small planet



# Something for Everyone

## Step back in Time at Hadleigh Castle Country Park



Saturday 2nd  
&  
Sunday 3rd  
August

"Let battle commence as knights in shining armour  
cross swords in medieval combat"

Experience a medieval battle & camp life – join in art & craft  
activities – watch the fletcher, weaver & woodturner at work – visit  
the traders stalls. Have a go at archaeology, even strike your own  
Groat!!!!

Entrance off A13 down Chapel Lane 10am – 4pm

Refreshments available

Admission £3 children/oap £4 adult

For more information phone 01702 551072



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Enjoy your Country Parks

## Weald Spectacular and RNIB aerial slide

Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 July 2003

Open 9am - 5pm



Dog Show  
Country Crafts  
Classic Cars  
Model Trains  
Model Boats  
Fire Brigade  
Bouncy Castle  
Stalls  
Exhibitions  
Refreshments



## Weald Country Park

Brentwood, Essex

Telephone 01277 261343

Park Office 01277 216297

Free Entrance

Car Parking Charges Apply



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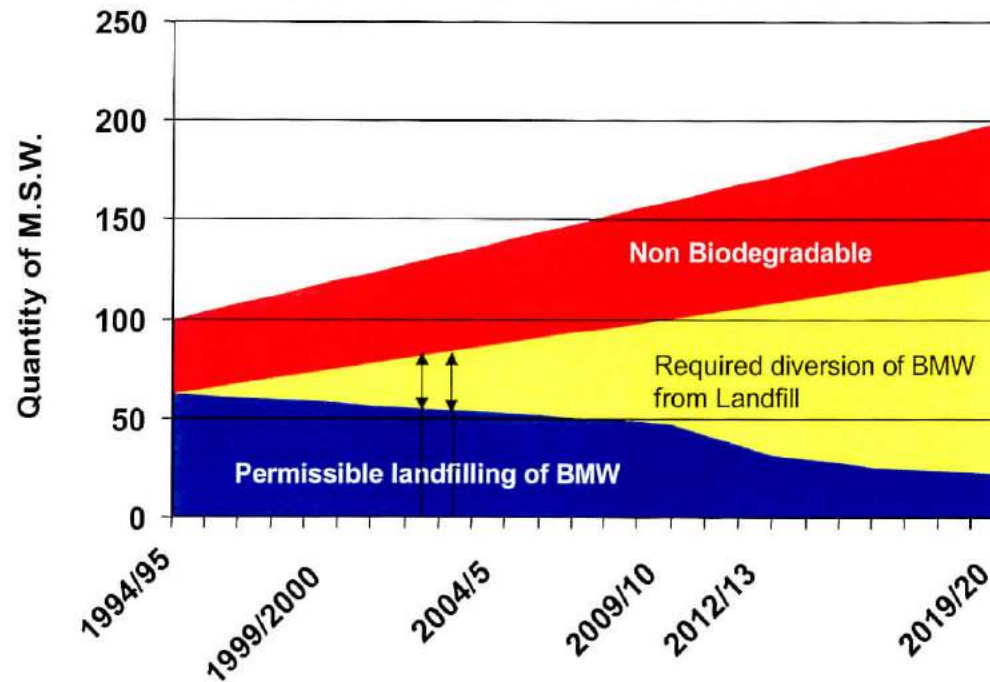
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# Waste and recycling Education for resources

## EU Landfill Directive

### Diversion of BMW from Landfill



# How much Local Authority Money we can help to save through Education

**Government penalty circa £70 / tonne would equate to:**

**£420,000 in 2001/2**

**£490,000 in 2002/3**

**Actual penalties will start in 2004, or maybe 2005, when a greater level of diversion will be required**



# The Range of Essex County Council Country Parks Education Service

- Sustainability
- Ecology, biodiversity and diversity of life
- Citizenship including volunteering
- Health issues – mental and physical links

## Funding for the Education Service

- Non statutory service of Country Parks but statutory education service
- Ring fence education budget to fund specially trained Education Rangers
- Heritage Lottery Fund Bid
- PSA target Central Government money





# Partnerships



Sat  
25  
May

LowTide EcoFayre

Cudmore Grove Visitor Centre

~ Kite Making ~ Bird Watching ~ Face Painting

~ Guided Walks through out the day ~ Seafood ~ Mobile Making

Start: 10:00AM  
Finish: 2:00PM

Bromans Lane  
East Mersea  
Mersea Island



riverOcean  
research & education www.riverocean.org.uk



Essex County Council



## Education Ranges Advert

### Staff Vacancy: Casual Education Assistant

**Do you have experience of working or teaching in the outdoors?**

Do you have knowledge of environmental education and ecological principles, together with a basic understanding of the National Curriculum? Do you have the ability to work on your own initiative and have good communication skills and a flexible approach to work?



The Casual Education Assistant will:

- Lead educational environmental activities
- Prepare site and equipment
- Clear away equipment and keep records
- Assist with development of new activities
- Comply with Health and Safety regulations.

Employment: on an 'as and when required' basis;  
requirements are seasonal: mostly during the school  
summer term.

**Payment: by number of hours worked, approx £6.10  
per hour: usually 8.30am to 3.00pm.**

For further details and an application form contact:.....



# Education Ranger Service In-Service Training

## Programme

09.30 Tea / coffee

09.45 Introduction

Brief description of the day; the type of education used in Country Parks; our system of booking schools; the system for using the Casual Education Assistants including what they can expect from us. Game: What Animal am I?

10.15 Health and Safety

What are our H & S responsibilities? - short brainstorm  
Duty of Care; Codes of Practice; daily site checks, safety talk  
Practicalities  
Outside session.  
Brainstorm about site awareness and equipment.

11.30 Motivation - 'who's it for?'

12.00 Lunch

12.45 Leading, Flow and Delivery

13.00 Activities

pond dip; food chains; seed dispersal mime; land art; co-operative games; reviewing

15.00 Tea

15.15 Activities - trainees to lead one short activity each with the rest of the group; details on the day

16.30 Review; help and support

16.45 Close

