



Countryside Recreation Network

A new era for country parks?

2009 Seminar Proceedings of the
Countryside Recreation Network

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"A new era for country parks?"

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Contents

Plenary papers

Welcome and introduction by Chair	6
<i>Andy Maginnis, Worcestershire County Council</i>	
Country Parks: a historical perspective	7
<i>David Lambert, The Parks Agency</i>	
Country Parks: their relevance today	11
<i>Lucy Heath, Natural England</i>	
Country Parks Accreditation: setting the standard	18
<i>David Solly, Natural England</i>	
Benefits of Green Flag Award	24
<i>Paul Todd, Keep Britain Tidy</i>	
Case study 1	25
<i>Liz Nether, Worcestershire County Council</i>	
Case study 2	28
<i>Bob Bleakley, Northern Ireland Environment Agency</i>	
Case study 3	36
<i>Eirwen Hopwood, West Lothian Council</i>	

Supporting papers

Appendix A - Programme	41
Appendix B - Speaker Biographies	43
Appendix C - Attendance List	47
Appendix D - Presentation slides from all speakers	53

Welcome and introduction

Andy Maginnis
Countryside Manager
Worcestershire County Council

Introduction

Country Parks were developed as a concept during the 1960s - on the one hand in response to fears that an increasingly mobile population was damaging national parks and conflicting with forestry and agriculture, and on the other to respond to a more altruistic belief that urban populations would benefit from some sort of "countryside" experience. During the 1970s Country Parks sprang up on disused collieries, old railway lines, stately homes and in many other locations and were a great hit with the public. Over the years the demands and expectations placed on Country Parks by successive government agencies has changed and, despite following their masters around like a faithful old dog, by the 1990s financial titbits from those masters and any clear sense of direction had largely dried up. Country Parks seemed to be a dog that had had its day; however, publication of the Countryside Agency commissioned "Towards a Country Parks Renaissance" report in 2004 began a revival of the fortunes of Country Parks and recognition of their value in terms of health and well-being, social inclusion, economic regeneration and environmental awareness. Most recently this has led to the development of a Country Parks Network, the opportunity for accreditation by Natural England and an increase in the number of Country Parks attaining Green Flag status. It is clear that you can teach an old dog new tricks and that some of his old tricks are pretty neat too!

The key messages that come out of the seminar are:

- Country Parks have much to offer in terms of health and well-being, social inclusion, economic regeneration and environmental awareness
- The process of attaining a Green Flag Award will help you focus on key areas for improvement
- The attainment of a Green Flag Award will help you to demonstrate to the public and other key stakeholders that your Country Park meets nationally recognised standards
- The introduction of Natural England's Accreditation process will help to re-establish and strengthen the Country Park brand
- Country Parks are the epitome of multi-functional green infrastructure
- There are some great case studies which can be readily accessed via the Country Parks Network

Country Parks: a historical perspective

David Lambert
Director
The Parks Agency

The historical context for the emergence of country parks in the 1960s takes us back to the beginning of the twentieth century, and to the heart of cultural attitudes towards the countryside. These attitudes can be seen as contrary: protection / access; guarding / welcoming; the countryside enjoyed either as a birthright or on sufferance.

I want to start with Clough Williams Ellis, who was responsible in the twenties and thirties for two books with revealing titles: *England and the Octopus* and *Britain and the Beast*. The octopus or beast is the threat to the countryside, which prompted the founding of the Council for the Protection of Rural England in 1926. The threat was posed by the growth of cities and of suburbia, by the increase in car-ownership and by mass public transport, buses, trains or underground. In 1915 a poster for the latter provocatively asked, 'why bother about the Germans invading the country? Invade it yourself with London Underground and motor-bus.' The mass-trespass on Kinder Scout in 1932, inspiring to millions, also made protectionists shudder.

But the Octopus and the Beast were only one side of the coin: the Shell guides to Britain which began appearing in the thirties, and which after the war were edited by John Betjeman promoted a genuine appreciation of the countryside, while books like *How to See the Countryside* (1939) by one of the heroes of the mass-trespass movement, Tom Stephenson, encouraged a respectful, even reverential, approach to the mysteries beyond the town.

The post-war democratic settlement changed the exclusivity of the countryside forever, and in 1949 the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was passed, paving the way for the creation of national parks based on areas of natural beauty. Interestingly, the Act was a watered down version of the Addison Committee of 1929, which had proposed the creation of two types of park, one 'conveniently situated in regard to industrial centres, to which it was desirable to provide a large measure of access.' In these post-war years, the new towns were moving hundreds of thousands into the countryside. And as the fifties unrolled, leisure and the growth of a consumer and leisure culture also fed into increasing access.

The sixties were the era of the white heat of technology and of never having had it so good. Confidence in the welfare state and in the advance of mechanisation – the Dan-Dare vision of robots doing all the boring jobs - encouraged still greater access to the countryside. There was a widespread expectation of a three-day weekend for everyone. This was the golden age of the leisure drive and of the roadside picnic. A 1969 survey at Box Hill discovered that 40% of the visitors there had set out without the intention of making it their destination. But again,

while the countryside full of aimless tootling, there was also a positive and pedagogical strand to the encouragement of access, in books such as *London's Countryside: geographical fieldwork for students and teachers of geography* (1957) by Woolridge and Hutchings .

However, amidst all this innocent recreation, the apocalyptic, or at least alarmed, vision of Clough Williams Ellis was also alive. In 1970, Nan Fairbrother published *New Lives, New Landscapes*, which depicted the town-dwellers almost literally as invaders in images of mods on scooters and tousle-headed urchins standing triumphantly on ancient walls. They were depicted as representing a 'danger' to farmers and there was a need to corral these potential vandals. Fairbrother wrote 'parks should contain their users, and provided their boundaries are efficient, adjoining land can be safely farmed.' There was a growing sense of concern that the countryside was at risk from mass access.

This was the climate in which Michael Dower wrote his influential Civic Trust report, *The Fourth Wave: the Challenge of Leisure* in 1965.

Three great waves have broken across the face of Britain since 1800. First the sudden growth of dark industrial towns. Second, the thrusting movement along far flung railways. Third, the sprawl of car based suburbs. Now we see under the guise of a modest work, the surge of the fourth wave which could be more powerful than all the others. The modest word is LEISURE.

The language is apocalyptic, and also has a kind of fastidious horror: Dower wrote of 'people like ants, scurrying from coast to coast, on holiday, swarming out of cities in July and August by car, coach, train and aeroplane to a multitude of resorts and hidden places throughout the isles of Britain.'

So in 1966, the Government published its White Paper Leisure in the Countryside, born from a series of conferences in the early sixties called The Countryside in 1970. The conclusion was that 'if our national parks or AONB's are to survive in anything like their present form, visitors from the town must be persuaded to use alternative spots for the enjoyment of the countryside'. The White Paper proposed the formation of country parks and picnic sites, with three objectives:

- To make it easier for those seeking recreation to enjoy their leisure in the open without travelling too far and adding to congestion on the roads;
- To ease the pressure on more remote and solitary places
- To reduce the risk of damage to the countryside

This was not very positive. This paranoid defence of the national beauty spots and deep England led the Commission to urge a strategic approach to the development of country parks. It has been remarked that when mapped, the country parks around Birmingham resemble a kind of Maginot Line. Country parks were deliberately established close to national parks 'for those who slip through the net, a defence against the countryside being invaded'. Hence, Padarn at Llanberis on the edge of Snowdonia, Afan Argoed close to the Gower, and Fellfoot at the southern tip of Windermere, to catch the urban trippers as they approach from the south. It was from this period that the metaphor of country parks acting

as 'honeypots' developed, with its disturbing echoes of Michael Dower's insect-like hordes.

The following year, 1968, the Countryside Act was passed, enabling 75% government grants to be made available towards the creation of country parks and picnic sites, and over the next two decades over two hundred were laid out. In 1969, the Countryside Commission published its Policy on Country Parks and Picnic Sites, which is notable for its emphasis on access by cars, basic facilities, a strategic approach, and the reuse of derelict land. It contained nothing on what we would now consider fundamental: interpretation, education, and welcome.

There are broadly three phases observable over those two decades. The explicit honeypot phase which lasts up to the mid-seventies, then a second phase of reconsidering how well this was working, of budgetary pressure and of reorientation, and then from the mid-eighties a growth in the idea of parks as gateways, with a new emphasis on those previously unrecognised fundamentals.

Thus in the Countryside Commission's 1974 advice on country parks, there was a new emphasis on planning, on formal and specialised activities, and on promotion and marketing. By the late seventies, it was being remarked that, 'the spectre of a countryside divided into small recreational, zoo-like Country Parks and large non-recreational areas is to be avoided,' and recognised that parks needed to be integrated with, rather than separated from, other land uses. There was also a dawning recognition that country parks had no role in reducing pressure on national parks, and that they were largely failing to appeal to working class city dwellers.

In 1983, Operation Gateway, co-funded by the Commission and Nottinghamshire County Council was launched. It was abandoned after a year due to lack of funds but in that year, it set up a programme of targeted events, Asian language leaflets and, crucially, subsidised transport links. The gateway function was recognised as both physical, that is, connected to rights of way, and metaphorical, that is, addressing the barriers to participation.

Although it was abandoned after a year due to lack of funds, the idea was resurrected in 1987 in the Commission's *Policies for Enjoying the Countryside*, and reached its zenith in the 1992 document *Policies for People*. Here we can see a shift from resource management to tackling social and economic barriers to the countryside. It promoted jargon-free literature, positive images of all groups, customer-oriented management, and positive discrimination in employment policy.

However, these admirable policies translated with mixed effectiveness on the ground. Budgetary pressure as the Commission reduced its funding handicapped progress, and a lack of data on visitors was a widespread problem. Gradually, the 'gateway' shrank to its purely physical meaning, as policy attention shifted towards rights of way.

The nineties can, unfortunately, be summarised fairly quickly. In 1992, the Commission announced a moratorium on funding for recreation sites. In 1995, the *Visitor Welcome Initiative* was announced but in the following year, country

parks had dropped out of the 10-year corporate strategy. There was instead a policy vacuum.

In 1999, *Countryside Recreation: enjoying the living countryside*, included 'rejuvenating country parks' but with a lack of financial commitment and the onus placed firmly on local authorities, already struggling with budget cuts. However, 1999 also saw the House of Commons Select Committee inquiry into town and country parks, and its report was forceful in pointing out that country parks were potentially at the beginning of the kind of spiral of decline which had devastated urban parks over the previous thirty years. In response, the Government included in the Rural White Paper in 2000 a requirement that the newly formed Countryside Agency to issue guidance on best practice to revitalise country parks' and in response the Agency set up a country parks renaissance advisory panel and commissioned the report which has led over the past ten years to the Country Parks Network and the CRN.

Country parks were born in a particular moment in our cultural history, one which now looks extraordinarily alien. It is fascinating to see how they have been adapted, reinvented almost, in recognition of their ability - when properly funded - to meet a huge range of national policy objectives.

Country Parks: their relevance today

Lucy Heath
Senior Specialist
Natural England

Background

The Rural White Paper (2000) tasked the Countryside Agency with 'issuing guidance on best practice to revitalise the country parks around our towns and cities'. In response, the Agency commissioned a programme of work entitled 'Towards a Country Park Renaissance,' guided by an advisory panel. In 2002, they commissioned the Urban Parks Forum and Garden History Society to carry out a health check of country parks, inviting 267 country parks in England to take part of which 137 responded to a detailed questionnaire. From these it was found that the good ones were doing well and continuing to improve whilst the poor ones were continuing to decline. The 2004 report helped to stimulate new discussion and activity on the relevance of country parks today and in the future and kick started what became known as a Country Parks Renaissance. With at least 430 country parks identified in 2009 in England alone, country parks have a key role to play for people and nature.

Recommendations of the Renaissance report and how they have been addressed

Natural England and its predecessor body the Countryside Agency, took forward the recommendations within the report principally by developing a country parks network of practitioners as a national forum for the discussion and exchange of information supported by a steering group of practitioners and stakeholder partners. The network is supported by a country parks website to promote and disseminate good practice within the country parks 'community', advise on funding and income generating opportunities and help to secure the long-term competencies of country parks staff and the commitment of local authorities to the wider social worth of country parks. More recently a Country Parks Accreditation Scheme has been launched which also provides a contact point within Natural England for advice particularly relevant to the standards we are setting for visitors to country parks.

Relevance of Country Parks Today - An Ecosystem Services Approach

In considering the relevance of country parks today it's helpful to consider them within an Ecosystem Services framework in what they are able to deliver.

Ecosystem services provides us with a systematic framework to:

"conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations".

They are the goods and services that we all depend on that are provided by ecosystems, i.e. by the natural environment. They include:

Supporting Services - The basics for a healthy natural environment and include: the nutrient cycle, the formation of soil, the production of oxygen and the water cycle

Regulating Services - These are the basis for survival, reliant on supporting services including: air quality regulation, climate regulation, flood regulation, erosion control, water purification and waste treatment, disease control, pest control, pollination and natural hazard regulation

Provisioning Services - The products obtained from ecosystems and also the basis for survival, e.g. food, fibre, fuel, genetic resources, bio-chemicals, natural medicines, and pharmaceuticals, ornamental resources and fresh water

Cultural Services - Important to human well-being, the economy and social cohesion. They include: a bio-diverse environment, inspiration through contact with nature and landscape, mental and physical health benefits, recreation and tourism opportunities, knowledge (traditional and formal), education and life-long learning, cultural heritage, spiritual and religious values, aesthetic values, social interaction and reducing isolation and a sense of place and belonging for individuals and communities

Country Parks provide these services within a green infrastructure network servicing and protecting urban areas and populations in particular. They also provide the perfect balance of conservation and recreation with enabling staff to deliver these services effectively.

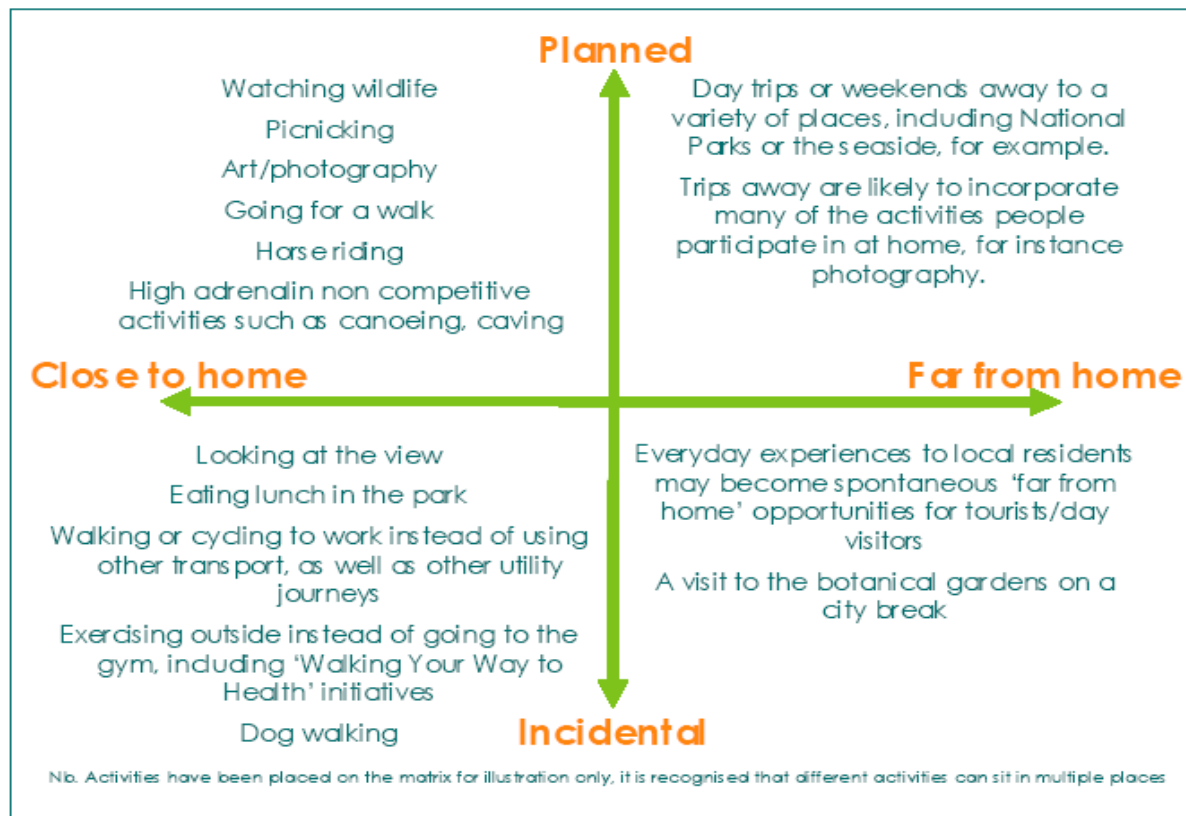
Engaging people in the natural environment

In Natural England we are advocating the need for better connection and engagement of people with the natural environment. We want a broader diversity of people particularly from disadvantaged communities, to have the opportunities to enjoy and benefit from this contact to deliver a number of outcomes:

- To improve understanding and awareness about the importance of the environment and how biodiversity contributes to its future;
- To encourage people to want to act to improve the environment;
- To improve the quality of life for more people through better health and well-being;
- To support the economy through leisure tourism.

The scope of our interest in relation to outdoor recreation is broad and can be demonstrated in the following table in terms of places close to home and afar, and activities planned for and incidental:

Defining outdoor recreation



Country parks as multi-functional spaces, provide such a wide range of incidental and planned activities and experiences both close to where people live and more distant from home. As a result of this they can be used as a model for outdoor recreation and engagement with the natural environment that we would want to see replicated across a number of other typologies.

During 2009 we have been gathering evidence for a report to be published in early 2010 on the State of the Green Belt. The study has identified the following:

- 44% of land area of all country parks in England is in the Green Belt and 22% in other urban fringe areas.
- 88% of England's population live within or adjacent to Green Belt or other urban fringe areas.
- Only 1% of Green Belt land is made up of Country Parks with key facilities (compared to 6% being Open Access land)
- Currently only 12% of Education Access grants within Environmental Stewardship go into the green belt land

Having large accessible, multifunctional natural greenspaces close to where people live can help address a broad range of issues. We know from the English Leisure Visits Survey (ELVS 2004) that about one third of adults in England have little or no contact with the natural environment and many more only have

occasional contact especially the young, ethnic minorities, and people on low incomes. This hides a lot of detail about visitor figures but also some ambiguity in our statistics, which we want to clarify through our current research project "Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE).

The reasons for not engaging are varied but a key one is lack of time and that activity outdoors is edged out with preference given to more indoor leisure activities such as watching TV and playing console/computer games. They are there in the house, available, take little effort, and for many are enjoyable too. We are all well aware now of the impact of little exercise on the nation's health, the rising levels of obesity, heart disease and mental illness. The statistics are very telling:

- Obesity levels have doubled in last 10 years for 6 year olds – and trebled for 15 years olds.
- Obesity costs the national economy £7 billion per year.
- 70% of the population are not active enough to benefit their health. Doubles risk of diabetes, heart disease, stroke and bowel cancer.
- Mental illness affects 1 in 6 of the adult population
- 1 in 5 under 16yr olds have a mental disorder
- By 2020 the WHO claims that depression will be the second most prevalent cause of ill health
- The total cost to the economy is £77 billion
- Each year stress from work costs employers £3.75 Billion
- Energy deficit: In 2005, 52% of people agreed 'I am so tired in the evenings I often don't have the energy to do much' compared with 46% in 2001

Having access to good quality green spaces easily accessible from home means:

- **More active, healthier lives** - People on the same income, who lived closer to green space were more physically active, lived longer, were less overweight or obese and had less heart disease than those with less access. (Bristol study, Lancet 2009)
- **Reduced weight gain** - Greater opportunities for exercise provided by close proximity to a park reduced weight gain in teenagers by 5kg over a 2 year period (U.S. study 2008)
- **Lower death rates** - In areas of Glasgow amongst lower income groups where green space provision is poor, 1,300 extra deaths occurred each year (study 2008).

The nation's physical and mental health and their quality of life is in decline. We believe that accessing the outdoors can help to reverse this trend.

We are also aware of changes in the way children play outdoors and experience contact with nature. Children today are less likely to play outdoors unsupervised than their parents and much more so than their grandparents. This appears to be mostly due to fears of 'stranger danger', traffic, taking risks that might incur accidents and injury, being bullied and getting into trouble with the 'wrong sort'. We have some cross generational stories of distances children are allowed to roam that although not thoroughly researched, tend to strike an accord with those who hear them. One is from South Yorkshire across 4 generations of one family. In 1919, George at aged 8 was allowed to walk 6 miles unaccompanied to go fishing. His son Jack was allowed to go one mile to the woods to play in 1950. By 1979, Jack's daughter Vicky was allowed to walk half a mile unaccompanied to the local swimming pool and her son Ed now 8 years old is only allowed to go alone as far as the end of his street. This is despite knowing the importance of natural play and the risks of not encouraging it:

- Play is a vital part of a child's healthy fulfilled development.
- Direct experiences with nature help children to make sense of the world.
- Childhood experiences of the natural environment influence adult values and behaviours
- Children need to have these experiences before about 11 years old to sustain adult engagement.

Moving to the other end of the age spectrum, we find that people are living longer and more significantly they are doing a wider variety of activities in old age. The trend is towards things which lead to achieving something such as a new skill or qualification or it could mean more wide ranging outdoor activities and more exploring the natural environment. Retirement has become an age for the traveller and explorer of the world, but also at home. This presents an opportunity because there is a responsive audience and more active retirement will result in healthier ageing.

Having accessible information about individual country parks in a variety of formats is seen as a driver for more engagement. Leisure and tourism decisions are increasingly researched online and amongst competing with many other leisure, activities, outdoor propositions need to be online as well, even if it is just ideas for things to do.

A day out in a Country Park is a great place for everyone to experience a sense of safety and freedom to explore natural habitats and landscapes and enjoy plenty of natural play. There is a general sense of freedom which many children don't experience very often and which they seem to appreciate here. We know that engagement and involvement in the natural environment contributes to self esteem, reduces anxiety, provides inspiration and a richer quality of life.

Reducing our carbon footprint

So we have the desire for more people from more varied backgrounds making more visits to green spaces but the dilemma of promoting use of the natural environment without adding to our carbon footprint particularly where public transport alternatives are expensive, infrequent and inconvenient. People are still wedded to the use of the private motor vehicle and all too often opportunities for walking and cycling are not good enough to attract them out of them. This is certainly true in accessing many of our country parks although huge improvements have been made to improving sustainable transport networks and active transport options. Leisure travel however, only contributes a small amount to the UK's carbon footprint.

The main challenge is to shift from a mainly indoor based sedentary and increasingly obese society to an outdoor active society. We need to understand better the behavioural triggers that inspire, excite and motivate people to engage and become involved, and promote convenient, easy to do ways of engaging that meet people's needs and provide them with the information they need to do this. We need to market to older generations and re-introduce to children and their parents the opportunities in places like country parks, to play throughout the space and not just in the playground where it is provided. We need to remove the barriers that exist that stop a wider diversity of people from engaging.

The Country Parks' Offer:

- Country parks offer unique resources for narrowing the divide between town and country.
- They deliver a range of benefits, services and recreational opportunities to diverse and varied visitors at a comparatively low cost.
- They address many issues: health; social inclusion; culture; sport; the arts; education and life-long learning; sustainability; biodiversity and active citizenship
- They have an innovative and adaptable workforce that connects with their customers
- Multifunctionality -Combining different functions on the same piece of land

Finally consider an "Outside In" approach to green spaces such as country parks. The park provides the hub with well trained staff highly qualified in managing the space at a Green Flag Award quality standard engaging with its visitors and outside communities including the farming communities to broaden the audience profile considerably. Through incentives like Environmental Stewardship the recreational offer can be a more integrated one spreading through a wider green infrastructure in and around urban areas close to where people live.

Annex 1

Two Case Studies

Engaging children and families

Park Hall Country Park and NNR near Stoke

- Helping to deliver our “One Million Children Outdoors “ Campaign providing access to nature
- Pilot project working with local schools to develop and design family friendly trails in the park
- World Environment Day 2009 saw hundreds of children visit and take part in an activities

A New Country Park within a Growth Area

- Rushmere Park was recently purchased by Central Beds Council in partnership with the Greensand Trust and Chalk Arc funding
- Abuts Stockgrove Country Park and Oak Wood, together making a new open access facility (400 acres) with a strong commercial emphasis to support other sites in the area
- Site will be used as an outdoor pursuits centre with camping and adrenaline sports in keeping with the surroundings
- Aim to tap into schools and redirect them here instead of travelling long distances to the Lake District or Wales

For more information about Natural England and our activities go to:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk>

Country Parks Accreditation: setting the standard

David Solly
Specialist - People and Access
Natural England

Country Parks provide a wide range of opportunities for people to have contact with the natural environment and deliver a wide range of benefits for the communities they serve. They are a recognised brand with an established image/logo.

Today nearly 430 sites call themselves Country Parks – we believe almost the same number again can be considered as ‘related sites’ i.e. they deliver the same core services and facilities but for whatever reason don’t call the site a country park (examples might be Forest Parks, or Local Nature Reserves where there are significant visitor facilities).

Many Country Parks continue to offer a high quality experience for their visitors, yet there are examples where the quality of delivery and service falls below what was expected. This can be for all sorts of reasons, ranging from services and facilities having been victims of resource cutbacks to the incorrect application of the Country Park name to a site that doesn’t offer the core facilities and service expected.

What was expected of a Country Park was originally set out in the 1968 Countryside Act, which empowered local authorities to call a site a Country Park. However, this Act did not establish any formal designation procedure, which has arguably allowed the Country Park name to be applied to some sites that arguably are not Country Parks, i.e. do not actually deliver the core services and facilities expected of this type of site.

Politicians and site managers alike frequently ask what a site should be delivering for it to be considered a good Country Park. Typology standards provide an effective mechanism of providing clarity on the core services and facilities sites are expected to provide. When applied alongside a recognised quality standard, they help to demonstrate that a site is delivering the core services and facilities expected of that type of site, and to a high standard.

As an independent public body charged with protecting and improving England’s natural environment and encouraging people to enjoy and get involved in their surroundings, Natural England expects that natural greenspaces delivers:

- to an **Accessibility and Quantity Standard** to ensure provision both close to home and within sustainable transport distances, i.e. Natural England’s Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt)
- to **Service Standards** for core services and facilities for each site type; and;

- to a national **Quality Standard**, i.e. the Green Flag Award scheme.

Country Parks are a significant element of the family of sites that make up accessible natural greenspace. As a typology standard for Country Parks and 'related sites' has not previously existed, Natural England has (with support from sector partners within the Country Parks Network) established the Country Parks Accreditation Scheme, with the purpose of:

- Confirming the core facilities and services expected of that type of site
- Enhancing the status of Country Parks established by the 1968 Countryside Act
- Enabling the Country Park 'brand' to be reclaimed
- Helping site managers demonstrate to funders/politicians that a site is meeting expectations

The Accreditation Scheme is entirely complementary with other existing standards – to explain this simply, an analogy would be to consider a hotel. This should be able to demonstrate it offers the full range of essential facilities and services you expect of a hotel (as Accreditation checks a Country Park does). The hotel may then apply to be awarded 'quality stars' to show that the facilities/services the star scheme assesses (which is not often all the core facilities and services offered by the hotel) are delivered to high quality (which the Green Flag Award does for greenspaces).

So to summarise, Accreditation checks to make sure all the facilities and services expected of a Country Park exist – other awards (such as Green Flag Award) take some of the facilities and services offered and consider how well they are being delivered.

Applications for Accreditation are welcomed from any site that managers believe delivers the core facilities and services expected of a country park (whether the site is formally called a Country Park or not). Applicants are asked to respond to the Schemes criteria by providing evidence that demonstrates how their site delivers against a theme. The key themes are:

- Area
- Accessibility
- Character
- Facilities
- Links to local communities and neighbourhoods
- Links to the wider countryside
- Management
- Activities
- Information and interpretation

Sites are required to demonstrate they deliver against all 15 essential criteria and 10 of the 25 desirable criteria.

The assessment process for applications follows the model in Figure 1. As this shows, should a site not be able to immediately demonstrate all the necessary criteria, the Scheme includes provision for maintaining links with site managers, offering advice/signposting to support which will hopefully lead to them making improvements to their site and reapply.

Figure 1 – the Accreditation Assessment process



Whilst fundamentally a straightforward assessment of a sites core facilities and services, the Scheme can be challenging where site and service managers are getting to grips with new/newer sector standard requirements.

An example of this is on equality and diversity standards, introduced in recent years and still being embedded in Local Authorities in particular. To satisfy its essential criteria 2A3, the Accreditation Scheme seeks evidence of commitment to Equality Standards (or an equivalent level of delivery) in the form of evidence from site managers that their service/managing body or company has committed to establishing a strategy for delivering the Standards. Currently evidence of actual delivery of the strategy is a desirable criteria - in future years its envisaged the current desirable criteria will supercede the current essential criteria as the minimum standard expected of applicants for Accreditation.

On 12th August 2009 Natural England's confirmed Worcester Woods Country Park as the first Accredited Country Park in England at a presentation where Worcestershire County Council's Councillor Derek Prodger (Cabinet Member for Environment), John Hobbs (Director, Environmental Services) and Liz Nether (Senior Countryside Sites Officer) received a certificate signed by Natural England's Chief Executive from Natural England Executive Directors Guy Thompson and Robin Tucker. The site managers can now display the Scheme's Accredited logo on any material/furniture directly relating to the Accredited site.

As of 23rd November 2009, 18 Country Parks have achieved Accredited status, with Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council having achieved the honour of being the first service to have all their sites Accredited.

Full details of how the scheme operates and how to apply appearing on the Natural England website at;
<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/countryparks/accreditation/default.aspx>

A dedicated group of people from within Natural England's Incentive Scheme Support team administer the Scheme and support people in their applications as far as is practically possible. Anyone thinking of applying can contact them via:

- e-mail cpas@naturalengland.org.uk
- telephone 0300 060 1115.

Anyone considering applying or wondering whether the Scheme can be of benefit to them should be encouraged to join a further Study session being offered on 18th March 2010 by Worcestershire County Council in conjunction with Natural England. Full details of this session appear in Annex 1

So how can you add value to the Scheme? To help the embedding of it amongst both practitioners and public alike, we would strongly encourage green space site and service managers across England to:

- Raise awareness of the Scheme, its relevance and value
- If you manage relevant sites, lead by example - **please apply!**
- Promote scheme to other site managers (of both Country Parks and related sites), and encourage them to sign up
- Encourage accredited sites to display the logo and certificates to help raise the profile of the Scheme and its logo amongst members of the public. Evidence suggests having confidence that core facilities and services they need can be important in people's decisions on where to visit – in time, we would hope that knowing their local Country Parks are Accredited will come to influence their choices.

To conclude, we must remind you of the ongoing support, good practice and networking opportunities offered through the Country Parks Network, whose Steering Group (comprising a range of site and service managers as well as representatives from key sector bodies) have been key to establishing the criteria that now underpin the Accreditation Scheme. The Network ends the year as strong as ever, with a new website (see <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/countryparks/countryparksnetwork/default.aspx>) and an acknowledged role as a source of advice and knowledge on matters relating to Country Parks.

Sources of further information:

Country Parks Accreditation Scheme Administration

cpas@naturalengland.org.uk

Country Parks Network

countryparks.network@naturalengland.org.uk

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Annex 1- Country Parks Accreditation Study Day

- **Hosts:** **Worcestershire County Council**
- **Where?** **Worcester Woods Country Park**
- **When?** **Thursday 18th March 2010**

Topics:

1. **Standards & Quality** – why are they important?
2. **Why have accreditation?**
 - *the benefits, the roots and development of the scheme*
 - *the relationship to other schemes, such as the Green Flag Award*
3. **An overview of the process**
 - *what you need to do to submit an application*
 - *what happens after application and after accreditation*
4. **Workshops**
5. A real application workshop using the *Worcester Woods one as a model*
 - *Looking at what was used as evidence.*

- *insight into what assessors are looking for*
- *Exploring how people can demonstrate their site meets the requirements.*

6. Site surgery

For further information please contact Joanne Barrow at ibarrow@worcestershire.gov.uk or call her on 01905 766491.

Benefits of Green Flag Award

Paul Todd
Green Flag Award Scheme Manager
Keep Britain Tidy

No paper available

Case study 1

Liz Nether
Senior Countryside Sites Officer
Worcestershire County Council

How do you, your visitors, senior officers or councillors think of a country park? Somewhere nice to go? Good place to walk the dog? An outing for the grandchildren? Maybe get a cup of tea and a bacon buttie? A costly resource which is nice to have, but could always be sold or closed when times get hard?

So how do you go about adding value, both economic and social, to your country park?

There is already some recognition of country parks as financial, community, recreational and wildlife assets. This is formally recognised by schemes such as Green Flag and Country Park Accreditation. Also perhaps by designations such as LNR, special wildlife site and so on. But how can a country park be used to add not just monetary value but also social value?

I'm going to base this case study on Worcestershire County Councils two Country Parks. The first is Worcester Woods Country Park. The countryside centre was opened in 1989 to provide information about the countryside, refreshments and a base for countryside service staff. In 2006 the centre was refurbished and extended and made more environmentally sustainable. It comprises 2 local nature reserves – Nunnery Wood and Hornhill Meadows, as well as a café, play area and 'amenity' events field. There are a number of other facilities which I shall refer to later. It attracts about half a million visit each year

Its sister Country Par, Waseley Hills, lies on the south west edge of Birmingham. It covers 150 acres of pasture and woodland rising to an open ridge with superb views across the Worcestershire countryside and the urban landscape of Birmingham. It has about 200,000 visits a year, mostly to walk their dog or visit the popular Windmill café. It includes waymarked self-guided trails, an orienteering course, countryside interpretation and many other free facilities.

Perhaps one of the most obvious ways of adding financial value is by charging for services. One of the most obvious is car parking. The introduction of charging for parking can be contentious, but people are becoming more accepting of car park charges. Lets face it you have to pay to park when you go shopping, for example by the local district council or at large shopping centres. Although this may be contentious when introduced, people generally happy if they know money is going back to manage the country park.

At Waseley Hills we offer an annual permit for regular visitors and tickets for a day or an hour. Public transport links to the main site entrance are not good, but visitors have the option to walk to site from link paths into the local communities or they can park at an alternative car park further way form the main facilities.

Parking generates about £20,000 per annum, which directly funds the management of the country park.

Perhaps also obvious is the hire of meeting rooms. We have 3 at Worcester Woods and one at Waseley. We charge variable rates depending on the group. This brings in money but also brings in people who may not come otherwise and will return at other times, perhaps with their families; a new audience for the information and messages we deliver.

We also hire out outside space – again variable rates dependent on activity e.g. family want bouncy castle for birthday; RSPB display in picnic area; corporate event.

Our barbecue is available for hire, and although this does not attract a huge income, it does cover the costs of its cleaning and maintenance.

Recently we have worked with a local Arts Project to 'store' an installation for a year – the project has somewhere to keep the piece, we have it for free (usually a charge is made), the public have the opportunity to experience this piece and it brings a different dimension to the Country Park.

This is an example of one of a number of mutually beneficial partnerships we are involved in

We also undertake direct sales. Our firewood, sold as green cord lengths, generates income from poor quality timber – a by-product of conservation management of sites, meeting legal obligations, some of which is grant funded.

We also produce a limited amount of added value products, such as benches and coppice products, which we use on our other sites – truly sustainable.

Another vehicle for adding value is through various tenancies. Each Country Park has a cafe. The leasee pays a fixed rent and a profit share. As well as refreshments, our leasees are required to act as an information and first aid point, meet and greet for our room hirers at weekends and so on. The lease requires that, as far as practicable, all produce used must be locally sourced, free range (all eggs must comply with this), fair trade (all tea and coffee must comply with this), organic. The café runs events, supported by the site staff, which generate income and create a new audience for everything we have to offer.

Although primarily in place for the appropriate conservation management of our country parks, our grazing tenancies generate some income, or as a minimum, reduce our spend on habitat management. In general the public like the cows; we support local economy and small business as the animals are sold for meat, and there is huge educational value in bringing the countryside to the edge of the city.

Our County Parks also add value to our communities. We have a whole range of types of volunteering opportunity – the weekly 'conservation volunteer' type tasks. These groups have amazing health benefits for many of the participants – whether it is someone recovering from illness or surgery, someone with mental health issue,

or just someone who has become isolated. We run a regular Duke of Edinburgh Award group linked to the local high school. We offer individual placements for those studying and recently we have linked up with Mencap to have a 12 month paid placement as part of the return to work initiative.

One of our most successful projects that adds value in so many ways is the Community Payback scheme. Through a partnership with West Mercia Probation we have jointly funded a 2 year project to provide opportunities for offenders to complete their sentences. The project has funded a full-time supervisor, vehicle and tools, based at one of our country parks. Six offenders work 4 days per week, allowing us to achieve many of the tasks and projects that otherwise would not happen. The offenders not only complete their sentence, but also gain useful skills and experience. Although it is hard to measure, it is understood that this type of project reduces reoffending rates - of immeasurable value to society and communities, as well as the public purse.

Another way to add value is to get involved in groups and networks, such as the CRN and the Countryside Management Association - it is how you get to hear about things and share experience & ideas.

Look at corporate strategies and objectives and see how what you already do, or would like to do, fits. Think about creative ways of working with others. You can add value without compromising on what you are trying to deliver; in fact it will enhance your country park.

Case study 2

Bob Bleakley
Assistant Director for Regional Operations
Northern Ireland Environment Agency

The presentation reviewed:

- The history of government Country Parks in Northern Ireland
- The development of a strategic approach to Country Park development and management
- Current Country Park Policy
- The implementation of that policy over the past five years

History of the establishment of Country Parks in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has a population of 1.6 million, so is equivalent in scale to a smallish County Council in Great Britain. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency, until recently Environment and Heritage Service, covers the work of nature and countryside conservation agencies, historic heritage agencies and environmental protection agencies.

Legislation [the Amenity Lands Act (Northern Ireland)] enabling the acquisition and management of 'amenity lands' was passed in 1965. This set up the Ulster Countryside Committee, which soon recognised that Northern Ireland lacked the public footpaths typical of Great Britain to provide good public access to the countryside. The Committee decided that country parks would be the answer to this deficiency and identified a wide variety of sites across Northern Ireland as potential country parks. Seven properties had been acquired by the mid 1970s. These were typically large wooded estates and parkland, but each had special features including:

- coastal beaches
- lake shores
- river valleys and glens
- hillsides with old quarries
- peat bog

Three of these parks are in the prosperous North Down area, serving the Greater Belfast population. Two are in the north of County Londonderry, one in County Fermanagh to the West and one in County Armagh in the Centre of Northern Ireland near Lough Neagh. They are:

Crawfordsburn

This 'flagship' coastal park in North Down, 10 miles from Belfast, features two sandy beaches, parkland and meadow, wooded glens, and a fine waterfall.

Roe Valley

Situated just south of Limavady in North Derry, this park boasts parkland, and wooded river gorge, a salmon river and historic heritage associated with past

water-powered industry, including: corn milling, linen mills, a saw mill and the Province's first commercial hydroelectricity scheme, dating from 1896.

Castle Archdale

10 miles north of Enniskillen on the shores of Lower Lough Erne, this park has a caravan site and marina as well as fine woodland and open parkland.

Scrabo

Situated on a hill dominating the outskirts of Newtownards, 8 miles south of Belfast, this park features a stone hilltop tower, sandstone quarries and old woodland.

Ness and Ervey Woods

7 miles south of Londonderry City, the 'park' comprised two separate woodlands straddling the Burntollet River with a very fine waterfall, but very little open grassland.

Redburn

This park lies on the outskirts of Holywood, five miles north east of Belfast. It comprises parkland and woodland on a steep hillside with a panoramic view from the top, but no public vehicle access beyond the bottom.

Peatlands Park

5 miles east of Dungannon, County Armagh, this park, which was established specifically to promote the importance of conserving peat bogs, comprises a partly cut-over raised bog lying between with mineral soil drumlins. Two areas are also nature reserves.

While the distribution of the seven parks across the Province is widespread, there are no government country parks in counties Antrim and Tyrone or in South Armagh. Some forest parks and council country parks do help to remedy these deficiencies.

Development work on the seven Agency parks was considered largely 'complete' by early 1980s. The parks collectively were attracting around 1.5 million visits each year, half of these being to Crawfordsburn.

In 1985, the Agency focus switched to nature conservation designations when new legislation was passed. This provided for the designation of Areas of Special Scientific Interest, soon followed by the need to comply with the Birds and Habitats Directives by designating SPAs and SACs. Some pundits even questioned the relevance of country parks to the Agency and proposed passing them to local authorities.

A period of stagnation followed, with little new development apart from the building of a large new visitor centre at Crawfordsburn Country Park and a narrow-gauge diesel railway at Peatlands Park; the railway was seen as a means of attracting visitors to the Park who might otherwise be put off by the idea of going to a bog.

Further consideration of the purpose of all seven country parks identified their potential for interfacing with the public on environmental conservation issues.

Starting at Peatlands Park, a qualified teacher was engaged to lead school field visits in 1995. The success of this venture resulted in Peatland conservation being added to the school curriculum. By year 2000 there were educators at 5 of the country parks, and by 2005 around 25,000 school children made field visits to government country parks each year.

The development of a strategic approach to Country Park development and management

Now that Country Parks were again recognised as important, the writing of formal management plans was required. This flagged a need for an overriding policy to inform these plans. Staff and stakeholders convened to develop an overriding vision for the parks, a mission statement and values by which they would be managed. Input was welcomed from staff at all levels, from concessionaires and representatives of user groups. A full policy statement was published in 2003. (www.ni-environment.gov.uk/cppolicymarch04.pdf)

A previous CRN Seminar in 2003 coincided with the development of that first written policy statement on the management of Northern Ireland's country parks. Ideas presented at that seminar were incorporated into the policy, which set out:

The vision:

'Natural Inspiration'

The Mission Statement:

- *a quality, safe environment for all to enjoy countryside recreation*
- *appropriate countryside facilities*
- *exemplary habitat and heritage management to enhance biodiversity and to conserve the landscape and built environment*
- *enhanced appreciation of the countryside and opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes and commitment needed to protect and improve the environment*
- *inspirational interpretation of the natural and built environment*
- *a positive "interface" between the Agency and the public*

The Management Ethos:

- *A stimulating and safe environment in which to enjoy the countryside*
- *Sound environmental principles with a presumption towards management to conserve the natural and historic heritage*
- *Working in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders*
- *A professional, friendly and efficient service*
- *A supportive working environment for staff to deliver the vision*
- *Equality – a commitment to all*
- *Best value for money*

Country Park Criteria

The exercise also considered what were the criteria by which an area should qualify for branding as a country park. The Policy Statement pronounced that:

The Agency will work towards providing at all its Country Parks a safe and well maintained essential infrastructure, which will include:

- access roads and parking, including cycle parking, and disabled provision;
- a structured network of paths that includes provision for those with disabilities;
- rest stops and benches;
- public toilets with provision for those with disabilities and for baby-care;
- clear, attractive and informative signage; and
- picnic areas with picnic tables and barbecue stands.

After this exercise, visioning days were held at each park to identify what was needed at that property to raise it to the standards set out in the Policy Statement. Management plans were written to chart the realisation of these visions. As a result when tourism money became available, a suite of projects was ready to take forward and a new development phase began. This has resulted in major upgrades at five parks with plans in place for the other two when funding is again available.

Case Study – Ness Country Park

The Policy committed the Agency to providing ‘a quality, safe environment for all to enjoy countryside recreation’. While Ness and Ervey Woods provided pleasant woodland riverside walks, they lacked open grassland and visitor amenities. There was internal pressure to abandon the pretence that they represented a country park and simply declare them a nature reserve. The uncertainty over their future led to paths and bridges became dilapidated.

However, the Policy commitment to provision for all supported the case for a fully developed country park for the residents of Derry City, who deserved similar provision to those from Belfast. Thus a decision was taken to seek to extend the Park rather than to abandon it. When a strategically located farm came on the market, the Agency had a strong case to acquire it. The new land provided space for amenity grassland and afforded a stunning view.

Existing paths and bridges were refurbished and new bridges were installed, linking the new lands with the two existing woods. Visitor facilities and dedicated staff were provided. The small, cottage-style visitor centre has solar heating and other ‘green’ features.

The extension and development of the Park was achieved through working in partnership, both with Derry City Council which helped secure additional funding, and the local community over the acquisition of the new lands. The family who sold the bulk of the land have been delighted with its development and are still able to enjoy it, along with other members of the public.

The existing woodlands provide visitors with excellent access to natural habitats and native species. The interpretative panels and the new exhibition in the visitor centre fulfil the aim of providing ‘inspirational interpretation’.

During the development phase when earth-moving was at its most extensive visitors could have come away with the impression that the Agency was not fulfilling its aim of delivering ‘exemplary habitat and heritage management’. However once the development was complete the landscape quality was

restored, with retention of features such as existing trees, dry-stone walls and other field boundaries. In addition, slopes have been planted with several thousand native trees and ponds have been created on the level land near the river. These are already attracting wildlife. The waste from the visitor centre is discharged through a small reedbed filtration plot. Level paths and open grassland provide for the less physically able, and the whole park is branded with clear new signage.

Ironically the Agency now has plans to designate the original woodland areas as a National Nature Reserve within the Country Park.

Case Study – Roe Valley Country Park

The Management Plan for this park aims to secure loop paths on both sides of the River Roe linked by bridges. This has been partially achieved. A historic 'inverted bowstring' bridge (originally built to provide access to a neighbouring church) has been restored, involving temporary removal and replacement by helicopter. Where a landslip had isolated two ends of a path and the gap could not be bridged, an old link path nearer the River was reinstated with safety features. This has proved very popular with visitors.

A level path close to the visitor centre and car park has been created for less able visitors. This has a yellow line and sensory features for the visually impaired. A 'mobility' scooter is available for use on level paths by visitors who are covered by insurance for its use.

The visitor centre café has been enlarged and kitchens modernised to comply with food safety regulations. The concessionaire provides food which is, where possible, home-made, locally sourced, organic, and/or Fair Trade.

A 'biodiversity area' was created for school visitors. This has a platform for pond-dipping in a flooded small quarry, a wildflower meadow, and a flax crop relating to the history of linen production as part of the educational resource.

Branded welcome signage was created, interpretative panels renewed and a new exhibition featuring 'inspirational interpretation' was installed. This includes a red band running through the panels reflecting the 'red river', stained by run-off from the blanket peat areas of the Sperrin Mountains.

A variety of seasonal events is run, including activities such as abseiling, canoeing, archery and angling.

There are now plans to reinstate hydroelectricity generation at the historic 'powerhouse' where Ulster's first commercial scheme operated between 1986 and 1965. The abstracted water will be channelled along a 250 year old lade.

Case Study – Castle Archdale Country Park

This Park is centred on an historic courtyard comprising fine outbuildings on three sides, though the mansion formerly occupying the fourth side was demolished as it became unsafe following occupation by the US Air Force during World War 2. The cobbled courtyard, which slopes steeply, was unwelcoming and bleak. Now a switchback path with seating at each bend and

amenity planting between the turns of the path provides disabled access down the steep slope, also transforming the area because of the seating and flowers. It is a focus for events. The bricked-up doors and windows of the basement of the former manor house are enlivened by quirky murals portraying the manor house servants engaged in their work.

Stone-faced steps now lead from the main car park, located behind and below the courtyard, up into the courtyard itself. The car park has been landscaped and vaulted stables and stores have been refurbished.

The natural and historic heritage of the parkland has been conserved through management as wildflower meadow and planting of specimen oaks. Traditional breed Dexter cattle graze the meadow.

Case Study - Crawfordsburn Country Park

The Park has some 800,000 visits per year, but most visitors go to the beach, few to the visitor centre (except for a meal in the café) and even fewer up the wooded glen to see the lovely waterfall. The centre is used to run popular events. These include an annual Autumn Festival, where up to 200 varieties of apples, pears and other fruits are on display and on sale, and fruit-themed activities are provided. 'Bark in the Park' is a popular event for dog-owners at which messages on dog etiquette are presented.

As the visitor centre café is currently accessed without entering the exhibition space, work will soon start to provide a new, more obvious entrance directly into the exhibition space from which the café will be accessed. It is hoped that this will result in exposure of many more visitors to Agency messages. A new exhibition will be provided which will encourage wider use of the whole Park and provide environmental messages to visitors.

The Agency is charged with securing value for money and security of public assets. The construction of a new boundary fence has proved very controversial. This has closed off unauthorised access to the Park from the private gardens of a new adjacent development, preventing the establishment of rights of access along unapproved paths.

Case Study - Peatlands Park

A new centre looking externally like traditional farmhouse-style was built to further environmental education. This has many 'green' features. The walls are of aerated cement blocks, which use only 20% of the materials in solid blocks. Much of the timber is recycled. Rainwater is harvested for toilet flushing, with reedbed effluent filtration and waterless urinals. Convection ventilation runs on solar power.

The two spacious classrooms are well used, largely by GCSE geography students, who conduct field studies out on the bog. The classrooms are open to the public over weekends in summer. 'Popular' environmental messages are delivered via rides through the bog on the narrow-gauge diesel railway, reflecting the time when peat was harvested commercially and transported by rail. Each passenger wagon has interpretative panels and there are stops along the way at which information is presented.

The Irish bog snorkelling championships are held annually on International Bog Day, attracting thousands to the Park, where visitors also learn about the importance of peatland conservation.

Case Study - Scrabo Country Park

Scrabo hill is capped by an igneous dolerite sill, which protected the Triassic sandstone below from glaciation. A 160-year-old stone tower dominates the Park. It was built to commemorate the Third Marquis of Londonderry on the site of an Iron Age hillfort, and affords magnificent views from the wall walk at the top. On a clear day, Strangford Lough, the Belfast Hills, the mountains of Mourne and County Louth, the Isle of Man, Cumbria, Galloway, and even Snowden and can be seen.

There is no disabled access or public toilet provision in the Tower, which is too exposed for winter use. Two floors have exhibition displays, including a life-size model of a Triassic reptile, whose footprints were found in sandstone quarried from the hill below. Though built largely of impervious dolerite, sandstone window details and turret caps allow water ingress. A flood last winter necessitated complete rewiring with waterproof electrics.

When funding becomes available, plans have been drafted for a new visitor centre in the car park area further down the hill. This will provide year-round use and disability access. The Tower will still open in summer.

Case Study – Redburn Country Park

This Park is used by local joggers and dog-walkers, but few others. The steep terrain deters many visitors so they never see the fine panoramic view from the hill-top.

A SWOT analysis undertaken at a recent visioning day identified the following opportunities:

- Create a viewpoint with seating and panorama plinth at the hilltop. (But how do visitors get there to enjoy it?)
- Create a downhill mountain bike trail. (But how do the bikers get up to the start without unwelcome interaction with walkers or cyclists coming down?)
- Re-use a derelict walled garden area as an activity centre by building rentable, lean-to roofed accommodation. (But the Agency can't afford to develop the site and run these activities.)

The SWOT analysis picked out the main weakness: building a vehicular road through the Park to the hilltop would ruin the historic parkland landscape and features. This posed the question - how can the vision possibly be realised?

The answer may be by working in partnerships with the commercial sector, which could potentially deliver the following:

- A pay-per-ride chairlift to the hilltop, which would carry regular visitors to see the view, many of whom would choose walk down again.

- A facility for taking bikes on the chairlift, which cyclists also would be likely to use to go up so as to cycle back down the mountain bike trail.
- Franchisees could rent the lean-to accommodation once built in the walled garden as a base for bike-hire, pony-trekking, catering, crafts, etc..

While this is merely a 'wild idea' at present, so were many of the schemes which resulted from previous visioning days and are now a reality. Many of the 25-year 'dreams' have been realised within five years.

To start a 'new era' for your country park:

- Develop a written policy with a vision, mission statement and management values.
- Engage with your staff at all levels and with your stakeholders to create a long term vision of how you want the Park to become in, say, 25 years.
- Divide your aspirations into:
 - do it now
 - do it within five years
 - do it at some time in the future when the opportunity arises.
- Write these into a structured management plan.
- Implement your plan, starting with 'do it now'. Only do those things which take you towards your 25-year vision.

A New Era for Country Parks? You can do it – we did!

Case study 3

Eirwen Hopwood
Countryside Manager
West Lothian Council

Introduction

The borough of West Lothian lies in the central belt of Scotland between Glasgow and Edinburgh (20 miles from Edinburgh and 30 miles from Glasgow). West Lothian's population of 169,000 in 2008 is predicted to grow at a faster rate than any other council area in Scotland. It also has a faster growing younger population which needs to be reflected in the services the Council provides.

West Lothian Council's 6 key priorities are similar to a number of other authorities, reflecting the theme of the conference in recognising the value of country parks in terms of health and well-being, social inclusion, economic regeneration and environmental awareness. The Countryside Section is required to deliver under these 6 key priorities.

Within the structure of West Lothian Council the Countryside Section is found in the Directorate of Development and Environmental Services and then within the Property Services Section. The Countryside Section has 45 full time equivalent posts which are part of a small unit covering a diverse range of service functions.

Country Parks

According to the Scottish Natural Heritage's website, since 1969 36 country parks covering a total area of 6,481 ha have been established by Local Authorities under Section 48 of the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 in Scotland. West Lothian Council has 3 country parks which are well spread across the borough to service the population.

1. Almondell & Calderwood Country Park was designated a country park in 1971, it is what would be considered a more traditional country park designed to provide for the opportunities of passive recreation and environmental education (both formal and informal). Almondell & Calderwood Country Park is 90ha (227 acres) in area (Almondell 97 acres and Calderwood 130 acres). The park follows the River Almond for 1.5 miles between the settlements of Broxburn and East Calder. It is easily accessible on foot for the populations of East & Mid Calder, Livingston and Broxburn and is visited by an estimated 140,000 visitors per year. The park is very popular for quiet walks and recreation where the visitor can enjoy the fantastic landscape which includes the Nasmyth Bridge, aqueducts and railway viaduct. There are a couple of BBQ's situated near to the river in a very pretty location with an open fire pit as well. These are booked through the park centre and are popular for birthdays and corporate events.

The visitor centre is open 7 days a week and offers information, guides/leaflets, exhibitions on the local area as well as a range of gifts and souvenirs, refreshments and toilet facilities. There are 2 rangers based in the park centre

who carry out a wide range of roles which include:

- Working with Lothian conservation volunteers (students from Edinburgh)
- Working with special needs groups since 1996 who have made a valued contribution towards the management of the park,
- Most recently working with the Princes Trust (16 – 19 yr olds) in the creation of a new great crested newt pond and woodland management
- Events programme with a wide range of walks and activities
- West Lothian Walking Week and a Health Walks programme
- Education from nursery to university but mainly local schools, children who could walk into the park
- Working closely with local cubs, beavers, brownies and rainbows

Looking to the future it is hoped to make more use of the park centre and the garden area. Another opportunity is to make sure that the park benefits from the core development area of Calderwood that is going to be developed adjacent to the eastern edge of the park.

2. Polkemmet Country Park was the former estate of the Baillie family and formally designated as a country park in 1981. The park was developed with a 'sporting' theme, with a 9 hole golf course which is considered to be of a very high standard with rough rough but excellent greens and fairways, and a driving range, the first of its kind in West Lothian but now in need of investment. The driving range offers club golf for 8 – 16 year olds through the active schools and has been very successful. The Countryside Section are in the process of looking into the possibilities of grant funding to provide waiting room facilities and toilets at the driving range. There is also a popular bowling green.

The park is estimated to receive in excess of 250,000 visits per year. The park centre is open 7 days a week offering information and confectionery as well as the reception for the golf and driving range.

Most recently a fabulous new play park has been created. The award winning Miners Play Park was opened in 2009 costing in excess of £250,000. It has been built sympathetically into the landscape to make the most of the setting and offers lots of opportunity for naturalistic play as well as incorporating well chosen pieces of play equipment. Since it opened in June 2009 there has been a noticeable increase in visitor numbers with a 20% rise being recorded over the period.

There is space for 2 commercial franchises at Polkemmet, one of these is empty at the moment but there are proposals in place to fill this. The other is the Crafty Café which works well as a facility within the park and acts as a draw in its own right providing a good range of food and play and craft activities. In addition there are 3 houses let to private residents as part of the courtyard complex, all of which

provide valuable income.

This winter, working in partnership with BTCV, the local community and various local groups, plans are in place for major improvements to the park which include vegetation management in the pond and creation of a dipping platform, woodland management, tree planting and upgrading of paths. Just over £50k has been secured from WREN landfill tax monies and Leader funding to enable this work to take place.

It is hoped to develop an additional visitor attraction to the walled garden area of the park which could help to offer another feature to the park. Similarly to Almondell & Calderwood there is a core development area, called Hartland's, which will be developed around the park and as the economic climate improves there will be opportunities for the park to benefit as part of this development.

3. Beecraigs Country Park is some 370 ha (913 acres) nestled in the Bathgate Hills three miles south of the historic town of Linlithgow. The park consists of over 243 ha (600 acres) of managed forestry plantation, 103 ha (255 acres) forms the deer attraction of which 20 ha (49 acres) is woodland/forestry and the rest is meadow, rough grassland and Beecraigs Loch. The park receives in excess of an estimated 400,000 visitors per year. Based in Beecraigs are the maintenance team who work across all 3 country parks and who also have a couple of 16 yr olds working on placements through a 'get ready for work' scheme.

There is one full time ranger based at Beecraigs, supplemented by a couple of fixed term contract rangers. The rangers currently oversee the caravan and campsite, deliver a ranger led events programme, work with various volunteers/friends groups, regularly work with special needs groups, deliver environmental education, produce interpretation materials and are developing a close working relationship with Oatridge College.

There is an outdoor pursuits team which consists of 4 instructors, all of whom are very experienced with specialists in the field of social inclusion and challenging behaviour groups. They offer a wide range of activities both within the park and further afield including target archery, field archery, climbing, hill walking, orienteering, canoeing, kayaking, pioneering, team building, John Muir Award, skiing, snowboarding, gorge scrambling, education and other training requirements as requested.

The deer attraction is a popular visitor attraction particularly during the calving period and at Christmas time when the Christmas Deer Walks take place which are always fully booked in advance. It is a great opportunity to get up close to our native Red Deer. The herd consists of 140 hinds, 8 stags, and 98 young stock. Beecraigs venison is a well recognised and thought of brand which is sold through the park centre shop which gives added value.

Beecraigs Caravan & Campsite offers space for up to 36 units for touring including up to 12 camping pitches. It is busy all year round being a popular site for people to holiday in and for those wishing to visit Edinburgh and Stirling areas, in particular around the time of the Edinburgh Festival.

The sawmill produces 450 cubic meters of sawn timber giving added value on timber products from our sustainably managed forest at Beecraigs. A team of 4 men are employed to run the sawmill, 2 sawyers, one driver and one New Deal post (unemployment scheme).

Beecraigs Loch is a 20 acre water open 7 days a week and evenings in the summer for trout fishing from boats, with a limit of 5 fish per rod. Run by a team of 3, 2 countryside operatives working rota system supplemented by a New Deal post. The fishermen are provided with a lodge as part of the fishing experience at Beecraigs. Various discount schemes are operated including a Gold Card membership scheme and unemployed / WLC / OAP reduced rates.

The forest is managed to provide timber to the sawmill by using contractors and the use of chainsaw courses for forestry thinning. Additional to this are the Christmas tree sales which take place over a couple of weeks in December using home grown trees supplemented by locally grown West Lothian trees.

There are a number of commercial leases in the park including the Beecraigs Restaurant which also provides the reception for the Caravan & Campsite as part of the lease agreement, and 3 residential houses which provide income to the section.

There are a number of developments happening across Beecraigs Country Park and one of the first to take place will be that Go Ape is on schedule to open for Easter 2010. This will provide a new visitor experience for a market not yet covered with the current attractions as well as being a good spectator attraction. Diversification of the deer attractions is being looked at and it is hoped to introduce a small fold of highland cows and possibly a horse livery and allotments/community garden on land made available by downsizing of the deer herd.

A new Eco Visitor Centre is planned for the park due to open in 2011 which will incorporate a wind turbine, ground source heat pump, heat recovery ventilation, rain water harvesting, solar panels, and locally sourced building materials. The project is with Development Control at the moment for them to consider for planning consent. The Council have invested capital money, match funding coming from carbon trust, energy saving trust, prudential borrowing, Leader funding and SRDP (Scottish Rural Development Programme). It is hoped that the building of the centre would commence in April 2010 and be complete by the end of 2010!

Countryside Section is looking for the new centre to become a community hub which would be well used by various community groups including local schools, colleges and universities, Linlithgow Climate Challenge, user groups, cycling clubs, equestrian groups and walking clubs. The centre will include a café which is something that the demand is clearly there for being requested on nearly all surveys. As part of the construction of the centre an application has been made to the Future Jobs fund for an additional 10 assistant countryside operatives who would work on the project to help to deliver the build. The Council would employ

them and training would be provided through a partnership with Oatridge College with funding for the training to be provided through Leader.

Performance management enables the Countryside Section to raise its profile within the Authority, with members and with the public. The section currently reported on 23 performance indicators 6 of which are available for the public and councilors to view. The section produces a service plan in March each year reporting on what has been achieved the previous year and what is to be delivered over the coming year. This is then presented to the head of service and the director, then the relevant committees. Once the initiatives are agreed, the database is updated and work can begin!

There are a number of performance management measuring tools that the section works within along with the rest of the Authority these include WLAM (West Lothian Assessment Model), Charter Mark, IIP (Investors in People) and EFQM (originally known as European Foundation for Quality Management). These again allow the section to raise its profile as we manage to score quite highly in these.

As an integral part of performance management we have to consult with our customers to ensure that their needs and expectations are met. This feedback is welcomed and enables the section to be reviewed to better reflect the customers' requirements. There are 12 Activity/functions areas where these surveys are used: Visitor Centres / Sawmill / Fishery / Outdoor Pursuits / Golf Course / Driving Range / Country Parks / Land Holdings / Caravan & Camping Site / Country Parks / BBQ's / Venison Sales.

It is clear that West Lothian's country parks have an important role to play in delivery of the key objectives of government, local authorities and communities in delivering health and wellbeing, social inclusion, economic regeneration and environmental awareness.

Appendix A

Programme

- 09:30 *Registration and Refreshments*
- 10:00 **Welcome from the chair**
Andy Maginnis, Worcester County Council
- 10:15 **Country Parks: a historical perspective**
David Lambert, The Parks Agency
- 10:45 **Country Parks: their relevance today**
Lucy Heath, Natural England
- 11:15 *Refreshments*
- 11:30 **Country Parks Accreditation: setting the standard**
David Solly, Natural England
- 12:00 **Benefits of Green Flag Award**
Paul Todd - Keep Britain Tidy
- 12:20 *Lunch*
- 13:05 **Welcome back from the chair**
- 13:15 **Case Study 1**
Liz Nether, Worcestershire County Council
- 13:45 **Case Study 2**
Bob Bleakley, Northern Ireland Environment Agency
- 14:15 **Case Study 3**
Eirwen Hopwood, West Lothian Council
- 14:45 **Questions to the panel**
- 15:15 **Summary from the chair**
- 15:30 *Close*

Appendix B

Speaker Biographies

Chair

Andy Maginnis Worcestershire County Council

Andy is Worcestershire County Council's Countryside Manager and is responsible for the authority's Country Parks and Local Nature Reserves; 3000 miles of public rights of way, a Community Greenspace Team that offers support and advice to local communities wishing to enhance their own environment; the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Staff Unit and 9 residential Gypsy sites accommodating over 120 families. A past chairman of the Countryside Management Association, he is the Local Government Association representative on the Countryside Recreation Network and is a member of the Country Parks Network and Environmental Volunteering Group. When not at work Andy coaches junior football and rugby.

Speakers

David Lambert The Parks Agency

David Lambert is a Director of the Parks Agency, a consultancy specialising in public parks. In 2002 he researched the history of Country Parks as part of the Country Parks Renaissance report. He was previously Conservation Officer for the Garden History Society and was an expert panel member for the Heritage Lottery Fund from its inception until 2002. He has been a special adviser to a number of House of Commons Select Committee inquiries including the 1999 inquiry into parks, and the 2002 inquiry into open space, recreation and sport. He currently serves on a number of advisory panels including the National Trust and English Heritage. He is a monitor and external adviser for the HLF, a CABE Space Strategic Enabler, as well as external examiner for the MA in Garden History at Bristol University.

Lucy Heath Natural England

Lucy has worked within the nature conservation, environmental education and greenspace management sector under a number of different guises over a 30 year career. Joining the Countryside Agency in 2004 from Sheffield City Council as a Regeneration Co-ordinator with the Parks, Woodlands and Countryside Service, she picked up the Country Parks renaissance work, testing the original framework for service standards with the Country Parks Steering group, developing the Network and website and on moving to Natural England continuing to advocate and raise the profile of Country Parks. She has sat on the Green Flag Award advisory group since 2004 as well as for CABE Space, the Community Spaces

Lottery Programme and the Greenspace National Forum until recently. She is currently developing Natural England's position statements on Engagement with the natural environment.

David Solly
Natural England

David followed 13 years as a Ranger in urban, urban fringe and rural locations (with local authorities and then the Forestry Commission) with a brief spell in environmental education working to establish a farm-based field studies/education centre in Worcestershire.

David moved to Countryside Agency, initially contributing to the transition of the lead on the Community Forest programme to the Forestry Commission before supporting work on the Countryside in and around Towns agenda including during its evolution/embedding into Natural England's work on Green Infrastructure.

In recent times, David has worked nationally on Natural England's positions on People and Access, their advocacy and transition to delivery, and in particular those relating to quality of natural greenspace management. As Natural England's point of contact on Country Parks, David led the recent establishment and launch of Natural England's Country Parks Accreditation Scheme in autumn 2009.

Paul Todd
Keep Britain Tidy

Paul has worked for the Green Flag Award Scheme since 2003 and is currently employed by Keep Britain Tidy who together with BTCV and GreenSpace form the partnership who manage the Scheme (The Green Flag Plus Partnership). The partnership aim is to achieve 50% of Parks and Green Spaces of the Green Flag Award standard by 2020. Prior to working for Keep Britain Tidy Paul was employed by the Civic Trust and Reed.

Liz Nether
Worcestershire County Council

As Senior Countryside Sites Officer for Worcestershire County Council Countryside Service, Liz has responsibility for overseeing the management of 2 country parks, a forest park and another 15 or so smaller sites on the urban fringe and in rural areas. These sites incorporate 5 local nature reserves, 2 sites of special scientific interest, 2 commons and access land. These sites have full public access attracting about a million visits each year. Most are owned by the County Council; however some are managed under a service level agreement with a different landowner.

Liz joined Worcestershire County council in June 2004, prior to then having worked in a variety of countryside management roles in south eastern England. Liz has been a member of the Countryside Management Association (CMA) for over 11 years, achieving accredited member status in 2002. Liz is also their County Representative and represents the CMA on the Country Parks Network.

Bob Bleakley
Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Bob was born in Northern Ireland. His interest in practical nature conservation was sparked by a school camp on an island nature reserve on Loch Lomond where he helped make steps for a path from railway sleepers. He studied Zoology at Queen's University Belfast, and then obtained an MSc in environmental conservation from University College, London after which he did post-graduate research into the effects of environmental factors on marine sand meiofauna.

Bob left the esoteric world of academia to take up a Warden post with the Northern Ireland government in 1975, managing first a country park, then a suite of nature reserves. After 12 years he was promoted to head quarters as a Senior Scientific Officer responsible for providing scientific input to the management of country parks and nature reserves.

Promoted to Principle Scientific Officer in 2000, Bob headed the Unit responsible for landscape conservation, planning and grant aid before transferring to his present post as Assistant Director for Regional Operations in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. This involves overseeing the management of seven country parks, 60 nature reserves and the grounds and visitors at 190 historic monuments in state care, and providing services across Northern Ireland to other units within the Agency.

Bob is married with five children and five grandchildren. His interests include gardening, photography and landscape and wildflower painting in watercolour.

Eirwen Hopwood
West Lothian Council

Eirwen was born, brought up and lived in South Ayrshire, Scotland for the first 24 years of her life. She worked for the National Trust for Scotland as a Seasonal Ranger while studying Electronic and Electrical Engineering. Working as a Seasonal Ranger influenced her decision not to pursue the electronics career and so attended Barony College, Dumfries to do the Certificate course in Countryside Skills for recreation and Leisure. This was a good practical course that went well with the experience she had gained as a Seasonal Ranger. Whilst volunteering Eirwen started applying for jobs.

Eirwen's first full time job was as an Assistant Warden with the Medlock Valley Warden Service, one of the Greater Manchester River Valley schemes set up in the 60's. She progressed through the service and then when it was disbanded through reorganisation she worked for Oldham MBC Countryside Service. Eirwen eventually finished there as Principal Countryside Officer before moving back to Scotland in January 2009 to take up position of Countryside Manager for West Lothian Council where she is responsible for 3 country parks totalling some 597 Ha (Beecraigs, Almondell & Calderwood and Polkemmet Country Parks) plus another 868 Ha of countryside.

Appendix C

**Country Parks
23 November 2009**



Attendance List

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**Country Parks
23 November 2009**



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**Country Parks
23 November 2009**



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**Country Parks
23 November 2009**



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**Country Parks
23 November 2009**

Attendance List



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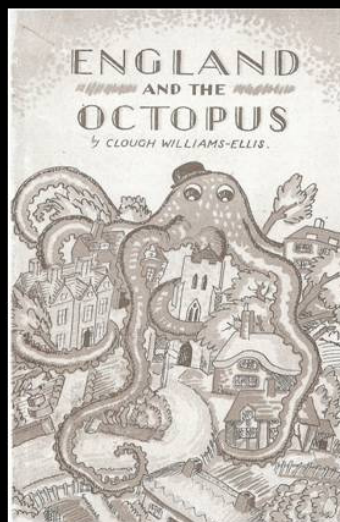
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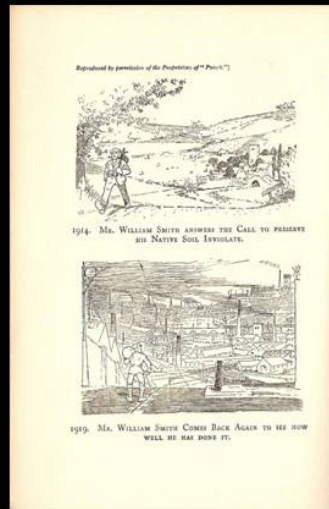
David Lambert's presentation slides

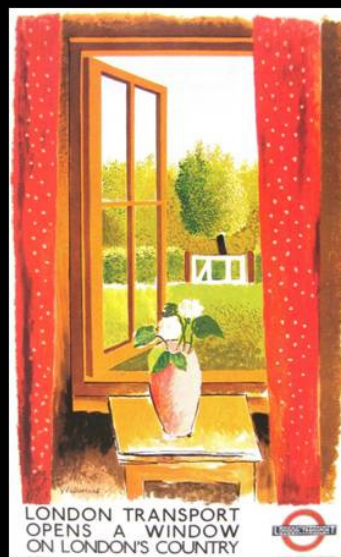
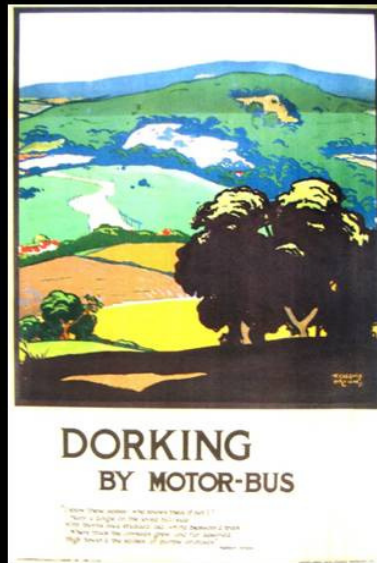
Country Parks: a historical perspective

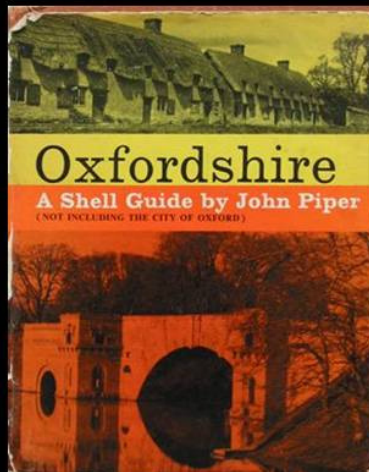
David Lambert

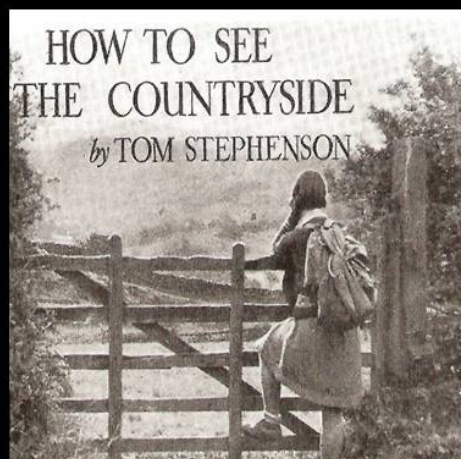
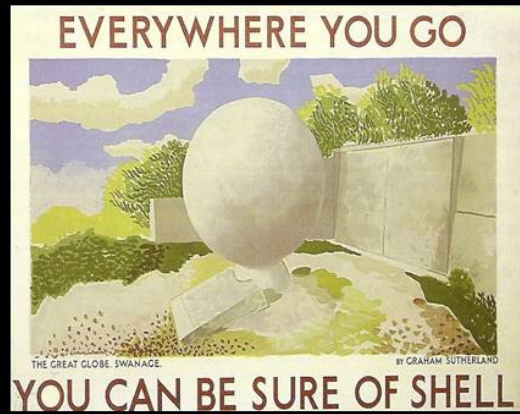
The Parks Agency



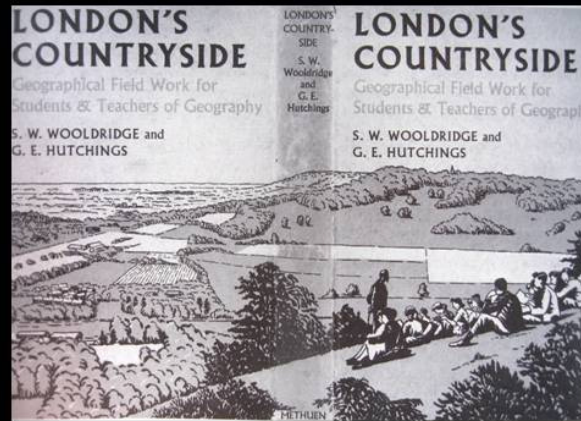






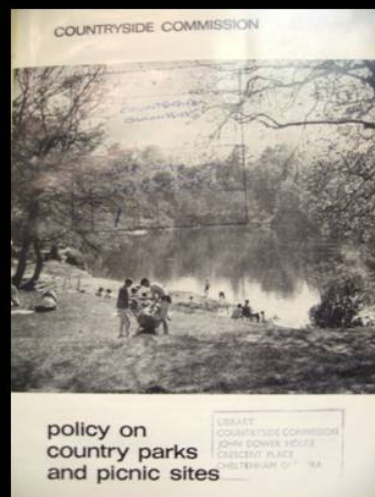


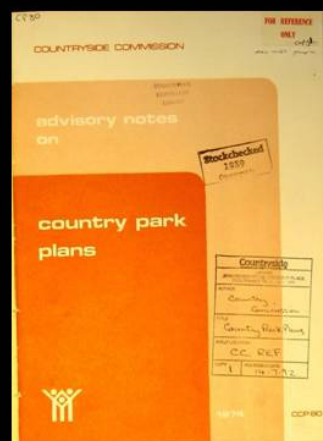
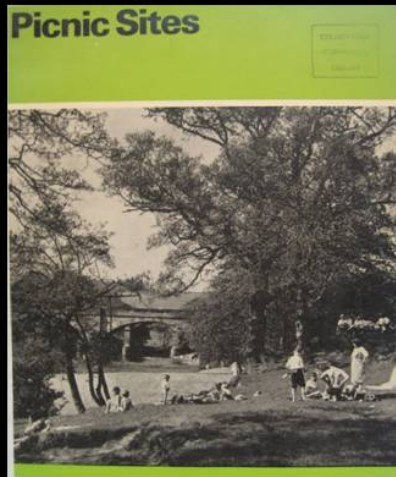


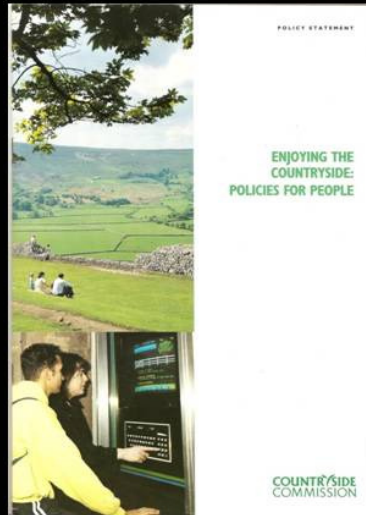


Mobile leisure for all. This attractive couple from the Midlands were going to Devon for the week-end









Lucy Heath's presentation slides



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CRN Seminar Country Parks – their relevance today Monday 23rd November 2009

Lucy Heath
Senior Specialist
People and Access,
Environmental Advice and Analysis Team

Towards a Country Parks Renaissance

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- The Rural White Paper (2000) tasked the Countryside Agency with 'issuing guidance on best practice to revitalise the country parks around our towns and cities.'
- In response, the Agency commissioned a programme of work entitled 'Towards a Country Park Renaissance,' guided by an Advisory panel.
- They commissioned the Urban Parks Forum to do a health check of country parks.
 - 273 identified
 - The best doing well and improving but a large number in decline
- It helped to stimulate new discussion and activity on the relevance of country parks today and in the future

Recommendations made in 2004 report:



- Support the development of the **country parks network** into a national forum for the discussion and exchange of information;
- Develop a **country parks website** to promote and disseminate good practice within the country parks 'community';
- Compile **practitioners guidance** and a self-audit database for inclusion on the country parks website;
- Secure the **long-term competencies of country parks staff** and the **commitment of local authorities to the wider social worth** of country parks;
- Identify **funding and income generation opportunities** for country parks and promote them through the network and website.

Relevance of country parks today - An Ecosystem Services approach



- Ecosystem services - provides us with a systematic framework to:
 - “conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations”
- These are the goods and services provided by ecosystems, i.e. by the natural environment. They include:
 - Supporting Services
 - Provisioning Services
 - Regulating Services
 - Cultural Services



Supporting Services:

The basics for a healthy natural environment and include:

- the nutrient cycle
- formation of soil
- production of oxygen
- the water cycle

Country Parks provide these services within a green infrastructure network servicing and protecting urban areas and populations in particular

Regulating Services:

These are the basis for survival, reliant on supporting services including:

- air quality regulation
- climate regulation
- flood regulation
- erosion control
- water purification and waste treatment
- disease control
- pest control
- pollination
- natural hazard regulation

Provisioning Services:

The products obtained from ecosystems and also the basis for survival:

- food
- fibre
- fuel
- genetic resources
- biochemicals, natural medicines, and pharmaceuticals
- ornamental resources
- fresh water



Cultural services

Important to human well-being, the economy and social cohesion. They include:

- a biodiverse environment
- inspiration through contact with nature and landscape
- mental and physical health
- recreation and tourism
- knowledge (traditional and formal)
- education and life-long learning
- cultural heritage
- spiritual and religious values
- aesthetic values
- social interaction and reducing isolation
- sense of place

Country Parks provide the perfect balance of conservation and recreation with enabling staff to make this happen.

Why do we want more people to enjoy the natural environment?

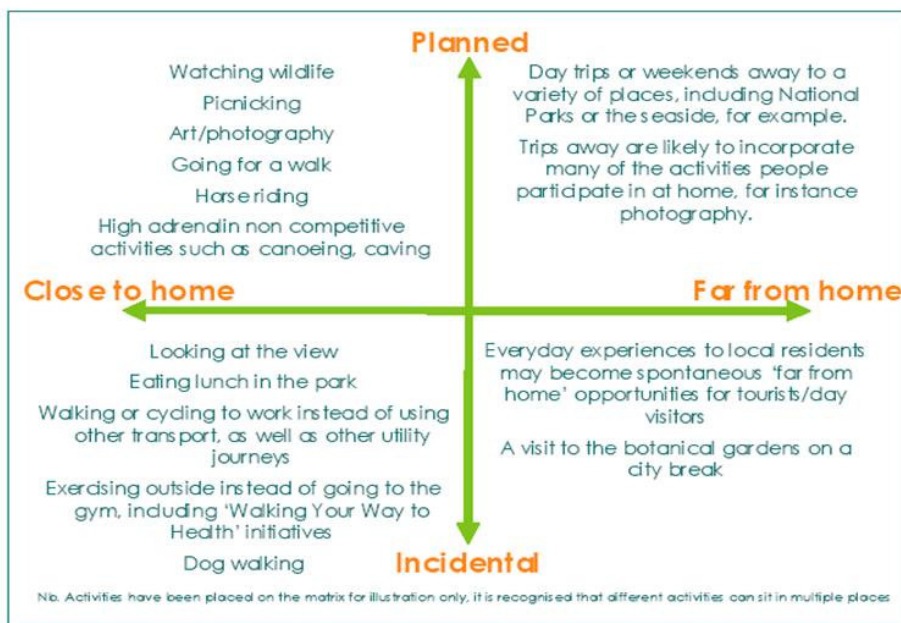


- To improve understanding and awareness about the importance of the environment and how biodiversity contributes to its future;
- To encourage people to want to act to improve the environment;
- To improve the quality of life for more people through better health and well-being;
- To support the economy through leisure tourism.

Spectrum of places and activities



Defining outdoor recreation





Where do the 430 country parks fit?

- 44% of land area of all country parks in England is in the Green Belt and 22% in other urban fringe areas.
- 88% of England's population live within or adjacent to Green Belt or other urban fringe areas.
- Only 1% of Green Belt land is made up of Country Parks with key facilities (compared to 6% being Open Access land)
- Currently only 12% of Education Access grants within Environmental Stewardship go into the green belt land
- Having large accessible, multifunctional natural greenspaces close to where people live, i.e. Country Parks, can help address a broad range of issues.

About one third of adults in England have little or no contact with the natural environment and many more only have occasional contact: especially young, ethnic minorities, low incomes.





- Obesity levels have doubled in last 10 years for 6 year olds – and trebled for 15 years olds.
- Obesity costs the national economy £7 billion per year.
- 70% of the population are not active enough to benefit their health. Doubles risk of diabetes, heart disease, stroke and bowel cancer.

Declining mental health



- Mental illness affects 1 in 6 of the adult population
- 1 in 5 under 16yr olds have a mental disorder
- By 2020 the WHO claims that depression will be the second most prevalent cause of ill health
- The total cost to the economy is £77 billion
- Each year stress from work costs employers £3.75 Billion

● **The nation's mental health is in decline**
Accessing the outdoors can help to reverse this trend

• Source: Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2002

*Source: Henley Centre interviews, 2003. A countryside for Health and Wellbeing, C&H, The economic impact of recreation and tourism in the English countryside, Henley Centre, PCC 2004

Wellbeing

"The countryside provides people with that vital sense of freedom and escape from the pressures of everyday life"

Energy deficit:

52% of people agreed 'I am so tired in the evenings I often don't have the energy to do much' compared with 46% in 2001

Quality of life:

Outdoor recreation contributes to self esteem, reduces anxiety and provides inspiration



- **The increasing focus on the importance of wellbeing and quality of life**

• More risk averse



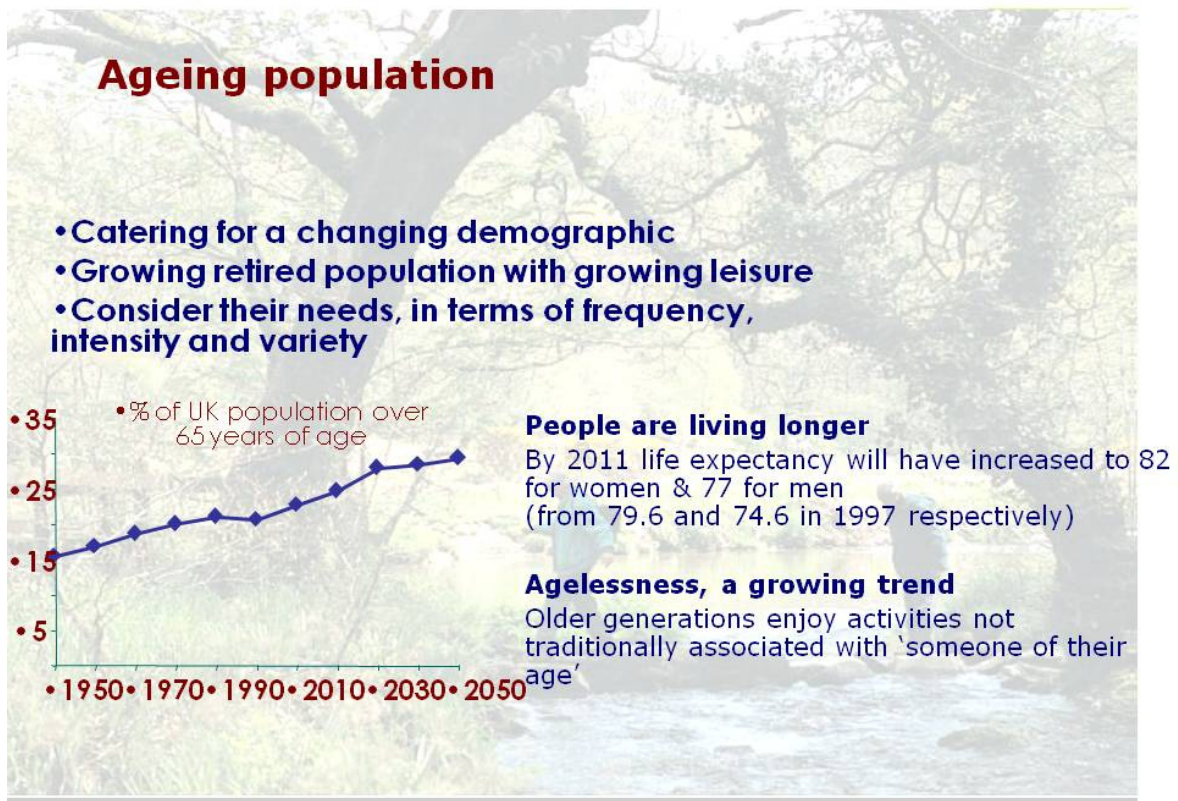
• Children today are less likely to play outdoors unsupervised than their parents and much more so than their grandparents.

- Mostly due to fears of:
- Stranger danger
- Traffic
- Accidents and injury
- Being bullied
- Getting into trouble with the 'wrong sort'.



The importance of natural play and the risks of not encouraging it.

- Play is a vital part of a child's healthy fulfilled development.
- Direct experiences with nature help children to make sense of the world.
- Childhood experiences of the natural environment influence adult values and behaviours
- Children need to have these experiences before about 11 years old to sustain adult engagement.



What does access to green space offer?



- **More active, healthier lives** - People on the same income, who lived closer to green space were more physically active, lived longer, were less overweight or obese and had less heart disease than those with less access. (Bristol study, Lancet 2009)
- **Reduced weight gain** - Greater opportunities for exercise provided by close proximity to a park reduced weight gain in teenagers by 5kg over a 2 year period (U.S. study 2008)
- **Lower death rates** - In areas of Glasgow amongst lower income groups where green space provision is poor, 1,300 extra deaths occurred each year (study 2008).

•Availability of Information

National Curriculum for Information and Communications Technology:

•Young people increasingly use technological tools to enable rapid access to ideas and experiences from a wide range of people, communities and cultures. ICT integral to National Curriculum.

Online growth in UK:

•More and more people are going online in the home, prices are decreasing.

Internet use in the UK:

•Over 60 per cent of the UK population have internet access. On average they spend 10 hrs a month surfing.



- **“Leisure and tourism decisions are increasingly researched online”** If decisions about outdoor recreation are being made in the wider context of competing leisure activities, outdoor propositions need to be online as well; even if its just ideas for things to do...(Impact of outdoor recreation, Henley centre p. 24)



Reducing our carbon footprint

- **Dilemma of promoting use of the natural environment without adding to our carbon footprint;**
- **Public transport alternatives expensive, infrequent; not convenient;**
- **Opportunities for walking and cycling are often not good enough;**
- **People are still wedded to the use of the private motor vehicle**
- **Leisure travel only contributes a small amount to the UK's carbon footprint**

Challenge: To shift from a mainly indoor based sedentary and increasingly obese society to an outdoor active society

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- **Understand behavioural triggers;**
- **Inspire, excite, motivate;**
- **Promote convenient, easy to do;**
- **Information – tell them and tell again, and again;**
- **Market to older generation;**
- **Re-introduce more play for children, tackle fears;**
- **Remove barriers for those who struggle;**
- **Provide a range of quality places that are linked by walking and cycling routes**

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We need to consider an "Outside In" approach.

Facilities as a visitor hub can broaden audience profile considerably.

But if we want to make a difference we need to provide:

- Choice
- Convenience
- Communication

The Country Parks' Offer



- Country parks offer unique resources for narrowing the divide between town and country.
- They deliver a range of benefits, services and recreational opportunities to diverse and varied visitors at a comparatively low cost.
- They address many issues: health; social inclusion; culture; sport; the arts; education and life-long learning; sustainability; biodiversity and active citizenship
- They have an innovative and adaptable workforce that connects with it's customers

Multifunctionality

Combining different functions on the same piece of land



Engaging children and families Park Hall Country Park and NNR near Stoke



- Helping to deliver our "One Million Children Outdoors" Campaign providing access to nature
- Pilot project working with local schools to develop and design family friendly trails in the park
- World Environment Day 2009 saw hundreds of children visit and take part in an activities



A New Country Park within a Growth Area



- Rushmere Park was recently purchased by Central Beds Council in partnership with the Greensand Trust and Chalk Arc funding
- Abuts Stockgrove Country Park and Oak Wood, together making a new open access facility (400 acres) with a strong commercial emphasis to support other sites in the area
- Site will be used as an outdoor pursuits centre with camping and adrenaline sports in keeping with the surroundings
- Aim to tap into schools and redirect them here instead of travelling long distances to the Lake District or Wales

• Contact: Clive Beckett
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Raising Standards for Visitors to Natural Greenspace



Natural England expects that natural greenspace delivers:

- to an **Accessibility and Quantity Standard** to ensure provision both close to home and within sustainable transport distances, i.e. Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt)
- to **Service Standards** for core services and facilities for each site type; and;
- to a national **Quality Standard**, i.e. the Green Flag Award scheme.



Contact:



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David Solly's presentation slides



Country Parks - the strengths



Country Parks – the challenges



Country Parks Accreditation - Purpose



- Service standard for Country Parks and 'related sites'
- Confirms the core facilities and services
- Enhances the status established by the 1968 Countryside Act
- Reclaims the Country Park 'brand'
- Demonstrates to funders/politicians that a site is meeting expectations

Raising Standards for Visitors to Natural Greenspace



Natural England expects that natural greenspace delivers:

- to an **Accessibility and Quantity Standard** to ensure provision both close to home and within sustainable transport distances, i.e. Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt)
- to **Service Standards** for core services and facilities for each site type; and;
- to a national **Quality Standard**, i.e. the Green Flag Award scheme.



Alignment with other Schemes



Country Parks Accreditation



The Green Flag Award

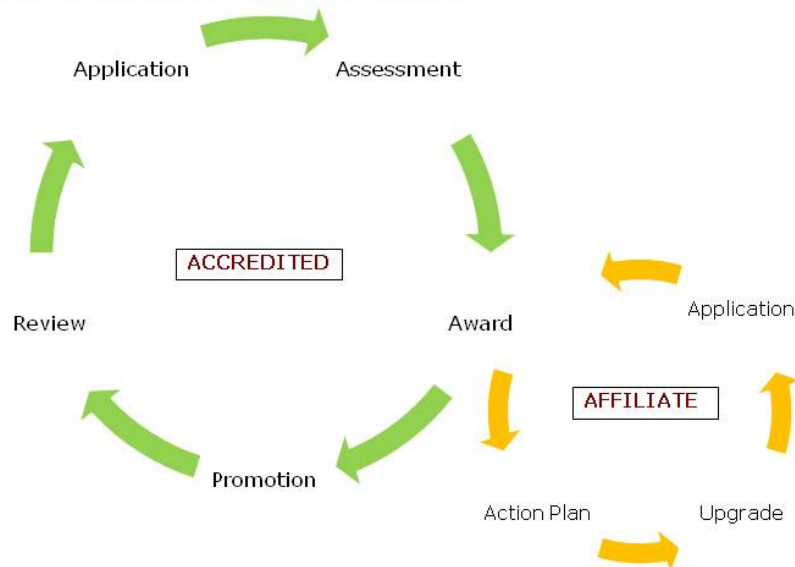




Scheme Criteria

- Area
- Accessibility
- Character
- Facilities
- Links to local communities and neighbourhoods
- Links to the wider countryside
- Management
- Activities
- Information and interpretation

The Accreditation Process





Scheme Criteria

Pushing the boundaries: equality standards

2A3 (Essential)

- Evidence of a Site access plan in place that has been developed following an access audit and addresses the requirements of the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) to ensure indoor and outdoor facilities provided are inclusive and accessible
- Evidence of commitment to Equality Standards or equivalent level of delivery

2B3 (Desirable)

Evidence of progress towards the next level of equality standards or equivalent level of delivery





Accredited Country Parks



Coombe Country Park

Chadkirk Estate

Cudmore Grove Country Park

Daventry Country Park

Etherow Country Park

*Grand Western Canal Country Park
and LNR*

Ham Hill Country Park

Mersey Vale Nature Park

Oakwell Hall

Reddish Vale Country Park

Rufford Abbey Country Park

Sandwell Valley Country Park

Stover Country Park and LNR

Teggs Nose Country Park

Waseley hills Country Park

Woodgate Valley Country Park

Worcester Woods Country Park

Yeovil Country Park

Country Parks Accreditation



- Administration by Natural England's Incentive Scheme Services
- Phone line 0300 060 1115
- Dedicated e-mail cpas@naturalengland.org.uk
- Link from Natural England website:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/countryparks/accreditation/default.aspx>



Accreditation Study Day

- **Hosts:** Worcestershire County Council
- **Where?** Worcester Woods Country Park
- **When?** Thursday 18th March 2010

Standards & Quality – why are they important?

Why have accreditation?

- *the benefits, the roots and development of the scheme*
- *the relationship to other schemes, such as the Green Flag Award*

An overview of the process

- *what you need to do to submit an application*
- *what happens after application and after accreditation*

Workshops

- A real application workshop using the Worcester Woods one as a model
 - *Looking at what was used as evidence.*
 - *insight into what assessors are looking for*
 - *Exploring how people can demonstrate their site meets the requirements.*
- Site surgery



Role for Greenspace Managers?

- Raise awareness of the Scheme, its relevance and value
- If you manage relevant sites, lead by example - **please apply!**
- Promote scheme to site managers – encourage sign up
- Encourage accredited sites to display the logo and certificates

Continuing support: Country Parks Network



New website now open

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/countryparks/countryparksnetwork/default.aspx>

*(Network Members advised to check
that site details are correct)*

Contact:



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Country Parks Accreditation Scheme Administration
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Country Parks Network
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www.naturalengland.org.uk

Paul Todd's presentation slides



Paul Todd – Scheme Manager



Supporters

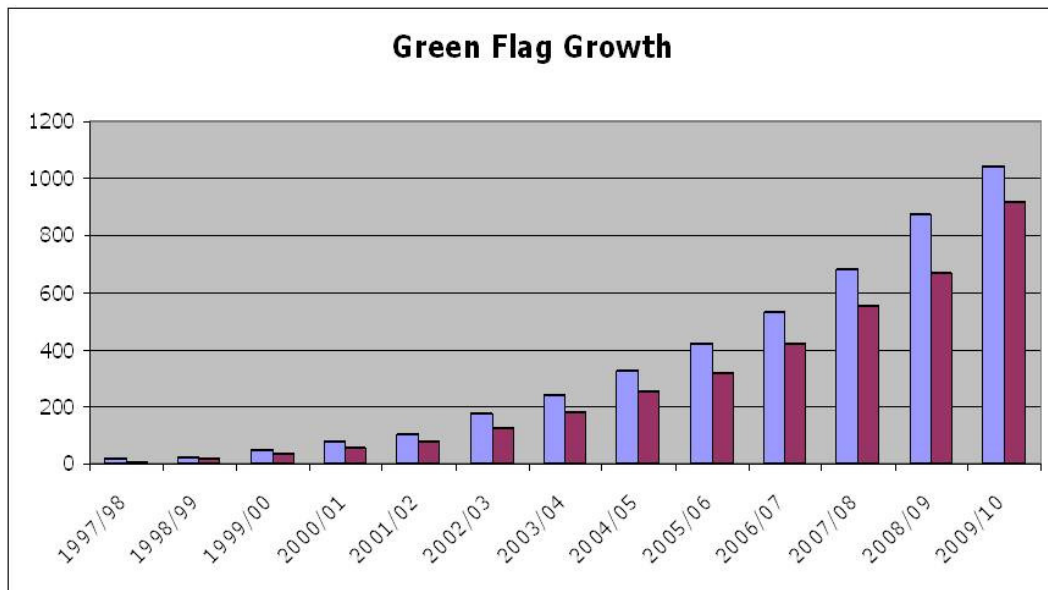


Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



COMISIWN
DYLUNIO
CYMRU





2009 Green Flag Award

	Applications	Change from 2008	Winners	Change from 2008
England	988	+17%	871	22%
Wales	36	+63%	30	58%
Scotland	15	+150%	10	100%
Northern Ireland	5	+66%	4	33%
Total	1044	+20%	915	24%



2009 Green Pennant Award

	Applications	Change from 2008	Winners	Change from 2008
England	80	+25%	76	29%
Wales	20	+25%	19	36%
Scotland	1	-	1	N/A
Total	101	+28%	96	31%



2009 Green Heritage Site Accreditation

	Applications	Change from 2008	Winners	Change from 2008
England	60	+15%	46	10%



Country Parks

- 2004 38
- 2009 136

Specific Guidance to be developed



SEGMENT	BENEFITS & NEEDS	CORE ACTIVITIES	WHERE
The Great Outdoors	Fresh air/exercise, to feel fit	Dog walking, jogging, walking & cycling	Especially woodland & parks
The Sanctuary	To feel calm, peaceful, relaxed	Sitting, walking, meditating, fishing	Especially nature reserves & water parks
The Playground	Excitement & fun	Playing – swings, ducks, events, kids footy	Especially parks & playgrounds
Team Spirit	Connecting with adults, socialising & bonding	Team sport, BBQ/picnics, romance	Especially parks & commons
The Dis-engaged	Potentially: Health, exercise, relaxation, bonding, fun...	Potentially walking, events...	Potentially any green space, but especially parks



Judging Process

- Sites assessed by qualified judges
- Sites that scored over 70% last round and have held a Flag for 2 years – assessed every 2 years
- Mystery shopping



Benefits of Engaging with Green Flag Award

- Opportunity to benchmark
- Sets a standard to aspire to
- Visible measure of achievement
- Secure and maintain funding
- Focus for staff and community
- Helps everyone to understand standards that should be achieved
- Opportunity to promote site
- Complementary to Country Park Accreditation





Greater Public Awareness

- Stronger understanding of the Award
- Raise public awareness
- Potential to include communities in the monitoring of parks throughout the year as part of the process
- New website






Vote for Best Green Flag Award Site

You are here: [Home](#) > [Get Involved](#) > [Vote for Best Green Flag Award Site](#)

Find a Green Flag Award Site to Vote For

Top 10 Parks

- **Duncan Down**
Duncan Down is the largest green space in Whitstable. Originally earmarked for housing in the 1930's, the land now provides opportunities for local people to walk with friends, sit, relax, listen to the birds, look out for wildlife, appreciate the magnificent view across the coastline of Whitstable Bay, slow the pace of life, play sports and walk the dog. The site now enjoys extended Village Green status which serves to protect its 23 hectares for current and future generations. The woodland, sc...
Vote total for this site: 13
- **Richmond Park**
Richmond Park, at almost 1000 hectares (2500 acres), is the largest and wildest of the Royal Parks. Home to around 650 free roaming deer. The pastoral landscape of hills, woodlands, ponds, gardens and grasslands set amongst ancient trees offers a peaceful respite to visitors. The Park is designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR), a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). It is a haven for other types of wildlife, many species of bird thrive in the P...
Vote total for this site: 5
- **Stanley Park**
Stanley Park is the borough's most sizable and significant park and at 256 acres, it provides one third of Blackpool's green space. The Grade II listed site has enjoyed continued popularity since its creation in the 1920's and contains everything that any local community or visitor could possibly wish for. There is a dazzling array of ornamental gardens, lakes, woodlands as well as a number of significant historical landmarks such as the Cocker Memorial Clock Tower and Art Deco Café. The park als...
Vote total for this site: 4

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY

Benefits of Judging

- Opportunity to learn from others
- Share their experience
- See how others deliver quality sites
- See best practice in action
- Experience other types of sites
- Training

Green Flag Award Organisations

Committed to promoting and celebrating GFA
Undertakes self-assessment of its parks and green space
Committed to engaging user views on a regular basis
Committed to exploring how communities could be involved in the assessment
Committed to management improvement
Committed to a mix of judging approaches



Green Flag 2020

- At least half the parks and green space meet the standard
- Great parks and green space within equal reach of poorer communities
- Management shared by highly skilled professionals working in partnership with engaged communities
- Parks and green space services valued as being at the heart of sustainable towns and cities



Liz Nether's presentation slides

Adding Value to Your Country Park

Case study of
Worcester Woods and Waseley Hills
Country Parks

Liz Nether 23 November 2009

www.worcestershire.gov.uk



[Slideshow Title - edit in Headers & Footers]

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www.worcestershire.gov.uk















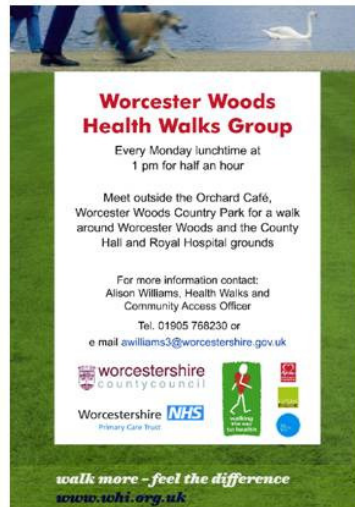


**Work done by
offenders as part of
their community order**



West Mercia
Probation Trust

 **worcestershire**
county council





Bob Bleakley's presentation slides

No slides available

Eirwen Hopwood's presentation slides

West Lothian Council

Property Services

Countryside Section

November 2009

Eirwen Hopwood

Countryside Manager

West Lothian Council delivers

westlothian.gov.uk



West Lothian
Council

West Lothian District

- 2008 Population 169,000
- Predicted to rise by 111% by 2018 to 184,000
- Rapidly growing younger population

West Lothian Council delivers

westlothian.gov.uk



West Lothian
Council

West Lothian Council's 6 key Priorities:

- Improving opportunities for young people
- Strengthening the local economy
- Improving health and well-being
- Protecting the environment and communities
- Planning for population growth
- Maximising the efficiency of Council services

West Lothian Council delivers

westlothian.gov.uk



West Lothian
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Countryside Section Strategic Statement

"To provide a better quality of life for those living in and visiting West Lothian by encouraging greater participation in formal and informal recreational and educational activities, within a safe environment ideally situated to serve the growing population of West Lothian.

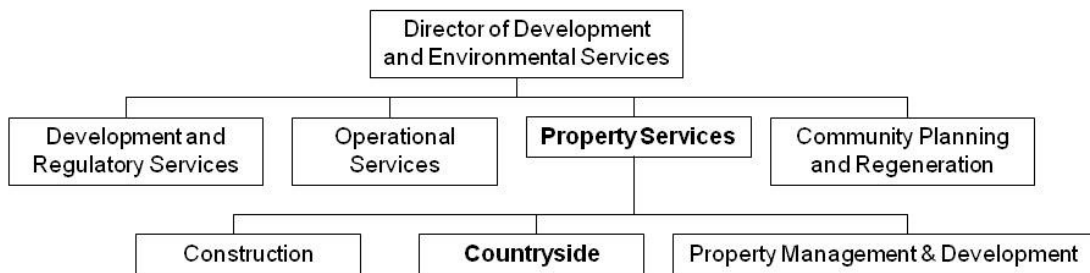
To manage sustainable land holdings and to seek to achieve greater appreciation and enjoyment of West Lothian's countryside, by nurturing lifelong learning and healthy lifestyles for all."

West Lothian Council delivers

westlothian.gov.uk



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- 45 FTE posts
- 35 full time permanent staff members
- 8 part time receptionists
- 7 temporary contracted staff (who work 168 man weeks between them).

West Lothian Council delivers

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West Lothian
Council

Country Parks

- Beecraigs – 321ha (913 acres)
- Polkemmet – 68ha (169 acres)
- Almondell & Calderwood – 90ha (227 acres)
- Plus 868ha additional countryside

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Almondell & Calderwood Country Park



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West Lothian
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Almondell & Calderwood Country Park



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Polkemmet Country Park



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Polkemmet Country Park



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Beecraigs Country Park



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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Beecraigs



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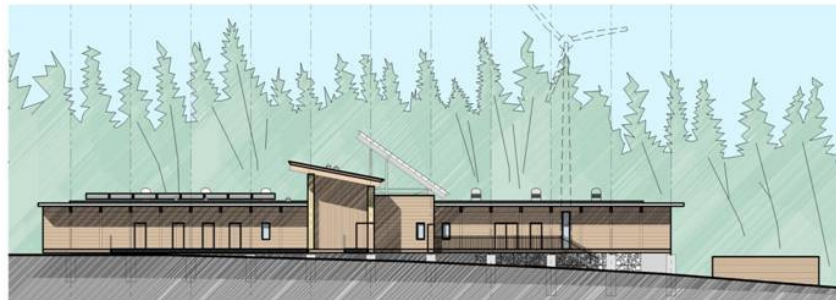
Beecraigs



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Council



Key Achievements and Outputs 2008/09

- 3 Visitor Centres open 7 days a week, 361 days
- 3 Country Park visitor numbers total 781, 390
- 756 sessions in outdoor pursuits. 5,631 participants
- 11% of the sessions delivered are delivered to Social Inclusion Groups
- Gorge walking & snowboarding introduced in 2008
- Annual fishery rod number total of 4553
- Caravan & camping 15% increase in bed nights
- 450m³ sawn timber from Sawmill
- In 2008/9 over £700,000 income generated from 8 business areas

West Lothian Council delivers

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West Lothian Council

Performance

Currently report on 23 Performance Indicators

- 6 are public performance PIs

New Service Initiatives for 2009/10

- Volunteer/friends groups
- Staff contributions sessions
- Pilot of the Green Flag Self Assessment
- Trial use of Placemaker

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**West Lothian
Council**

Customer Consultation

4 methods used to capture customer comments & feedback these are:

- Customer questionnaires (12 activity/function areas)
- Suggestion boxes in each of the 3 Visitor Centres
- Comments card's
- Web site online survey.

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**West Lothian
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Countryside Section



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