

National Access Forum Written Contributions

NAFW 79: 5 November 2024

Introduction

This note is collated and edited by NRW from submissions from Forum members and NRW staff prior to National Access Forum Meetings to facilitate the sharing of information.

Contents

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.....	2
Welsh Government: Designated Landscapes & Countryside Access Branch (DLCA).....	3
Access Reform.....	3
Access Improvement Grant (AIG)	4

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

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The National Park Authority has worked closely in partnership with Pembrokeshire County Council and other agencies for many years. The partnership is known as Greenways and meets regularly to focus on sustainable transport improvements in the coast and countryside of the National Park and wider county of Pembrokeshire. The Park funds 50% of the Greenways Officer post.

The Pembrokeshire Coast is generally a linear coastal park with the National Trail – the Pembrokeshire Coast Path - running through it. This makes longer distance walking more challenging in terms of return journeys. The railway network only provides limited access in the south of the National Park, so our starting point was to identify where the service bus routes were and then over a period of years we were able to fill in the gaps and reach the more remote peninsulas/headlands with bespoke seasonal bus services. Names such as the Puffin Shuttle, Celtic Coaster, Poppit Rocket, Strumble Shuttle and Coastal Cruiser help to promote them. Keeping these services operational with the funding cuts has been an increasing challenge in recent years and the Fflecsi Bws service has helped to provide cover. These services also help the local resident communities many of which had lost their bus services in the 1960/70s.

We were able to promote the concept of “Bus Out - Walk Back” to help prevent multiple car journeys to pick up and drop off groups of walkers and this also reduces congestion on the minor road network.

Each year with Pembrokeshire County Council, we publish a Coastal Bus Timetable Booklet and include it in the National Park Authority’s free visitor newspaper Coast to Coast. Promoting awareness of these services is as important as their provision. Most of our visitors come to the National Park by car and are not confident in leaving the car behind and taking the bus during their stay.

The Park Authority also makes a financial contribution each year to public transport services and sustainable transport initiatives. Over £40,000 is allocated to fund the coastal bus services and a contribution of £7,000 is made to the Tenby Park and Ride scheme.

The Celtic Coaster (service 403 for St Davids Peninsula) had 28,939 passengers in 2023/24.

Poppit Rocket/ Fflecsi Service (service 405 runs via coast between Fishguard and Cardigan) had 5,603 passengers.

The Coastal Cruiser (service 387/88 for Angle Peninsula) had 6,986 passengers.

The National Park Authority now has an e-bike hire scheme up and running at its Visitor Centre at St Davids and we are working with PCC to explore further roll out of e-bike scheme into the National Park.

National Park Authority recently commissioned a consultant to research traffic and parking issues affecting the National Park, to identify strategic approaches for reducing the negative impact of traffic and parking on the landscape and communities. The resulting Access and Travel Management Strategy will guide future policy and management approaches.

Welsh Government: Designated Landscapes & Countryside Access Branch (DLCA)

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Access Reform

Our intention remains to increase opportunities for all people to access the outdoors, reduce complexity for making changes and ensure responsible recreation.

We have had a very busy legislative programme this Senedd Term. As a result, implementation of much of the access reforms has been constrained because the majority of reforms require primary legislation. Work is continuing to progress on some of the access reforms, where existing internal resources allow.

The Digital Mapping Working Group was formed earlier this summer. Chaired by DLCA, the members are drawn from LAs, NPs, NRW and WG's DataMapWales (DMW). Its second meeting took place on 19 September. DMW intend to produce a single digital map for Wales from the existing datasets. DMW will draft and manage this map on their website, where it will act as a working copy which can be used (in combination with various other datasets) by the LAs, NPs and other stakeholders. Two virtual stakeholder events will be held in early 2025 where the vision and process can be better explained, stakeholders can ask questions, and the next steps can be communicated.

The Legislation (Procedure, Publication and Repeals) (Wales) Bill has its Stage 1 reading in the Senedd in October. The Bill is focused on improving the accessibility of the law and it makes some important adjustments to how legislation is published and scrutinised. The Bill no longer includes a repeal of sections 53, 54, 55 and 56 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This was originally proposed as those sections had never been commenced (in England or in Wales), and at the time of the consultation the UK Government's stated policy was to repeal those sections. The Welsh Government had the same policy. In March 2023 the UK Government suddenly announced a change of its position and subsequently commenced sections 53 to 56 of the 2000 Act in relation to England. Whilst not affecting the Welsh Government's position that those sections will not be commenced in relation to Wales, it affected the continuing inclusion of those sections in the Bill. This is because the criteria for inclusion of repeals (that they are no longer of practical utility or benefit) could no longer be demonstrated.

Access Improvement Grant (AIG)

Between April 2022 – April 2024, the AIG has delivered a total of **498 projects**

- over **124 km** of public rights of way have been improved
- **459** projects include physical improvements
- **49** projects specifically target less able users
- **87** projects focus on removing barriers
- **138** projects focused on promotion or information materials.

The current round of AIG ends in March 2025. No commitments for April 2025 can currently be made as our budget allocation for next year is still unknown.

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