

Brecon Beacons Park Society, registered charity 1180841

Statement of Affairs at 31 October 2020

	Notes	£	2019 £
Bank balances		27,019 =====	20,763 =====
Represented by:			
Unrestricted Funds			
General Fund		19,800	14,420
Designated Funds	1	5,869 -----	4,993 -----
		25,669 -----	19,413 -----
Restricted Funds	2	1,350	1,350
Total Funds		----- 27,019 =====	----- 20,763 =====

The CIO has no other assets and no liabilities.

The Receipts and Payments Account and the Statement of Affairs were approved by the Executive Committee of the CIO on 7 April 2021 and signed on its behalf

Martin Buckle, Chairman & trustee

Ben Sladen, Treasurer and trustee

Independent reviewer's report to the trustees of Brecon Beacons Park Society

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the Society you are responsible for the preparation of the Accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 (the Act).

Independent reviewer's statement

I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the review giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the Society as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the Accounts (on this and on 2 other pages) do not accord with those records.

I have no concerns and have across no other matters in connection with the review to which attention should be drawn in this report in order that a proper understanding of the Accounts may be reached.

Signed: J. Goreing
Qualification: ACCA MBA
Address: Llanfair, Crickhowell, NP8 1RB
Date: 7 April 2021

Brecon Beacons Park Society, a CIO

Receipts and Payments Account for the year ended 31 October 2020.

		Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £ Note 6	Total for year £	Period ended 31 October 2019 £ Note 1(c)
	Notes				
RECEIPTS					
Membership income					
Members' subscriptions		11,259	0	11,259	10,894
		-----	-----	-----	-----
Other income					
Gift Aid receipts		1,882		1,882	2,278
Interest		33		33	133
Navigation training	2	170		170	200
Donations		1,774		1,774	1,353
		-----	-----	-----	-----
		3,859	0	3,859	3,764
		-----	-----	-----	-----
TOTAL RECEIPTS		15,118	0	15,118	14,858
		=====	=====	=====	=====
PAYMENTS					
Services for Members					
Guided walks programme	2	1,529		1,529	3,235
The Beacon magazine		2,182		2,182	1,689
Talks and Events	2	380		380	971
Walks Leaders, training & equipment		1,375		1,375	1,483
		-----	-----	-----	-----
		5,466	0	5,466	7,378
		-----	-----	-----	-----
Collaborations with					
AfWDL and CNP	3	1,067		1,067	2,055
BBNPA	4	0		0	119
		-----	-----	-----	-----
		1,067	0	1,067	2,174
		-----	-----	-----	-----
Oversight on Projects	5	54		54	280
Payments from Restricted funds			0	0	77,226
		-----	-----	-----	-----
Total Payments on Charitable Activities		6,587	0	6,587	87,058
		-----	-----	-----	-----
Administration					
Annual General Meeting	2	179		179	574
Executive Committee expenses		1,181		1,181	2,110
General expenses		915		915	1,697
		-----	-----	-----	-----
		2,275	0	2,275	4,381
		-----	-----	-----	-----
TOTAL PAYMENTS		8,862	0	8,862	91,439
		=====	=====	=====	=====
SURPLUS (DEFICIT) FOR YEAR		6,256	0	6,256	(76,581)
Bank balances as at 31 October 2019		19,413	1,350	20,763	97,344
		-----	-----	-----	-----
Bank balances as at 31 October 2020		25,669	1,350	27,019	20,763
		=====	=====	=====	=====

The CIO has no other assets and no liabilities.

This statement should be read in conjunction with the Notes on the following page.

Brecon Beacons Park Society, a CIO

Notes to the Receipts and Payments Account for the year ended 31 October 2020.

- 1(a) This statement has been prepared according to the date on which monies were received and payments made.
- 1(b) The cost of items of equipment for £500 or less is expensed on purchase; there were no such purchases in the period.
- 1(c) The amounts shown for the period ended 31 October 2019 are for the period from 26 November 2018 (the date the CIO was formed).
- 2 Navigation courses, Guided Walks and Events are provided primarily for members; all are open to non-members subject to limits on numbers attending.

The Annual General Meeting is open to anybody.
- 3 Alliance for Welsh Designated Landscapes (AfWDL) and Campaign for National Parks (CNP)
- 4 Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA)
- 5 The CIO is represented on the Management Boards for the Brecon Beacons Dark Sky Reserve and for the Forest Fawr GeoPark.
- 6 Restricted Funds are balances remaining from donations and grants for specific purposes, less amounts expended on those purposes.

NOTES to the Statement of Affairs as at 31 October 2021

1. **Designated Funds** represent amounts set aside for certain purposes but which can be returned to the General Fund at any time, including the Life Fund - £3,809.

During the year, The Society received £1,060 in memory of Steve Horner 'who loved the Beacons'. This sum will be allocated to a project.

2. **Restricted Funds** are balances remaining from donations and grants for specific purposes, less amounts expended on those purposes.

The balance comprises:

	£
Gunpowder Works scheme	1,350
	=====

Brecon Beacons Park Society

Friends of the Brecon Beacons



Cymdeithas Parc Bannau Brycheiniog

Cyfeillion Bannau Brycheiniog

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



Photo Lee Major

Charitable Incorporated Organisation No. 1180841
www.breconbeaconsparkSociety.org

Trustees

The persons who served as Trustees during the period from 1st January 2020 to the 31st December 2020 are :-

Martin Buckle	Hon. Chairman
Ben Sladen	Hon. Treasurer
David Thomas	Hon. Secretary
James Wilson	Vice Chair
Janet Callear	
Richard Chandler	
Elizabeth Gibbs	
Nicholas Groombridge	

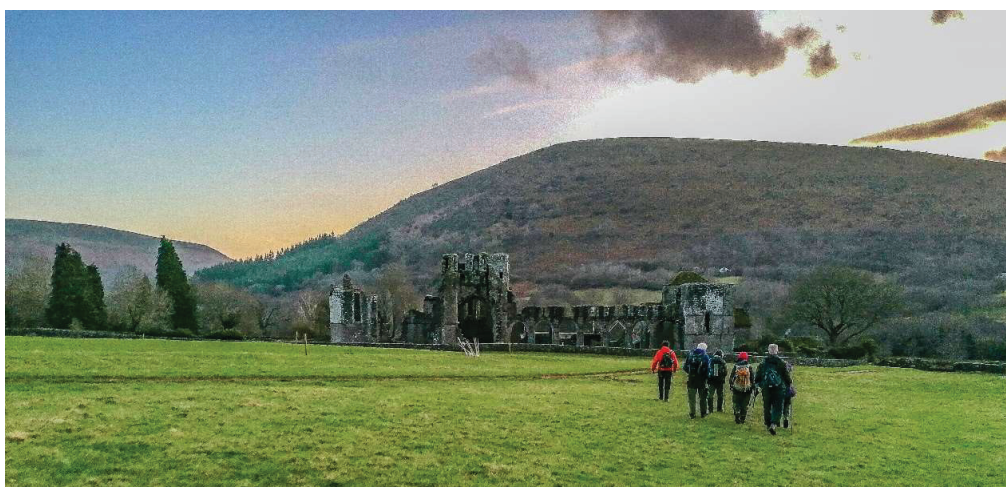
At the General Meeting held on 8th June 2019 the above were elected Trustees and Chris Barber stood down as a Trustee.

Due to the COVID epidemic there was no General Meeting in 2020 and the Trustees remained in post.

Elizabeth Gibbs, Ben Sladen and Jim Wilson retire by rotation at the General Meeting and, being eligible, stand for re-election.

Executive Committee

The Committee comprises the Trustees plus Clive and Iau Counsell, Phil O'Shea and Sue Hoddell, who will be proposed as Trustees at the General Meeting in June 2021.



Chairman's Report – Martin Buckle

This is now the fifteenth Annual Report of the Society. It was disappointing last year, due to the pandemic, that we were unable to hold the AGM as planned and to present the fourteenth report to the meeting. The hard work of our Hon. Sec., David Thomas in making all the arrangements proved to be in vain, although of course we were able to publish our annual report and accounts on our website as usual.

With the uncertainty over the progression out of lockdown this year, we have opted to hold this year's AGM remotely, and are hoping that this will not prejudice attendance by our members.

We are of course now hopeful that we are all back on the road to normality, even if it's a new normality, and that the activities of our Society are able to restart in full. We look forward to being able to hold our AGM next year in a rather more conventional setting.

The Walks Programme

A lot of credit is due to those members of the Committee and of the wider Society who have made every effort to get our walks programme running again. This has been a major challenge with the need for constant adjustments as restrictions have changed.

Many thanks are due to all those involved for their tireless efforts to get things going again while keeping wholly on board with current regulations and advice. Nic and Hilary Groombridge as our Walks Secretaries have played a key role, as have Iau and Clive Counsell in co-ordinating and supporting our walks leaders.

The Walks Sub-Committee

In recognition of the workload generated by the Walks Programme, the Executive Committee took the decision early in 2021 to establish a Walks Sub-Committee. This has been meeting with great frequency in recent weeks, with representation from walks leaders and regular walkers as well as the Executive Committee. Many thanks to all involved, including, in particular Clive Counsell for agreeing to chair the Sub-Committee.

The Events Programme

Like the Walks Programme, the Events Programme has been badly affected by the pandemic. Nonetheless, restarting the programme remotely has been popular, and a good programme continues to generate a lot of interest. Much credit is due to Janet Callear, our Events Secretary, for managing this successful transition. Being able to offer some events remotely has the potential to enable those who might find it difficult to get to events to continue to participate. Nevertheless, I am sure there are many like me who will enjoy the opportunity to get together again, and who miss the conviviality of The Bear in Crickhowell.

The Executive Committee

The Committee has continued to meet remotely, generally on a six-weekly basis throughout the pandemic, with lots to discuss as the restrictions have been continuously adjusted. It has inevitably been another busy year for Committee members. We are again indebted to Ben Sladen our Treasurer for our financial management, a particularly critical role at a time of great uncertainty.

Along with all of the trustees, Phil O'Shea our Rights of Way Officer and Sue Hoddell our Minutes Secretary have regularly attended meetings of the Executive Committee over the past year. I am delighted that both Phil and Sue are now willing to also take on the role of trustees. That will make four new trustees in two years, bringing extra confidence in our ability to manage our way through whatever challenges we may face in the years ahead.

The Beacons Way

Sue Hoddell has now also taken on the role of being our Exec Member for The Beacons Way. In doing so, she is following in the footsteps of Anne Pritchard, who represented the Society on the Beacons Way Steering Group with the National Park Authority for a number of years. In handing over this role, Anne joined us for an Exec meeting in September. Anne had been on the Steering Group since its inception in 2005, and also spent several years as our Walks Secretary. Many thanks Anne for all your contributions to our efforts!

Communications

At times when face to face meetings have been few and far between, communications activity takes on a greater significance. Moving to on-line communications and social media clearly has its advantages. Many thanks to David Thomas who co-ordinates our website, and to Nic Groombridge, our Publicity and Communications Officer for keeping members informed through Twitter and Facebook. Nic has also launched a newsletter which members will receive from time-to-time.

We do nonetheless remain committed to sending material by post for those members who prefer this. And I do look forward to receiving in hard copy our colourful twice-yearly magazine - The Beacon - edited by Chris Barber. I particularly enjoyed the item about Adelina Patti and Craig-y-Nos Castle in the last edition.

The Alliance for Welsh Designated Landscapes

Through the Alliance, we meet regularly with the other Welsh National Parks Societies and other organisations with a landscape focus. In preparation for the recent Senedd elections, the Alliance collaborated with the Campaign for National Parks in drafting a document to share with the political parties, in order to influence their manifestos. We did succeed in raising the profile of national parks and were pleased see references to them in several manifestos. Nonetheless, the inclusion within the Labour Party manifesto of a proposal to create a new National Park in Wales by upgrading the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty took us by surprise. It is interesting that the addition of further areas to our designated

landscapes is recognised as a live issue, and we remain hopeful that at some point the case for the Cambrian Mountains will be accepted.

Each of the three National Parks Societies in Wales takes it in turn to administer the Alliance. The Brecon Beacons Park Society is now taking over this role from the Friends of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. We will pass it on to the Snowdonia Society in two years' time.

Liaison with the National Park Authority (NPA)

Inevitably much of the work of the Society involves liaison with the NPA. There have been lots of changes in the management of the NPA over the past year, and these have represented a challenge for us. We were sorry to see the departure in March this year of Julian Atkins, the former Chief Executive, with whom we had a good working relationship. He has been replaced temporarily by Stephanie Evans in the role of Transition Director, and it's good to report that, with her support, collaborative working is being maintained. She will in turn be replaced by Catherine Mealing-Jones, the new Chief Executive, in July. We look forward to building on our established collaboration with national park staff with Catherine and her management team.

The Historic Environment Partnership

In deepening our collaboration with the NPA, we were recently invited, along with a number of other organisations, to discussions about establishing a Historic Environment Partnership for the Brecon Beacons. Along with a number of stakeholders, we have agreed to support this, and have become members of the Core Group of the Partnership. A wider forum is also proposed. A key task will be the preparation of a Historic Environment Action Plan.

Planning Proposals

Maintaining an oversight on planning proposals will always need to be a key priority for the Society, and we are grateful to Liz Gibbs, the Society's planning lead, for her work in this respect. The NPA's Local Development Plan Preferred Strategy Revisited has given us some cause for concern, and has led us to respond to the consultation at length. We will be looking very carefully at the next stage of proposals.

The National Park Management Plan (NPMP)

The NPA launched its Issues, Vision and Objectives document for NPMP21 in January. It covers the period up to 2026. It's an interesting document with lots that we would endorse, but nonetheless does suggest some changes in direction that are not without concerns. Another comprehensive response is under preparation, and many thanks to Janet Callear for co-ordinating this.

Rights of Way

Concerns about established Rights of Way (ROW) and proposals to amend routes mean that Phil O'Shea, our ROW lead, is always busy. The pandemic has been a powerful reminder to us all about how important the ROW network is. There are currently a number of initiatives and consultations around ROWs that are adding to Phil's workload. Having put considerable effort into responding to the consultation on the NPA's ROW Improvement Plan last year, it is particularly pleasing now that the

Welsh Government has made some significant money available to carry out improvements.

Projects

It is also pleasing to be able to report that, after some hiccups, progress on the established Dark Skies and Gunpowder Works projects, on which we work with the NPA and other partners, has been resurrected over the past year. Much credit for this is due to Jim Wilson our Vice-Chair. The Fforest Fawr Geopark, continues to progress well, and many thanks again to Dilys Harlow for representing the Society on this project.

The Historic Tramroads of the Brecon Beacons

As with many other activities during the pandemic, our project to survey the National Park's tramroads has experienced some delays. The aim, in collaboration with the NPA and other partners, is to get the more important ones scheduled as ancient monuments, as well as addressing any rights of way issues. We have made a lot of progress assembling website based information, with Exec Member Richard Chandler taking the lead.

The discussions with Cadw and the three archaeological trusts that cover the National Park have now borne fruit. Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust, acting on behalf of the three, have now secured some funding from Cadw to augment the tramroad data held in the statutory Historic Environment Record, drawing on the data assembled by the Society. There will be a need to move the project forward out on site in due course, and volunteers to help with this are likely to be needed.



Membership – Ben Sladen

What a year that was. It started well enough, but the change in bank in January led to a number of standing order members, who had been members from our start in 1992, to realise that their contact with the Society had become tenuous and so resign. Then, of course COVID-19 struck, reducing our activities to those that could be carried on without direct personal contact.

Nevertheless, new members continued to arrive, more than cancelling out subsequent leavers, right through to the end of October, and membership numbers over the year did not fall as much as feared initially. Some 60 households resigned or failed to pay the sub up to the end of April, but by the year-end new members had made up most of that reduction, to 707 households for 936 members.

One matter on membership. Please always add your membership number or at least your post code when contacting us. Some family names occur several times – Williams for example 17 times.

Financial – Ben Sladen

The financial impact of COVID-19 was evident more in a sharp reduction in costs than in membership income. Your Exec switched to Zoom meetings (so no room hire or travel costs), Events came to a halt and Walks programmes were no longer necessary. This resulted in a large surplus for the year against a near breakeven previously.

The current year has seen more of the same; membership numbers are holding up well, with some leavers expressing the possibility of re-joining when our activities return to normal. Expenses continue to be low, with the prospect that the current year will show another surplus.

As a result, our financial position is healthy. The General Fund amounted to £19,800 at the year-end. Trustees have resolved that we should regard 75% of normal annual expenditure as a prudent reserve to start the new financial period – this equates to about £9,500. The principal risk to the financial future of the Society is seen as an event adverse to our reputation leading to a substantial drop in membership income. However, the scale of activities could be cut back quickly in such an event. Your committee intends to apply the excess reserves to support specific projects, yet to be identified.

Declaration

In accordance with Charity Commission requirements, the Trustees of the CIO confirm that the activities of the Society have been and are being delivered for the public benefit.



Guided Walks – Nic & Hilary Groombridge, Clive & Iau Counsell

Fortunately, the walk-leaders' annual training day took place on 2 Feb 2020 just before the COVID-19 lockdowns. Twenty-two leaders attended.

From 23 March until 16 July 2020 all walks were cancelled because of COVID-19. During that time, plans for restarting were made, and a booking system set up in to enable the walks to resume in a way that was safe for everybody. All leaders were given a Zoom talk by Allan Gibbs on changes to first aid and leading during a pandemic. They were also issued with instructions on Personal Protective Equipment and managing walks during the pandemic. All walkers were supplied with the same safety information as the leaders and walkers' contact details were kept for 14 days following walks in case anybody needed to be traced. None of our walkers informed us of any COVID-19 symptoms following walks.

Despite lots of complications with local lockdowns, a first aid course was arranged in November and eight leaders whose certificates had expired were able to renew theirs. It was limited to 8 because of COVID-19, and a bigger space than normal was used. This still leaves several leaders who need to renew, and they have been offered a course due to take place in October 2021 or earlier, COVID-19 allowing.

In the meantime, leaders with expired first aid certificates are encouraged to continue to lead if they have someone with an up to date first aid certificate with them on all their walks. This will be straightforward to organise with the present booking system.

Between 17 July and 19 December 2020, we were able to offer over 60 walks and we are very grateful to all those leaders who were able to help. In the first month, July, only 5 leaders came forward, followed over the months by a further 16. Some of these people led many walks, in particular those first five who led between them a total of 32 walks during the year. Local lockdowns caused disruption, too and we are grateful to a new leader and a returning leader who helped in their areas. Many leaders were unable to offer walks during this period because of shielding, etc.

In January 2021 a Handbook for walk leaders was compiled, which included available material and that devised especially for our leaders. The leaders will receive their copy in the post by the end of March 2021.

Also in January, all people who have been involved in leading and backmarking in the last few years were polled to check their intentions, and, considering the effect of COVID-19, it was very pleasing to find that we still have 41 active and willing leaders and 8 backmarkers looking forward to returning to the hills. In addition, we have 6 prospective leaders, and these have been invited to a free, outdoor, two-day introduction session in October 2021 led by Allan Gibbs.

For our existing leaders, night navigation training is being brought back. Together with the leaders training days, we hope that all will attend both of these at least once in every three-year period. Night navigation is intended to improve navigation whenever visibility is poor, such as fog, low cloud and white-outs. The next leaders training day is planned for December 2021. The next training course for people wishing to gain a Hill and Moorland Leader (HML) is planned for the autumn. An assessment course is expected to be held early in 2022. These are kindly subsidised by the BBPS.

Events Programme – Janet Callear

Our last Illustrated Talk In Crickhowell was more than a year ago on March 4th 2020 and as I write we are still uncertain when we will be able to meet together again at such a venue. As COVID-19 took over our lives we had to cancel a number of illustrated talks that we had planned and also a walk and talk to Tyn y Lwyn that we were all looking forward to. Initially we felt that a Zoom talk could not replace meeting together and listening to a speaker at a “proper” venue. Eventually, however, it became apparent that such was the desert we were having to live through, a Zoom talk at least provided something in the way of contact and took our minds away from the endless stream of COVID-19 news.

David Thomas has been helping out as the Zoom host – I like to imagine his home office to be more of a control centre with huge screens to be able to see the audience,

lots of meters and output gauges with their needles swinging to and fro . . .but I suspect in these days of nano-technology, it is much the same as mine – he just does it so much better! Over the year speakers have become more relaxed with the Zoom technology– as have we all – and we now have a programme of talks again to take us forward.

We are told that every cloud has a silver lining and although the atmosphere and conviviality of a cosy hotel could not be replicated, with Zoom we are able to reach many more of our members, many of whom have expressed their appreciation. We hope, then, to be able to continue with occasional Zoom talks after the COVID-19 restrictions are fully relaxed and we are meeting together again, and for as long as we get a good sized audience that properly reflects our speaker's time and efforts.

By the time you read this we hope to have been able to organise a walk to Waun Ddu, following up on the informative talk that Jake White and Dana Thomas from Natural Resources Wales gave on the restoration of this Welsh Raised Bog. Alan Bowring (National Park Authority), and Dilys Harlow will have given an associated and equally informative talk on the geomorphology of the area so that, when we are finally able to visit Waun Ddu, it is with knowledge and interest that brings it all to life.

Alun and Isobel Davies' talk made us yearn yet more for the freedom of walking the mountains, but it was a timely reminder that a satisfying walking holiday needs good planning and careful execution.

Next year then, we look forward to eventually catching up with talks and events we missed due to COVID-19 and exploring subjects and places that will be new to some of us and bring good memories back to others.

Rights of Way – Phil O'Shea

COVID-19 impacted on applications to amend ROW received from Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (NPA), reducing the number of applications to 7, compared with 17 last year. Conversely, members' reports of issues affecting ROW increased to 29, from 16 last year - perhaps due to members undertaking more local walks, finding less used paths and making the time to report problems. All these issues are posted on BBPS website.

Thanks for following the new procedures (details available from me) to report issues. Please continue to follow this practice. Receiving reports in that preferred format, I can simply relay the information to NPA, but other reports require further investigation.

Living 40+ miles from most of areas of Beacons, it's not viable for me to visit all locations of proposed variations to ROW to inspect the plans. I am grateful to those volunteering to help:-

West: -Robert Pritchard, Robin Barlow.

Central: -Nic Groombridge, Helen Fletcher.

East: - Jill Taylor, Roger White, Frank Scott. Ros Grant and Chris Playford.

Last year also saw several damaged roads, bridges and footpaths which were posted on the website. Wardens have been limited in what they have been able to do, hindered by some of the public abusing COVID-19 regulations, and either working from home or having to focus on day-to-day issues rather than ROW.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

NPA is no further forward with the Plan but will be able to provide a list of projects intended to undertake in the new financial year following the receipt of a grant from the Welsh Government. The grant of nearly £100,000 will allow NPA a range of bridge refurbishments/replacements to be undertaken. Other works are also included.

Local delivery plan

COVID-19 has delayed implementation of the plan.

Beacons Way

The Beacons Way is the NPA's flagship route albeit a creation of the Society. It is hoped that during the summer of 2021, there will be sufficient volunteers from the membership to walk the route and survey the Way's furniture and possibly renew waymarkers. Sue Hoddell has assumed the rôle of liaising with NPA. Sue reports:-

"After discussion with Lisa Lloyd ROW officer at the BBNPA it is hoped that our volunteers will get involved in the Beacons Way project. Members will be asked to join the volunteer register of the NPA so that they can receive any needed training and they can be given ID to show the validity of what they are doing. It is hoped that there will be an annual survey of the way and a report on each year's findings".

Local Access Forum

These were established by the BBNP as statutory advisory bodies and were set up as a result of the (CROW) Act 2000 to advise the National Park Authority on the improvement of public access to the land in the National Park for the purpose of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area. The Society has recently renewed its representation on the forum.

Don't Lose Your Way

Having identified over 49,000 miles (361 in Brecon Beacons) of potentially lost paths, Ramblers are now looking to prioritise those to save and develop tools that allow volunteers to do this. To support volunteers, they are working with people who have spent years saving lost paths to develop training and resources to guide their members in this process. Ramblers is keen to work with highway authorities and the national parks on trying to save the most important paths.

Welsh Government Proposals to reform access legislation.

Members know from my e-mail earlier in the year that The Government proposes to reform legislation to allow cyclists and equestrians by right to use all footpaths, rather

than look at on a case-by-case basis. 690 Members were invited to email me their experiences, eliciting a disappointing 18 responses (2.6%), covering 10 A4 pages which I have referred to Ramblers to include with their evidence. 17 members opposed the idea of joint usage.

Development and Planning – Elizabeth Gibbs

The aim of the society with respect to Development and Planning is to try to ensure that the Statutory Purposes of the National Park are upheld, in particular the first purpose: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park. We respond to proposed developments which are likely to have a detrimental visual impact and affect the tranquillity of the Park.

The pandemic has affected Development and Planning as with all other aspects of normal life. Periods of lock-down have restricted access to view sites. We have continued to object to the proposals for telecommunications masts. Of necessity they have to be sited on high points to get coverage but their impact on the landscape can be minimised by careful siting and suitable plantings to screen them, which our responses try to ensure. The statutory protection of National Parks extends to all developments affecting them even if they lie outside the designated areas. This year we responded to an application to double the height of a stack on Hirwaun Industrial Estate because of the effect on the landscape of the Park. Other applications over which we have made representations include the proposed redevelopment of Crickhowell Conservative Club as a convenience store, two applications for polytunnels, the redevelopment of barns for use as holiday cottages (where the access along narrow lanes would be a problem), and an application for seven houses outside the settlement boundary of Crickhowell.

Work continues on the new Local Development Plan (LDP) for the National Park which will be the basis for development control from 2022-2033. However, the timetable had to be revised because of the difficulties that the pandemic imposed on carrying out the community involvement strategy and consultations. In addition it was decided that the changes in socio-economic conditions meant that the new LDP would need to be amended to ensure it would be fit to guide the National Park in the post-COVID-19 world. We made formal responses to the consultations on the 'Delivery Agreement Amendment' and on the revised strategy and planning priorities set out in the document 'LDP2 Preferred Strategy Revisited'. We await the publication of the Preferred Strategy which will be followed by an 8 week period for public consultation. The Society will submit a response but it is important for anyone living in the NP to make sure they are aware of this and how their community might be affected. Monmouthshire County Council is also preparing a Replacement LDP (excluding the area within the Brecon Beacons National Park). We have sent in a response to their 'Growth and Spatial Options Paper' focusing particularly on the areas affecting the National Park. The Monmouthshire Preferred Strategy Consultation and Second call for candidate sites is due in June - July.

The National Park is a large area to cover, and we would appreciate help particularly for following up applications in the west of the Park. We can be contacted via the society website if you become aware of an application of concern.



Photo Rubin Eynon

Fforest Fawr Geopark – Dilys Harlow

Geological time, which considers millions of years, is not unduly bothered by a missing year or two, so most projects have continued slowly.

The Geopark Discovery Point, on the terrace at Craig y Nos Country Park, is now completed and open. This consists of a magnificent 3D circular bronze relief map of the surrounding area, three handsome information steles and 3 new geologically decorated circular table tops.

The Geotours smartphone app, featuring excursions to Penwyllt, Cribarth, Mynydd Illtud and Garn Goch, should be launched in June.

The original Geotrails have been revised, are awaiting their Welsh versions, and will be available later this year.

Needless to say, the Geopark has not been revalidated and there are no current plans to do so until travel restrictions allow. The Geopark Festivals in 2020 and 2021 were obviously cancelled. We hope that the next 12 months will allow more activities. There is more information on the website:- <https://www.fforestfawrgeopark.org.uk/>



The Dark Sky Project – Jim Wilson

Partnership Working

Last year's report highlighted an existential threat to our International Dark Sky Reserve (IDSR). Namely the National Park Authority's (NPA) inability to develop the mandatory Annual Report for the International Dark Skies Authority (the status awarding body). This was due to the only member of staff with the knowledge to be able to write this report not having her contract renewed by the NPA. This decision having been made with no consultation with partners who would be affected.

Our IDSR was rescued by the voluntary sector, with members of the Dark Sky Board (DSB) writing and submitting the Annual Report to the IDA on behalf of the NPA. This involved several meetings with supportive members of the NPA Board and with its Chair to ensure that necessary information was provided by the Park. The IDA were happy with the report and the Society have subsequently had a meeting with the acting Chief executive of the Park to ensure that this situation does not recur. The Society's Vice Chair is now Chair of the Dark Sky Board and considerable bridge building with the Park has been carried out. The result of this is that the relationship with the Park on dark skies is now more or less back to the previous level of good

partnership working. We now have a full member of the NPA Board on the DSB and have strong support from other members.

However, we still have work to do in raising the profile of Dark Skies and the benefits of controlling light pollution in the minds of all the members of the NPA Board. To that end the DSB have been invited to present to the Park's Strategy Forum. Additionally the DSB have given a well-considered and evidenced response to the Park's consultation on the developing National Park Management Plan, arguing the case for recognition of the light pollution issue and the multiple benefits of controlling it. The evidence included references to multiple recent research reports and papers which identified light pollution as a major contributor to the global collapse of the insect population. As insects are the base of the food chain their loss has a large negative impact on bio-diversity which is in major decline globally and here in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Public Engagement

We have been very active in Public Engagement both prior to the arrival of, and during the Covid pandemic in Wales.

Immediately before and early in the reporting period public engagement and outreach activities continued as normal. In the period from September 2019 up to March 2020 there were the 1180 participants at dark sky events at the Brecon Beacons Observatory. This is typical of numbers at this time of the year, but unfortunately due to the necessary government Covid 19 prohibitions on gatherings of people and restrictions on access to the Park/IDSR, it has not been possible to hold any further stargazing events at the observatory.

This required cancellation of most of the programme of events planned for the year including a two day stargazing session at a large music festival (25,000 visitors), a themed weekend at a CADW site, two large annual star parties at Cwmdru and a further 25 public events. In total only 17 events with (around 720 attendees in total) could take place.

It is hoped that following potential easing of restrictions that some limited events can restart in the late Autumn. Risk assessments have been prepared to ensure the safety of attendees and two events are being planned at the time of the writing of this report. Although direct engagement activities have not been possible, work has continued apace preparing businesses in the park with training programmes and also support materials. A bi-lingual podcast-style do-it-yourself stargazing session was developed for a group of young people that would normally have had a live session with an astronomer. This appears to work quite well and has potential for use in more normal times to allow visitors to have a commentary of the night sky on-demand. A series of podcasts is now in preparation.

We continue to run our Dark Sky Ambassador Course with businesses and now have over 80 qualified ambassadors with an additional 20 due to take the training session in the near future.

Finally on Public Engagement - we are very pleased to be able to inform you that Martin Griffiths, a current and founder member of the Dark Sky Board, former University lecturer in Astronomy, public speaker, author, and “astronomy youth champion” has been awarded the Dark Sky Advocate Award by the Astronomical League. The Astronomical League is a US based body for the promotion of the science of astronomy with more than 240 member organisations. The award is given for raising awareness of the problems of light pollution and working positively to confront and prevent further spread. It particularly recognises Martin's work with various non-governmental organisations, local government councils and other administrative bodies across Wales over the last decade.

Marketing of our night sky

In order to increase the profile of our dark skies a number of promotional / marketing activities have been completed:-

- The Brecon Beacons National Park website area that deals with the dark sky has been extensively revised and updated. It gives information on the best sites for visitors to go to for star gazing and some basic tips on observing, this is receiving around 13,000 hits per annum.
- The 10 best observing sites have also now been added to the tourist map, along with the best places to observe sunsets.
- Stargazing introductory leaflets have also been revised by including new star charts and updating the text. These will be distributed to tourist venues in the park to help visitors familiarise themselves with the night sky. The Elan Valley Dark Sky Park and Cambrian Mountains are to use the same format for their areas.

Collaboration

The award of the IDSR status to the Brecon Beacons National Park was the catalyst for the growth of the Dark Sky movement in Wales and we have been extremely active in improving the protection of our Dark Skies since (and indeed prior) to gaining the status.

There has been Dark Skies collaboration between the Brecon Beacons National Park and a number of neighbouring parks, areas and organisations including the Cambrian Mountains (a wilderness area in mid Wales), the Elan Valley Trust (an International Dark Sky Park), Welsh Water (national water supplier and owner of a large area of the BBNP/IDSR), Brecon Beacons Tourism (local tourism business association) and Powys County Council (Local Government body with extensive overlap of the Park/IDSR).

It has been identified that many visitors to these areas only stay for the day and that the dark skies, nocturnal wildlife and scenic sunsets are important local assets to encourage overnight stays.

A promotional programme was developed for the areas which includes for example three promotional videos for the Brecon Beacons National park and three for the Cambrian Mountains, plus an additional general video. The objective is to enable more people to experience and learn to enjoy dark skies, the mysteries of the wider universe, the constellations and their heritage and the Milky Way in all its splendour. The project is funded by Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and Welsh Government. Powys County Council are also contributing funding towards this project. The Park/IDSR's allocation of the funding is £57,000 and various promotional materials and events have been developed including videos, as well as nocturnal wildlife experiences, stargazing and astro-photography.

The UK Government in Westminster has formed an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Dark Skies and our local MP is Vice Chair of this group. The Dark Sky Board have had several very positive (virtual) meetings with her, and she will be attending one of our meetings in the near future.

The APPG has developed and launched ten policies for Dark Skies, many of these are applicable in Wales in general, and in our National Park in particular. We intend to explore how they could be adapted to circumstances here in Wales.

Night Sky Quality

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Special Planning Guidance document on dark sky protection has now been operational for several years. All potential building developments and many building modifications must satisfy these rules in order to gain permission to proceed within the National Park/IDSR. The Authority processed 270 planning applications during the period Sept 2019 to Sept 2020, all were determined in accordance with the Local Development Plan's Policy 12-Light Pollution, and the above-mentioned local planning guide on lighting. We are therefore confident that no new developments within the IDSR boundaries have detracted from the quality of the night sky of the Reserve.

This has been confirmed by the annual night sky quality survey carried out by a Dark Sky Board member and also by the findings of Natural Resources Wales recent "Tranquillity and Place - Dark Skies" report. The NRW report contains dramatic satellite images of a tsunami of light pollution from the south being held in check by the IDSR/NP.

The Chair of the DSB took part in a worldwide webinar on the IDA's new lighting guidelines on external lighting in dark sky places (including IDSRs). These may need to be reflected into the Park's Supplementary Planning Guide on obtrusive lighting.



Photo Neil Mansfield Photography

Gunpowder Works – Jim Wilson

The objectives of the overall Gunpowder Works programme, appropriately called “Explosive Times”, are to secure the long term future of the Glyn-Neath gunpowder works structures in the Mellte gorge, and to protect and re-establish the ancient woodland and hence improve the bio-diversity of this part of the National Park. The Brecon Beacons Park Society took ownership of the Bio-Diversity Improvement project within the overall Programme and raised £77K funding for its financial support.

As highlighted in last year’s Annual Report there was a major breakdown in communication between the Park and the Society on progress of the programme. This was due to the Park’s unilateral decision not to renew the Programme Manager’s contract even though the programme was far from completed and there was nobody qualified within the Park to take up the reins. Despite many attempts at communication by the Society this resulted in a period of many months when the Society had no information on what was happening with the programme or even if the funding we had raised was being used appropriately. Happily, matters are now much improved due to the re-instatement of the original Programme Manager (on a very part time basis).

Bio-Diversity

The woodland around the gunpowder works structures contains some of the few remaining fragments of ancient woodland in Wales. The Society's Bio-Diversity Improvement project (part of the overall programme) will achieve its bio-diversity improvement aim by removing invasive tree species and replanting and/or re-generating native species. This will help to re-establish a greater extent of ancient woodland which has a far higher bio-diversity than woodland comprising of invasive species.

The felling of the invasive tree species has been completed and the native species trees which we have planted are flourishing. The Area Warden will monitor the development of the native species trees and will watch for any re-seeding of non-native tree species. The only outstanding work is on interpretive signage on the bio-diversity improvement aims of the project and to finalise on the ongoing monitoring and re-assessment of the bio-diversity of the site.

Archaeology

As reported in the last Annal Report the archaeological restoration had been completed. However severe weather caused a tree fall which damaged the Stove House, one of the important structures on the site. Work to repair this damage is progressing and does not look likely to be a problem (costs covered by Insurance).

However, there was a subsequent collapse of the forestry track into the site which is serious, with a repair cost of the order of £20K. It is not clear at the moment whether this cost needs to be covered by the project or will be met by the NPA.

The access dispute over the Parks entitlement to vehicular use the above mentioned forestry track continues, and despite many attempts to resolve the issue with the landowner, is likely to go to court. The Park is quietly confident of a positive outcome.

Publicity and Communication – Nic Groombridge

Our communications to members are necessarily increasingly online. Information about walks and events is regularly emailed and Twitter and Facebook is used to persuade people to join or at least know of our work. We have 829 followers on Twitter and 828 members on the Facebook group.

The Beacon – Chris Barber

The Society Journal is produced in full colour twice a year (in January and July) and contains a wide range of articles on topics mainly relating to the Brecon Beacons National Park.

A steady flow of material is needed for inclusion in future issues and Chris Barber, the editor would be very pleased to receive contributions from our Members. Articles should be between 500 and 1,000 words in length. Make sure any pictures you send on a CD or e-mail) are high quality JPEGs.

Please send your articles, poems, letters etc by email to: cbarber010@aol.com or by post to Chris Barber, Blorengge Cottage, Church Lane, Llanfoist, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire NP7 9NG. (Telephone: 018733 85918).

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