

## REPORT OF DISCOVERY TEAM

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### **SUBJECT: VOLUNTEERING**

#### Purpose of Report

To provide an update to Members on Volunteering

#### Introduction/Background

Volunteers have been contributing to the work of the National Park Authority and helping the Authority to achieve its purposes for at least fifty years. Until relatively recently there has been a core group of volunteers – Voluntary Wardens. They volunteer in their local area with their local ranger, primarily carrying out practical conservation tasks in a group. About 10 years ago we added Activity Volunteers, who are managed by the Activity and Events Officer. They play a vital role in leading and supporting our varied Activities and Events programme. Most recently the Pathways project was introduced to provide supported volunteering opportunities.

We currently have 145 volunteers registered. They do a variety of tasks, including practical conservation work, lead and support activities and events and health walks, support funded projects such as Stitch in Time, the Pollinator Project, invigilate in the gallery at Oriel y Parc, plant the herb garden at Carew, and work with the photos sent in for the Changing Coasts photo project. We have integrated the tree wardens into our volunteer family and we are currently working on opportunities for archaeology monitoring and footpath and site monitors. Volunteers helped out at the PAVS volunteering fair and also at County Show. The Friends of the National Park and independent groups such as Newport Paths also contribute time towards projects.

In 2018/19 volunteers contributed 2,198 days (increase in 42 from previous year)

- 975.5 of these days related to conservation volunteering activities.
- 537.5 volunteer days contributed to access related activities on Public Rights of Way.
- 193 Volunteer Days related to beach cleaning
- 191 volunteer days were contributed through volunteer activity leader support, with 40 of these relating to activity leader support for Walkability project.

Volunteers also have the opportunity to participate in the volunteer forum. The forum was set up to give volunteers a voice, to improve communication between staff, volunteers and the Authority and to give a volunteer perspective on National Park issues, plans and policies.

In recent years there has been increasing recognition of the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering and we have seen an increase in the demand for volunteering opportunities. The National Park Authority is at a crucial stage in the volunteering journey. In order to develop volunteering in a sustainable way we need to build stronger foundations by having a robust volunteer management system, strengthening the relationship between staff and volunteers, and increasing, improving and diversifying our offer to potential volunteers.

We are working to an Action Plan to achieve these aims. Our objectives cover the key areas of:

- Strategy and Infrastructure
- Volunteer Management
- Resources
- Training
- Partnerships
- Projects

There are four main objectives within these key areas:

- To be able to offer volunteering opportunities to a wider cross-section of local people, including those most likely to derive benefits from volunteering.
- To be able to offer more volunteering opportunities across a wider range of National Park work.
- To develop, support and work with 'like-minded' voluntary and community sector organisations across the National Park, strengthening partnerships to enhance the role of volunteers.
- To develop an appropriate infrastructure for volunteer management that reflects good practice and maximises the value of our work in this area.

### Challenges and Opportunities

There are several opportunities for flexible volunteering eg monitoring and surveying, and these tasks provide valuable opportunities for local people in communities throughout and adjacent to the Park to connect more closely with their environment. However, the challenge is to do this in such a way as to minimise additional line management work, and have an efficient reporting procedure. Once Pathways finishes, continuing to provide valuable supported volunteering opportunities may also pose a challenge. As volunteering grows, there will be opportunities for mentoring – experienced volunteers mentoring new volunteers, and experienced line managers mentoring new line managers. Another challenge is to integrate volunteering more fully across the National Park Authority, and to have volunteer efforts recognised appropriately.

### Comparisons

Our volunteering offer is less developed and structured than many other National Parks, however we do offer a wide range of volunteering opportunities. The introduction of a volunteer management system would allow us to develop individual and flexible volunteering opportunities. To our knowledge we are the only National Park to offer a supported volunteering programme (Pathways).

### Financial Considerations

The National Park Authority supplies uniform appropriate to the task, and reimburses travel expenses. Many volunteers choose not to claim expenses, so we do not have a realistic figure for cost implications. Currently there is no central budget for volunteering – each team covers their own costs. Although costs are minimal, this could be interpreted as a disincentive for some teams to recruit volunteers.

### Risk considerations

No significant risks associated with the volunteering. Volunteers are covered by insurance and appropriate risk assessments are in place.

### Compliance

Volunteering supports the NPA's duty to 'foster the social and economic well-being of local communities'. Volunteering is a strong demonstration of the Authority's work towards WG directives, WFGA, SSA etc

### Human Rights/Equality issues

Volunteering supports PCNPA Equality plan, and is a strong demonstration of the Authority's commitment to Equality and Diversity etc. Volunteers have been invited to have input in to the equality plan through the volunteer forum.

### Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

Volunteers make a significant contribution to the conservation and access work of the National Park. New opportunities relating to biodiversity and species monitoring have been identified and will be implemented next spring. Volunteers are encouraged to minimise travel and car share where possible.

### Welsh Language statement

Currently Welsh provision is not demanded by participants. We have run a 'Welsh in the Landscape' training course to promote the use of the Welsh language in a context relevant to volunteer roles. There are opportunities for Welsh speaking volunteers with the North voluntary wardens.

### Conclusion

Volunteering is moving forward and in the last 12 months several new opportunities for volunteering have arisen. In order to maintain momentum, and cater to the demand for flexible opportunities we need to look at options for volunteer management systems. The action plan provides a clear and concise set of objectives to work towards.

Recommendation

To receive the information on volunteering and to identify an Authority Member with a responsibility for or interest in volunteering who may be able to attend the quarterly volunteer forum meetings.