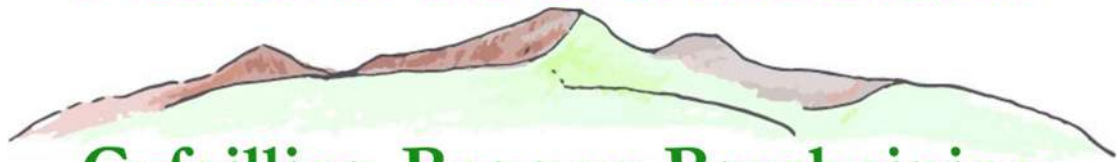


Friends of the Brecon Beacons



Cyfeillion Bannau Brycheiniog

www.breconbeaconsparkociety.org

ANNUAL REPORT

2021

**“Friends of the Brecon Beacons” is the working title for the Brecon Beacons Park Society
Charitable Incorporated Organisation No: 1180841**

This is the Annual Report of the Activities of the Brecon Beacons Park Society for the year January to December 2021.

Trustees

The persons who served as Trustees during the period from the last AGM on 1st January 2021 to the 31st December 2021 are: -

Martin Buckle	Hon. Chairman
Ben Sladen	Hon. Treasurer
David Thomas	Hon. Secretary
James Wilson	Vice Chair

Janet Callear (stood down in July 2021)

Clive Counsell

Iau Counsell

Richard Chandler

Elizabeth Gibbs

Nicholas Groombridge (stood down in July 2021)

Sue Hoddell (elected at the AGM, June 2021)

Phil O'Shea (elected at the AGM, June 2021)

Executive Committee

With a number of changes in the roles of officers of the Society over the past year, there has been some fluidity in attendance at Executive Committee meetings, but at all times the Committee comprises all of the Trustees, plus other officers as appropriate.

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.

Contents

Chairman's Report	Page 4
Executive Committee Reports	Pages 9 - 17
Project Reports	Pages 18 - 23

Chairman's Report – Martin Buckle

I am writing this with great optimism that we will again be able to meet up in person for an AGM. I do hope that this optimism is not misplaced. The ability to hold virtual meetings has stood us in good stead, but it is clear that “real” meetings bring a lot of added value. We are now moving towards alternating the meetings of our Executive Committee between virtual and real. It was clear from the recent meeting in early April at the Bear how much we all valued being able to get back together again. Nonetheless, it was good to see many members attending last year's virtual AGM, and many thanks are due to David Thomas our Secretary for making it a success.

The Walks Programme

Again, it has been a challenging year in offering a walks programme through the peaks and troughs of the pandemic. Many thanks are again due to those members of the Committee and of the wider Society for all of their efforts in delivering a varying and inspiring programme. This has been a major challenge with the need for constant adjustments as restrictions have changed. A particular highlight was our first walks festival in the summer. Many thanks are due to Stuart Campbell, who provided much of the initiative for this festival.

During the course of the past year, we have seen Nic and Hilary Groombridge transfer the baton as our Walks Secretaries to Jenny Cann. It has been very encouraging how well momentum has been maintained through this transfer. Much appreciation is due to Jenny, but also to Iau and Clive Counsell in co-ordinating and supporting our walks leaders. Training for walks leaders has been extended, and particular thanks are due to Allan Gibbs for his role in this.

They have been ably supported the Walks Sub-Committee which includes representatives from our walks leaders and other members who are regular walkers. Jenny has now joined the Executive Committee and has taken over as chair of the Sub-Committee, but thanks are also due to Clive, who as the previous chair, had got the Sub-Committee up and running.

Commemorating Thirty Years in 2022

How better could we commemorate those smart souls who got the Society up and running back in 1992 than with a specially extended walks programme? Again, much credit is due to the Walks Sub-Committee for making the running on this. Watch out for publicity about events in September if not already seen!

The Events Programme

This programme has also been affected by the pandemic. A combination of remote and in-person events has maintained its popularity. Janet Callear, who so successfully managed this transition, has now stepped down as Events Secretary. Many thanks are due to her for developing and sustaining this programme so well, but also to Alun Flynn, who has now kindly taken over this mantle. I am sure that I am not alone in enjoying being able to cross the threshold of The Bear in Crickhowell once again with a sense of purpose!

Janet remains very active as a Society member, having co-ordinated our response to the National Park Authority's draft Management Plan. She also has taken on a substantial role in organising the Alliance for Welsh Designated Landscapes, of which the Society currently holds the chair.

The Executive Committee

While we have now held two recent meetings of the Committee at The Bear, the majority of meetings have taken place remotely, and this has enabled us to sustain our six-weekly frequency of meetings. As well as working our way through the ups and downs of the pandemic, the Committee has also been busy in overseeing a number of transitions as existing officers of the Society have changed their roles, and vacancies have needed to be filled. The willingness of Society members to step forward has been particularly welcome.

At this point, I should mention that Ben Sladen, our Treasurer, will be stepping down after the AGM. Having already been a member for a number of years, Ben took on the role of Treasurer, combined with that of Membership Secretary, back in 2006. He has now competently steered our financial management for more than half of the Society's existence! He was also highly instrumental in navigating through the Society's transition in 2019 to becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, one better able to manage the complexity of financial and legal risks which has grown along with the Society itself. He has also been assiduous in ensuring that members' subscriptions have been received in a timely manner! He will be leaving his role at a time when the Society is in particularly good financial health.

Communications

Clearly communications are at the core of what we do as a Society. Keeping in touch with our members is of critical importance, and our developing partnerships with other organisations are dependent on good communications. Many thanks are due to Nic Groombridge who fulfilled the role of Publicity and Communications Officer for several years but has now

stepped down. Nic is however continuing as a Walks Leader and an active volunteer.

It is pleasing to be able to report that we now have in place a new Communications Team. Welcome to Katherine Jordan and Stuart Bain. They are starting to formulate a new Communications Strategy which will enable us to respond to the challenges ahead. In support of this, David Thomas will be continuing to co-ordinate our website, and Chris Barber continues with great skill to edit our twice-yearly magazine The Beacon. It's been a good year to learn about the history of the water industry in the Beacons, with the fascinating article on Talybont Reservoir in the Winter edition of The Beacon, and the excellent presentation by Zoe Arthurs from the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust in December, as part of our events programme, on the heritage of the water industry.

The Alliance for Welsh Designated Landscapes

Now into its second year of current Brecon Beacons Park Society administration, the Alliance continues to occupy much of our attention. November saw it hold its AGM and Conference in person for the first time for a couple of years. Contributors included Rose O'Neill, the new Chief Executive of the Campaign for National Parks (CNP) and Chris Lindley from the Gower Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) who chairs the new Landscapes Wales organisation, which brings together the national parks and AONB administrations across Wales. Through collaboration between the Alliance and CNP, we were able to respond comprehensively to the recent Welsh Government consultation on second homes, which remain a challenge for many of the communities in our special landscapes. Pressing the case for some form of landscapes designation for the Cambrian Mountains continues to be a priority.

Liaison with the National Park Authority (NPA)

With the continuing turnover of senior management at the NPA, liaison with the authority has remained a challenge. Nonetheless, a good rapport has been established with Catherine Mealing-Jones, who arrived as Chief Executive last July. A new management team is now in place to support her, and we look forward to building on our established collaboration with national park staff.

Established areas of collaboration include the Darks Skies Reserve, under the guidance of Jim Wilson, our Vice-Chair, and the Fforest Fawr Geopark, on which we are represented by Dilys Harlow. The value of these initiatives is underpinned by their recognition internationally, with both having recently been revalidated. We also continue to be involved in the Beacons Historic Environment Partnership, with a new action plan scheduled for wider consultation later this year. Another key interface with the NPA is on Rights

of Way (ROW), where, under the watchful eye of Phil O'Shea, our ROW lead, we continue to share members' concerns with the NPA, and provide feedback on how issues are resolved.

Future Beacons - The National Park Management Plan (NPMP)

Launched in October, the consultation draft of the NPMP is a substantial 108-page document, with policies and proposals spread over 24 topic areas, and covering the period up to 2026. The NPA is to be congratulated for launching a series of "deep dive" public discussions around these topics, with the Society represented at nearly all of them. We then pulled together a comprehensive response, which was submitted to the NPA in March.

There is much to welcome in the document. However, it is dependent on high levels of collaboration from lots of organisations, and we do have concerns about the NPA's capacity to implement this very ambitious plan as it stands. We look forward with interest to learning of the NPA's conclusions from its extensive consultation exercise.

Planning Proposals

While much of our oversight on planning proposals involves the NPA as local planning authority, we do from time to time need to take an interest in proposals in adjoining areas, but close to the NPA boundary. This has particularly been the case over the past year. Under the scrutiny of Liz Gibbs, the Society's planning lead, responding to these consultations remains a key priority for the Society.

The Historic Tramroads of the Brecon Beacons

This further area of collaboration with the NPA continues to gather momentum. The aim is to safeguard the future of the National Park's tramroads. Under the leadership of our Exec Member Richard Chandler, the website-based data collection stage is now largely complete, and very impressive! With continuing funding from Cadw, the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust and the NPA are jointly developing a volunteer training framework for this project. We hope shortly to recruit volunteers, and to move the project forward out on site.

Executive Committee Reports

Membership – Ben Sladen

It is most heartening that members in general have renewed membership in spite of the varying Covid restrictions, resulting to limited opportunities for a led walk, no in-person talks, no in-person AGM.

Over the year total households have increased, from 706 to 724. Aggregate membership fluctuates in a different way; that depends mainly on the balance between single memberships and families; then within families, between 2, 3, 4, and occasionally 5 members. At the year-end total membership was 968.

In the first 4 months of the year (to end-February), households and total members have fallen slightly. This period sees over 50% of the renewal subscriptions for the year falling due, whilst new memberships are typically fewer than non-renewals.

Finally, on this my last report, I wish to thank all members for their continued support with the encouragement that brings. I am remaining a member with my wife Wendy who walks occasionally with BBPS, so I hope to see some of you during the 30th Anniversary events and at AGMs in future years.

Financial – Ben Sladen

Thanks to the resilience and confidence of members the financial statement is showing another healthy surplus. However, when more normal activities resume, expenses will increase.

During the past year, not one in-person meeting of the Executive Committee was possible and as already mentioned no full AGM and no talks. For the last pre-Covid year, these items generated costs of some £5,250.

It will be observed that the costs of The Beacon appear to have increased, partly because the printers now undertake all the mailing, and partly as distribution costs used to be shared with the printed Walks Programme.

The Executive has approved an allocation of £1,000 for a review of the Dark Skies lighting and another £1,000 for the 30th Events.

Guided Walks – Clive & Iau Counsell and Jenny Cann

Statistics

The year has been affected by COVID-19 and the various stages of lockdown and travel restrictions that have been imposed from time to time. For portions of the year, it has not been possible to hold organised walks. When travel and meeting outdoors were permitted, walks were organised but with a booking system that ensured that walk numbers stayed well within those permitted at the time. The number of walkers allowed was capped at 12 then 16 as at present, which is just above the average numbers attending pre-COVID. This was more in line with the general recommendations of the Mountain Training Association. This system also enabled the Walk Leader Support Officer to potentially track and trace any infections should that have been necessary.

Despite all the difficulties of the past year 127 walks were conducted. The total distance was 1,168 miles with a combined mileage walked by our members of 6,294 miles. The average length of the walks was 9 miles with 14 walks being more than 12 miles.

The most frequently offered walks were either classed as Moderate (41) or Energetic (65). Easy walks were offered again this year (4) and Strenuous Walks were offered on 17 occasions.

The walks were spread evenly across our normal walking days (Saturday (27), Sunday (30), Wednesday (27) and Friday (22)), as well as 21 walks on days other than these. Yet again, it was the West of the Park that was sadly underrepresented with 11 walks offered compared with 63 for the East and 24 in the Central Beacons. There were 28 walks outside the Park.

When we look at the number of walkers attending these walks it can be seen that those classed as Moderate are the most popular with an average of 12 walkers on each walk. Energetic walks had 11 and Strenuous 8.

The average number of walkers attending our walks in the various regions showed equally good support across the Park. The West attracted an average of 11 walkers per walk. Central and East Beacons had 10 and 12 respectively. Walks outside the park attracted on average 9 walkers per walk.

So, all things considered, and thanks to our leaders, back markers and administrators we had another successful walking year, and it is good to see an increase in the number of walks offered in the West of the Brecon Beacons National Park, but it is still an area that is under-represented in our walking calendar.

Walks Report

After a second suspension of walks because of lockdown in December 2020, walks resumed on 28 April 2021 with the same system of booking as in 2020 and with many leaders generously giving their time to devise, recce and lead them. Our spring quarter ends with May, and we offered 15 walks before its end.

Our first festival, from 28 June – 4 July 2021, was suggested by Stuart Campbell as a way of welcoming members back to walking and celebrating the end of lockdown. A walks subcommittee had recently been formed as a way of ensuring the wishes and views of walkers were met and acted upon, and one of the subcommittee's first tasks was to organise the festival. There were 14 walks planned, two for each of the seven days. Efforts were made to spread the walks throughout the Park and to offer all grades of walk. The walks were well received and well attended, and we hope that some local businesses benefited. There was also a photographic competition. We are very pleased that pretty much everyone was able to attend the walks of their choice.

Stuart had sourced funding for the printing of some commemorative festival programmes for the festival leaders, back markers and executive committee. He also organised the production of some ceramic mugs bearing the BBPS logo to be given to the leaders and back markers of festival walks. Some were presented at the end of Dilys Harlow's walk on 1 July when refreshments - supplied and made by walks subcommittee members - were offered to all present.

Another action by the subcommittee was to design and distribute the high visibility armbands to all leaders. The reasoning, apart from being useful in poor light, was to help identify our leaders at walk starts.

Our summer quarter, June - August saw us offer 50 walks, and in the middle of September, the new walks secretary, Jenny Cann took up her post and took over the booking system from Iau. A very successful weekend in Ceredigion was organised by Stuart and Phil in September, the first since lockdown. The review of the website and introduction of the new booking system on 1st April 2022 should make it easier for members to book onto walks and events.

Walk Leader Support

As mentioned in the 2021 annual report, Allan Gibbs had devised an Induction Course for the training and assessment of prospective leaders. It is a qualification just for Society Leaders. We were delighted that enough (14)

came forward for us to run two such courses, with the Society covering the cost.

In October 2021 Allan ran a course for leaders every weekend - two Induction, one First Aid and a two-weekend HML Training Courses for which the Society offers a conditional subsidy. We are, as always, immensely grateful to Allan.

All new leaders were lent any first aid kits and group shelters they needed.

I am very pleased to have all these new leaders on-board and also pleased that two very experienced leaders came forward and offered to lead some walks for us. This is the case in particular because some of our leaders have still not been able to return to lead since before COVID. We wish them all well.

We ran another First Aid Course in February 2022 in conjunction with the Crickhowell Walking Festival and have one planned for October 2022.

We held the annual “Day for Leaders” on 4th December 2021 at Llangynidr Village Hall when we were extremely pleased that 32 leaders came to talk to each other, and hear interesting talks by Allan Gibbs, Dilys Harlow and David Thomas. The day was beautifully rounded off with a walk led by Phil O’Shea and Stuart Campbell in the area around Llangynidr.

Events Programme – Janet Callear

The “Illustrated Talks” have always been a fundamental part of “Events” for the Brecon Beacons Park Society; a talk at the end of the day to rest the legs from miles of walking or to rest the mind from work, whatever it be. So, what have we provided to ease our body and mind over the past year? I look at the list of talks and think that my comments above are wrong – our members do not wish to sit back and merely rest, they want to find out about more hills and more mountains that they can walk, and to learn about the magic they can see, hear and feel along the way, to explore further into where they have already walked and to see a future for themselves, their children and grandchildren in these hills. In response to members interests we have had talks ranging from geology to foraging, from heritage of the water industry to pilgrimages and onto the future for our National Park. Then there was last night’s Breconshire Stones talk and the reminder that humans, also part of nature, bring their own beauty in stone walls, stone markers and monuments, sculptures and engravings; the Society’s purpose to protect and enhance the Park for everyone is no mean task!

I have now handed over the Events Secretary responsibility to Alun Flynn who already has many ideas coming to fruition for the next year’s programme.

And for me . . ., it is time to step back and say thank you to all the members of the Society - you taught me so much about the Brecon Beacons National Park and opened my eyes to subjects and ideas I had never even considered before!

. . . but you are not rid of me; I now hope to be able to help out in other areas of the Society's work so that we are truly Friends of the Brecon Beacons.

Rights of Way – Phil O'Shea

	2022	2021	2020
Members reports to me	55	29	7
NPA notices to me	11	7	17
TOTAL	66	36	24

Issues reported in the last year have almost doubled. Some have been quite contentious. My role is to liaise between the Society and National Park Authority (NPA), keeping both sides informed of matters which come my way. I report to each Executive Committee meeting keeping them apprised of issues affecting Rights of Way (ROW) and have begun to use Leaders' WhatsApp group to inform them, if it seems relevant to their work.

I appreciate members continued reporting of these issues both to me and the police (illegal off-roading and dangerous dogs). Your reports, which I refer to NPA, help to keep the ROW network navigable. Those of you, who encounter problems but don't report them, please consider doing so. It's a 2 minute job! Follow the guidelines on our website and use the report form. If you have difficulty, please email me your phone number and I will gladly help.

It can be frustrating getting some issues addressed quickly, due to NPA's priorities, but the problem is usually placed on a Warden's work schedule immediately. Thanks to both Eifion Jones and Lisa Lloyd of NPA who have been prompt and informative in my dealings with them. Though, this year, I've not had to use those who have volunteered to assist with site visits, thanks, but "I know where you are!!"

Some members have expressed frustration at the length of time it takes to rectify ROW problems. It might help to be reminded of how NPA prioritise their work. All ROWs in the National Park's rights of way network are categorised 1 to 5. A fuller explanation of the system is set out in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan ('ROWIP'), pages 84-89:-

<https://www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/BBNP-ROWIP-2019-2029.pdf>.

Category 1 – proactive (reaction time within 1 month if complaint received from public)
Category 2 – reactive within 3 months
Category 3 – reactive within 6 months
Category 4 – reactive within 9 months
Category 5 – reactive within 12 (but discretionary according to individual circumstances)

NPA adheres to these completion dates unless the issue raised is an emergency or is more complicated than just a repair/maintenance. For example, if a contractor or legal work is required it is generally going to take much longer. For the sake of efficiency NPA may also deal with reports which are near each other but are of different categories and have different target dates.

Issues reported by members have included the state of ROWs, undergrowth, poor and removed signage, illegal off-roading by motorcycles, damaged furniture and increasingly, barriers in a variety of forms, some due to nature and some apparently erected by landowners. There has also been an increase in reports of landowners' nuisance dogs, dog bites, dog fouling; aggressive behaviour scaring walkers, with some dogs chained leaving a metre gap for people to squeeze by.

NPA also advises me of applications affecting ROWs. Those reports are préciséd, reported on our website and members are invited to contact me for full reports. Please access the new website, regularly to see current ROW issues and other news.

OS and other maps become outdated and what is on the ground is not always reflected on the map. To confirm the existence of a ROW, you can check on the NPA (or Council if ex-area) definitive map to be sure.
<https://rightsofway.beacons-npa.gov.uk>.

I continue to encourage you to include the less used ROWs in your walks as this helps to keep them open and to identify issues which can be reported to me.

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.

This year not only has the pandemic affected Development and Planning but also the problems caused by excessive phosphate levels on water catchments has had a major effect. All planning applications which would increase phosphate loading within affected catchments have had to be refused. Also, the National Park made the decision at the end of May 2021, to pause preparation of the replacement Local Development Plan (known as LDP2) for 12 months pending further understanding of the scope for future development to be accommodated in the National Park. In addition, we have responded to consultations on the Monmouthshire Replacement Development Plan (which does not include areas within the National Park) because of the way developments in and around Abergavenny can affect the Park. However, the Welsh Government has objected to the plan's proposed increase in housing in Monmouthshire which they suggest is contrary to the higher-level plan, Future Wales. We await further news of how these issues will be resolved.

We have continued to comment on or object to proposals large and small.

- We objected to the application for the Ciner Glass Factory. This would be a massive building with two 75 metre high chimneys, on the Rassau Industrial Estate only 400m from the boundary with the National Park. The statutory protection of National Parks extends to all developments affecting them even if they lie outside the designated areas.
- The redevelopment of Crickhowell Conservative Club as a Co-op convenience store was given permission despite continued local concerns about the safety of the access: we have since responded to the application for illuminated advertising signs.
- We have responded to the recent application for the siting of a brewery (non-alcoholic), as a farm diversification, in barns on the south facing slopes of the Sugar Loaf. Among other objections, the access off the A40, besides being sub-standard, is up a track which also serves as a bridleway and public footpath.
- Another application to which we objected was for proposed farm buildings near Cwmyoy, which we considered would have an adverse effect on both the landscape and the heritage of the National Park. Covering farmyards can be helpful in reducing phosphate rich run off, but in this case we felt there were ways in which the problems could be addressed without the deleterious effects.

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 should you become aware of an application of concern

Publicity and Communication

Nic Groombridge resigned from the role of Communications Officer in July 2021.

Stuart Bain and Katherine Jordan have now jointly taken up the role as a Communications Team.

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, Bloreng Cottage, Church Lane, Llanfoist, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire NP7 9NG. (Telephone: 018733 85918).

Friends of the Brecon Beacons – David Thomas

You may have noticed a change to the Society's logo on the cover of the Annual Report and wondered what lies behind it.

For many years people outside the Society have confused us with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. In fact, only recently Liz Gibbs received an email clearly intended for BBNPA but addressed to us!

We have conducted a survey into all the other national park societies in England and Wales and how they style themselves. The Friends of the Lake District is the only society to actually have the word "Friend" as the official name of the society, every other society brands itself "Friends of...", with the sole exception of the Snowdonia Society.

A further possible source of confusion for our society is that we are the only one to have the word “Park” in our title.

When we became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2019 we applied to the Charities Commission to use the strapline “Friends of the Brecon Beacons” and so the Executive Committee has decided to promote the strapline more visibly on our logo. It does not change who we are or imply any change in our status, but, hopefully, will explain to the general public our role in supporting the aims and objectives of the National Park.

Project Reports

Fforest Fawr UNESCO Global Geopark – Dilys Harlow

The big news this year is that the Geopark was revalidated in November &, once again, gained a green card to continue as a member of the UNESCO Geopark Network. Some advice was given, especially that we should continue to enhance the Geopark Hub facilities at Craig-y-nos Country Park. To this end a disused room on the site has been fitted out as a Learning Lab with displays about the history and geodiversity of the Geopark. Plans are advanced for this to be staffed by volunteers and open on peak visitor days. The displays on the terrace at Craig-y-nos are popular and much viewed. They are well worth a visit.

The Geofest should be held again this year, from 21st May to 5th June. Some events are already advertised on:

<https://www.fforestfawrgeopark.org.uk/geofest/2022>.

More may be added, including in partnership with BBPS, watch this space!

Elsewhere, plans and negotiations continue to explore the feasibility of extending the Geopark to include some of the southern, post-industrial fringe. This is a long-term project which would allow us to complete some of the geological stories of the area.

The Dark Sky Project – Jim Wilson

Summary

It has been a good year for Brecon Beacons International Dark Sky Reserve (IDSR). There have of course been up and downs but overall, we are pleased with progress in both protecting our dark skies and gaining the benefits from doing so.

Partnership Working

Partnership Working on Dark Skies is primarily between the members of the Dark Sky Board (DSB), which endeavours to protect our Dark Skies and retain our IDSR status. It is currently chaired by the Park Society and includes the National Park Authority.

In the early part of the reporting period the Partnership Working with the Park was not great as, once again, there was no member of staff capable of writing the Annual Report to the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA). Submission of this report is a mandatory condition for the retention of the

International Dark Sky Reserve status. As was the case last year our Reserve 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.

The Park's representative on the DSB (a Member of the Authority) has been extremely helpful, the problem lies with the resourcing for the support of the IDSR which is the responsibility of the management team.

The collaboration with the Park markedly improved in the later part of the reporting period with the development of a good working relationship with the Park's new chief Executive (see below).

Additionally, a good relationship has been developed with the IDA's new Director of Conservation who is responsible for monitoring and encouraging activities of their Dark Sky Places (including our IDSR).

Public Engagement

With restrictions being lifted in August last year the Greenman Music Festival was permitted to proceed. A stargazing event, led by members of the DSB, was held as part of the Festival and attracted hundreds of visitors.

The Brecon Beacons Dark Sky Festival took place on the weekend of the 24th, 25th and 26th of September. The festival was virtual this year and had an emphasis on reaching young people. It was promoted through multiple channels including by an article in the BBC's magazine "The Sky at Night" (circulation around 20,000). The main sessions for the public began on the Friday evening and had a great introduction from the Park's Chief Executive and the Astronomer Royal.

All in all it was well worthwhile event even though the numbers in general were a little lower than we had hoped for. However, the special session for schools (and other young people) on Friday morning was very well attended with about 3,000 children taking part which was fantastic and bodes well for the future of our IDSR!

Marketing of our Dark Skies

The marketing focus has been on digital channels due to pandemic constraints. A bi-lingual podcast for all year DIY stargazing has been developed and put on-line:-

<https://www.breconbeacons.org/things-to-do/activities/stargazing/monthly-stargazing-podcasts>

The Brecon Beacons National Park website section that deals with Dark Skies has again been updated. It gives information on the best sites for visitors to go to for star gazing and some basic tips on observing:-

<https://www.breconbeacons.org/things-to-do/activities/stargazing>

A new promotional video for the Park has been prepared featuring the Dark Sky Reserve, it may be seen on YouTube at the link below:-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXQdHs-4Dk>

Additionally, Martin Griffith (a member of the Dark Sky Board) gave a presentation on the Dark Skies of the Brecon Beacons at the National Astronomy Meeting (the major annual event of the Royal Astronomical Society).

Collaboration

The DSB, as the local dark sky experts, were invited by the NPA to develop a Dark Sky Policy for its new National Park Management Plan (NPMP) the top-level plan for the National Park for the next 5 years. This has been done and the policy is now part of the draft NPMP. We are very pleased with the level of collaboration with the NPA on this matter and that the importance of our Dark Skies is recognised in this key document.

In parallel with the NPMP work the DSB have developed a draft 5 Year Plan for the IDSR which we hope will inform the development of the implementation plan for the NPMP.

The Society have been working closely with the NPA's new Chief Executive who is a former senior executive with the UK Space Agency and has asked to be personally involved in the Dark Sky Board.

A new collaboration is being developed with the Northumberland International Dark Sky Park, who also have an observatory within their boundaries and have been successful in gaining funding from industry. We are also in discussion with Northumberland on gaining access to the light pollution data from new micro satellites built and launched by a Scottish company which are sensitive to the full spectrum. Many LED streetlights emit at this wavelength and so the current assessments of the status of light pollution (including NRW's Tranquillity and Place – Dark Skies report) are underestimates of the light pollution problem.

We have also been sharing experiences of how best to work with local government with Professor James Lowenthal of Massachusetts, USA.

In collaboration with other Dark Sky places in Wales the NPA gained £53K for Dark Sky work in the Brecon Beacons. This has been used to purchase a new all singing and dancing planetarium which will greatly enhance our Dark Sky events and for the initial development work for a Responsible External Lighting (REL) campaign.

Night Sky Quality

The quality of the night sky in the Brecon Beacons is still very good though there is a continuing threat especially from south of the boundary of the IDSR. This has been confirmed by the annual night sky quality survey made by members of the DSB. The maintenance of this high level of night sky quality is primarily due to the work of the Park's planning department in ensuring any new external lighting is Dark Sky friendly.

However, we also need to move from solely preventing further deterioration to actually improve the quality of our night skies. This will necessitate the replacement of poor quality existing lighting. The NPA has no powers in this area so we will need to be done through a campaign to gain support for this aim (the Responsible External Lighting campaign above) which is our preferred approach in any case.

Gunpowder Works – Jim Wilson

The objectives of the overall Gunpowder Works programme 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 Society took ownership of the Bio-Diversity Improvement project within the overall Programme and raised £77K funding for its financial support.

Unfortunately for several years there has been a breakdown of management and governance in this programme which is summarised below.

As highlighted the 2020 Annual Report, there was a major breakdown in communication between the NPA and the Society on progress of the programme. This was due to the NPA'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 NPA 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.

As stated in the 2021 Annual Report, matters are now much improved due to the re-instatement of the original Programme Manager (on a very part time basis).

Current situation

Due to the lack of engagement of NPA staff with the Programme Manager matters did not improve as had been hoped, and subsequently deteriorated even further. The NPA made yet another unilateral decision (which was not even communicated to the Society), to put the whole programme on hold and to pause the Programme Manager's contract. This situation has triggered the decision by the Society stated at the end of this report.

Bio-Diversity

The only outstanding work is the installation of the 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.

Industrial Archaeology

There is considerable outstanding work to be done which includes storm damage repair to some of the restored structures, repairs to the collapsed forestry track which provides vehicular access to the site, and the legal dispute with a land over on the use of this track.

Decision

There is a complete breakdown of partnership working on this programme.

However, the Bio-Diversity Improvement sub project that the Society led was more or less completed before this breakdown occurred and we are confident that the funds we raised have been spent appropriately.

The Society have decided to disengage from this Programme and have written to the Chief Executive of the NPA to that effect and to require the NPA to complete its one outstanding action on the bio-diversity sub project and confirm its commitment to appropriate long term monitoring of the bio-diversity of the site.

Brecon Beacons Tramroads – Richard Chandler

The purpose of the Tramroads Project is to identify, map and survey as many as possible of the still existing historical tramroad sites in the Brecon Beacons National Park. Despite their roles as important parts of our heritage and as walking routes, most of the Park's tramroads lack any statutory protection and are continuing to deteriorate. Our aim is to present evidence of their history, condition and vulnerability to CADW in the hope that they will agree

to give Scheduled Status to some of them and thus to safeguard them for the future. It is expected, also, that our endeavours will contribute to the enhancement of the overall Historic Environment Record (HER).

We are partnered with the Brecon Beacons Park Authority and the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust in this project.

The first phase of the project has identified some 160 named tramroads, together with many more associated structures, from the existing HERs via the internet. The Brinore (Bryn Oer) Tramroad will be studied first and the next phase of the project, which will commence shortly, will involve the physical surveying of the tramroad by volunteers, whom we will be seeking from our Society membership. In this respect, we are planning also to continue this work into the future by ongoing condition-monitoring of the Brinore Tramroad on behalf of the Park Authority.

