

Wider Access – Improving opportunities for minority groups to use Rights of Way

Purpose of the Report

All visitors and residents of North Yorkshire should be able to enjoy some access to the countryside, no matter what their level of ability, and should be able to decide for themselves whether or not a public right of way or opportunities for recreation are suitable for themselves as individuals – this is given the shorthand term ‘Access for All’.

This report sets out some of the work carried out by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) and the Yorkshire Dales Access Forum (YDAF) in providing access to the wider community.

Background

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 prevents discrimination against disabled people.

- Since 2 December 1996, it has been unlawful for service providers to treat disabled people less favourably for a reason related to their disability
- From 1 October 1999, service providers have to make “reasonable adjustments” for disabled people, such as providing extra help or making changes to the way they provide their services
- From October 2004, service providers also have to make “reasonable adjustments” to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access.

Some of the factors, which might be considered in determining what reasonable adjustment is, include:

- whether taking any particular steps would be effective;
- the extent to which it is practicable;
- the financial and other costs;
- the extent of any disruption;
- the extent of the service provider’s financial and other resources
- the amount of any resources already spent on making adjustments;
- the availability of financial and other assistance.

All countryside services are covered by the DDA: events programmes, the provision of information and interpretation, access to the public rights of way, visitor centres, etc.

UK Figures

It is estimated that there are over 10 million disabled people in Britain; of which, 4.6 million are over State Pension Age and 700,000 are children. (Family Resources Survey 2003-2004). This number is greater if the definition includes all those people who at any one time experience temporary impairments. Older people and families with young children often have specific needs similar to those of some disabled people, for example small

children and some older people cannot walk very far or have restricted balance or dexterity.

Disability increases with age: only 10% of adults aged 16-24 are disabled, while one third of people between the age of 50 and retirement age are disabled.

By 2020, it is predicted that, 58% of people over the age of 50 will have a long term health condition.

The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) say that there are 2 million people in the UK with sight problems, with 1 in 50, (over 1 million) people being registered as blind or partially sighted.

What's happened in the Yorkshire Dales National Park?

The Yorkshire Dales Access Forum has worked with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority on Access for All issues since it's formation in 2002.

In 2003, the YDAF established an Advisory for All Advisory Group to look at specific access issues. They meet twice a year and have made progress on the following issues:

An Integrated Access Strategy for the Yorkshire Dales National Park

In January 2005, the Integrated Access Strategy, written by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, was published. The aim was to bring all the inter-linked access issues together in one policy document.

As part of the strategy, a section was written on Access for All. With help from the Yorkshire Dales Access Forum, a list of guiding principles with regard to Access for All was formulated. They are as follows:

- Addressing countryside 'Access for All' issues is an integral part of all access and recreation management in the Yorkshire Dales National Park:
- In each of the geographical areas of the National Park, routes suitable for all user abilities will be identified and upgraded, or where a need has been identified new routes will be created. Where practicable, routes that radiate from villages, visitor centres or public transport interchanges will be provided as a matter of priority;
- Wherever an existing right of way is being maintained, every opportunity to replace difficult barriers with Access for All features will be considered. For example: where a ladder stile needs replacing could it be replaced with a gap or gate?;
- The creation and upgrading of Access for All routes must safeguard the historic, scenic and environmental value of the National Park. In particular locations there may be a conflict of interest between the desire to improve Access for All and the National Park Authority's duty to conserve and enhance the environment within its care these conflicts must be resolved on a case-by-case basis;

- All information about access and accessibility should be regularly updated and published as widely as possible, e.g. on the web, at visitor centres, in the National Park's general publicity materials. This publicity should include large print and audio versions.

Leaflets

In 2004, a booklet was produced to identify attractions and routes etc for visitors with limited mobility in the Yorkshire Dales. Since then, leaflets have been produced on Access for All opportunities in Cumbria, Wensleydale and Wharfedale. Members of the Access for All Advisory Group have had a key role in providing the content of each of the publications.

Audit of the Public Rights of Way and Prioritising Projects

The audit of the PROW in the Yorkshire Dales began in 2005 with an overall aim to identify the barriers that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to access the PROW in the Yorkshire Dales National Park and to suggest practical measures for removing or overcoming them within the context of the spirit of the DDA plus any other relevant guidance, legislation or case law provisions.

The Countryside Agency (now Natural England) published the guide 'By All Reasonable Means' in 2005. It was designed to help countryside managers improve accessibility of their sites, routes and facilities. It was agreed by the Yorkshire Dales Local Access Forum that any surveys would work to the standards listed within the 'By All Reasonable means'.

Three and a half years on, the audit is almost complete. The result is a full costed work programme for making the some of the rights of way fully accessible. Sections of the work programme are taken to the Access for All Advisory Group when the budgets are decided on for the YDNPA. Advice can then be given on which routes would deliver the optimum resource for people with limited mobilities.

All Terrain Wheelchairs

During 2007, members of the Access for All Advisory Group identified a gap in PROW network for those people wanting to access more remote areas of the Yorkshire Dales using all terrain electric wheelchairs (such as a Trampers). These class 3 invalid carriages can, legally, go where a pedestrian can go i.e. on footpaths or access land.

Using results from the access audit, a list was compiled of those routes that it was thought could be suitable for Trumper type wheelchairs and some of those routes were tested by members of the Disabled Ramblers. In 2008, the Disabled Ramblers had a two day visit to Swaledale which they thoroughly enjoyed. They are due to have a repeat visit in 2009.

Outreach work with minority groups

The YDNPA has a dedicated Outreach Officer who works as part of the Outreach and Education team to increase awareness of the Yorkshire Dales National Park amongst groups who are currently under-represented as visitors to the Park.

The four groups currently identified as under-represented as visitors, in line with the findings of Natural England's Diversity Review, are; disabled people, black and minority ethnic people, people who live in inner city areas and young people. The YDNPA works with all these groups but has specific targets relating to Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

A number of programmes and projects are run across the Park each year, which work directly with both representatives and members from these groups. In particular, to increase awareness and experience of the PROW network, staff and volunteers from the YDNPA organise and lead over 30 walks for minority groups who live in the urban areas around the National Park.

What can be shared from this?

Much of the work carried out by the YDNPA in this area has relied on the support and commitment from members of the YDAF. The starting point was the establishment of an Access for All Advisory Group to enable members to look at specific issues outside the formality of a full LAF meeting. Officers of the YDNPA and members of the YDAF would agree that most of the work of the YDAF now takes place within smaller advisory groups where members work is beginning to make a real difference.

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