



# Outdoors for All Case Stories 2010-11

## 1. Introduction

Natural England has a responsibility to promote access, recreation and public well-being for the benefit of today's and future generations. Natural England aims for everyone to have fair access to a good quality natural environment. Through our work we hope people will make the natural environment an enriching part of their daily lives. We work with partner organisations to help improve the quality of everyone's experience of natural places and to increase the number and diversity of people inspired by and enjoying the natural environment

This report captures some of the good news stories showcasing the very positive work that Natural England has supported in addressing diversity issues in the countryside ensuring 'fair access to a good quality natural environment'. We hope that the cases stories will provide a source of information and inspiration within the sector.

## 2. The Case Stories

### Sense the Dales

Sense the Dales was a one-day event held jointly by Natural England and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority at the Bolton Abbey estate in September 2010. The event was set up as a taster day for people with disabilities, with a view to encouraging them to visit the National Park more regularly. The event also allowed the National Park to trial some activities with disabled people before including them in the events calendar for the year.

The day was planned using consultation with local disability groups and it was particularly geared towards people with sensory impairments. The event was a success in raising the awareness of disabled and non disabled people to the Yorkshire Dales, but unfortunately not many people with sensory impairments attended the event, although a range of disabilities were represented. This in itself provided a useful learning experience for the staff who organised the event, and they realised that they would need to engage with sensory disabled people over a longer period of time to build up trust before drawing them into novel activities.

Feedback forms used at the event provided additional suggestions for making improvements to future events.

### TrailView

TrailView was a national pilot project involving a Natural England volunteer who is a wheelchair user. Country Parks, footpaths and to the natural sites in Yorkshire were videoed and commented on by the volunteer via social media sites You Tube and Twitter (#OutdoorsforAllUK). The clips

indicate how to get to the sites by public transport and show the terrain so people with mobility problems can assess whether the site is accessible to them. It was hoped that using social media would also stimulate the interest of young people.

The project was very successful with seven sites being described in this way. The volunteer himself was influenced by his experiences in the project and started to visit sites that he had not been to since he was an adolescent and before he became disabled. This made him an excellent advocate for other disabled people to visit their greenspace sites. The volunteer received positive feedback from a range of different countryside users and from tourist agencies, councils and national organisations.

As a pilot, the project proved that the approach of using social media for highlighting accessible greenspace resulted in new audiences being reached as evidenced by the online comments provided by the volunteer. By April 2011 there had been 334 visits to the YouTube Outdoors for All channel. The project was also successful in launching the Natural England volunteer into a new career path. He used the TrailView project as a basis to receive a start-up grant to set up a disabled tourism business linking disabled people with the environment.

### **Wicker Man**

Wicker Man was a willow sculpting community project run in Oxfordshire between a willow artist and local schools with the assistance of Natural England National Nature Reserve staff. Many of the schools were located in areas of multiple deprivation and the project provided an opportunity for the children to learn about willow sculpting and then to visit the finished sculpture in a beautiful natural site.

The giant Wicker Man toured a number of natural sites in the county including Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, where it was displayed in a prominent position overlooking the Vale of Oxford. Thousands of people would have been able to see the sculpture from the nearby M40 motorway and dozens of people contacted Aston Rowant NNR to find out more. Visitor survey data revealed that over 300 new visitors came to the reserve over just one weekend in the summer of 2010, no doubt stimulated by the media interest in the project and the prime location.

### **Dartford Young Rangers**

The Dartford Young Rangers pilot project in Kent targeted 14-16 year olds from an area of multiple deprivation, engaging them in practical conservation activities and encouraging them to care for the natural environment close to their homes. The project was set up by Natural England and delivered by Groundwork Kent and Medway Council. The project aimed to:

- introduce young people to some of their Local Nature Reserves, which many had not visited before;
- encourage the youngsters to make a positive impact in their own local community by helping to manage their local nature reserves and green spaces; and
- provide an opportunity to learn new skills, such as survey techniques, practical conservation and bush craft.

Some of the outcomes for the 2010/11 project were as follows:

- Engagement of 12 year eleven students in woodland management training days.
- Woodland management work successfully complemented horticultural studies.
- Commitment of school to future links with woodland management training

### **Low Luckens Farm**

Low Luckens is an educational access farm near Carlisle. Funding from Outdoors for All strengthened the existing partnership between Natural England and Low Luckens, allowing the existing educational access programme to be broadened to work with disadvantaged families, youth groups referred by the Police, learning disabled children and young people and individuals suffering from mental health issues.

The groups undertook countryside tasks through a range of enjoyable and creative 'hands-on' activities. This programme promoted social cohesion and wellbeing as well as providing opportunities for people to experience the natural environment in ways that were previously unavailable to them.

Low Luckens Farm said, "We would like to thank Natural England for supporting our work with the above groups and the start of our new mental health project 'Wellbeing in the Environment'".

### **Diversity-focused volunteering at Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve**

Natural England and Somerset Wildlife Trust have been working together to promote diversity in volunteering. A volunteers' co-ordinator was co-funded by the two organisations to run a volunteering programme based at Shapwick Heath NNR and a nearby Wildlife Trust site focussing chiefly on people living in areas of urban deprivation, disabled people and young people aged 17-25.

Diversity Volunteer Groups in Somerset include: adult students with learning disabilities, adults with mental health problems, mixed-age people with mental health problems, mixed-age people suffering from drug & alcohol misuse and mental health problems and pupils with learning disabilities.

The main aim is engagement with nature through access to the outdoors. The programme ran in parallel with the established volunteer teams, so that the diversity volunteers worked alongside more experienced volunteers.

### **Nature translations in the Brecks**

The Brecks is located on the borders of Norfolk & Suffolk and includes the town of Thetford, one of the country's 10 per cent most deprived areas. Thetford has a high proportion of young people, many of whom are agricultural immigrants from Poland, Lithuania and Portugal. Although the Brecks is a unique landscape with a rich assemblage of habitats and species, making it one of the most important biodiversity regions in the country, many of the residents of Thetford are unaware of how special the Brecks are, or what they can do to help preserve this special area.

A report describing the biodiversity of the Brecks highlights the importance of the area for wildlife. However, it is incomprehensible to many of the local people whose first language is not English.

The Brecks partnership, with funding from Natural England's Outdoors for All programme, provided translations of the Brecklands report into Polish, Portuguese and Lithuanian and distributed the report locally with the hope that residents of Thetford could become more aware of the nature on their doorstep and develop some pride in the place where they live.



### **Disability cycling taster event**

This event was set up by Natural England in partnership with Letchworth Garden City to introduce disabled people to permissive access routes on a local farm by providing adapted cycles. A safe route from the train station was also developed to connect to the event. People of all ages and a range of disabilities came to try out the cycles.

After a bit of practice, many people felt confident enough to cycle on the adjoining Greenway, which was constructed using Environmental Stewardship (HLS) funding. The majority of people who tried the cycles came away feeling more confident and enjoyed the experience of being out with friends and family. One visitor said, "It was great to see such an inclusive event where disability barriers were lowered."

The event was so successful that Letchworth Garden City are developing plans for an annual disability cycle and they have been working to permanently improve the cycle access between the railway station and the greenway.

### **West Midlands allotment projects**



Three allotment projects supported by Outdoors for All were run in the West Midlands region this year. These projects helped community groups and disabled people to experience the natural environment through allotment gardening. The allotments not only provided vegetables but also wild flower plots and bird tables so that the groups could experience wildlife close up. The funding provided specialist tools for the gardening as well as workshops run by the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust to help the groups learn about gardening and wildlife.

The three projects have brought together community members and have allowed disabled people and others suffering poor mental health to integrate with other allotment users locally, learn about wildlife and grow their own food.

The projects have been so successful that Walsall Council has provided additional funding to improve access to one of the sites as a direct result of seeing how popular the allotments were with disabled people.

### **Derwent WheelyBoat**

Support was provided for a disabled access boat at Derwent Water in the Lake District National Park in partnership with the National Park and the Environment Agency. The scheme was suggested during the National Park's Access to Lakes, Rivers and Coast research and gained support from the local angling club and local disability charities.



### **Accessible bird hide leaflet**

Following experience of not being able to access or fully use bird hides around the country, our Yorkshire and Humber Outdoors for All adviser, who is a wheelchair user, designed an information note to describe simple modifications to bird hides to make them fully accessible. This easy read leaflet contains photographs and technical specifications to show how to improve the seating spaces and shutter design in a hide. The leaflet will be published for external use in 2011/12 with the intention of sharing the information with other site providers.

### **Yorkshire & Humber's accessible natural greenspace**

Numerous natural spaces in the region were not well known to the general public and information about access to and around the sites was not readily available. This project, which was led by two disabled staff members in the region, set out to change this.

First of all a questionnaire was designed and sent out to public greenspace providers in the region. The completed questionnaires were then collated and selected sites were visited to check the accuracy of the questionnaire responses.

The final stage involved uploading the information on all these sites to the regional pages of the Natural England website so that the information on access could be shared with the general public. The initial plan to host the information in interactive format on the Welcome to Yorkshire (regional tourism) website unfortunately fell through due to financial restrictions. However, the information is available to all and in the future it can potentially be hosted in a more popular web location.

### **National Nature Reserves outreach**

A Heritage Lottery funded project, 'Welcome to the Wildside' allowed some innovative access improvements to be made to NNRs in Kent. Web-based audio trails and pod scrolls with accompanying on-site interpretation were launched for Wye and Stodmarsh NNRs and tactile way marking, physical access improvements and targeted engagement allowed a variety of disabled people to visit these sites for the first time.



A number of other NNRs have carried out access improvements during the year allowing disabled people as well as people with pushchairs to access the sites more easily. For example, Ribble NNR in partnership with Lancashire County Council Rangers Service hosted approximately 25 disabled ramblers at the NNR on Trumper mobility scooters. The NNR staff mowed additional routes through the NNR to allow improved access for the ramblers.

National Nature Reserve service standards were implemented on 23 'destination NNRs' in England ensuring a good provision of access and information for visitors, including specific facilities for less-able users.

### **Internal Guidance**

During the year, internal position notes were produced for the following: Access to Local Nature Reserves; equestrian access; multi-purpose access routes; securing quality delivery in Country Parks and related greenspace sites; walking with dogs; and access and nature conservation. These short guidance notes highlight key issues and guiding principles for Natural England staff and include underpinning evidence, good practice and case study examples.



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