Access Management

an integrated approach

The Access Issue

The area of the Yorkshire Dales was designated as a National Park because of its many special qualities, but also for the opportunities it offers for people to experience them. Managing these recreational opportunities is the work of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA).

The Environment Act 1995 defines the purposes of National Park Authorities in England and Wales, including the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA), as:

- **to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the national parks;**
- **to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities [of the national parks] by the public.**

National Parks in England and Wales were created based on the belief that visiting beautiful landscapes is beneficial to an individual's mental and physical well-being and this experience should be available to everyone by right.

"National Parks are not for any privileged or otherwise restricted section of the population but for all who come to refresh their minds and spirit and to exercise their bodies in a peaceful setting of natural beauty." (John Dower, Secretary of the Standing Committee on National Parks,1945)



Fell runners near Malham (©Paul Harris)

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan 2019-24 (NPMP) states the vision for access in the Yorkshire Dales National Park today as:

'A friendly, open and welcoming place with outstanding opportunities to enjoy its special qualities'.

Managing access involves complex interrelated challenges, which include: access for all abilities; inclusion; promotion of healthy living; sustainable transport; sustainable tourism; accessibility and visitor management. These issues are outlined below in relation to the access resource.

Achieving Sustainable Access

The future of the National Park is dependent on balancing the conservation of the special qualities of the area, with the activities of a visiting population and the well-being of the local community. An important factor in achieving this balance, involves a positive relationship between the growing range of users; farmers; landowners and other local residents; visitors and the YDNPA.

Crucially, the local economy can be strengthened by having its foundations firmly rooted in the uniqueness of the National Park and in particular its access opportunities. However, recreational activity cannot come at the expense of what makes the area special and attracts people to it. Users should be encouraged to act responsibly, making them part of the conservation of the access resource, rather than harming it.

Transport

The large number of vehicles travelling in the area is seen as a significant issue facing the National Park today. While most people accept the need for vehicles, they also bring problems if there are too many, these include congestion; accidents; ecological disturbance; pollution and land taken for car parking. The YDNPA is working with agriculture, quarrying and other local industries to reduce the impact of goods movement. The YDNPA also aims to increase public transport to and within the National Park, which will reduce the impact of private vehicle traffic.

Tourism

Tourism provides enormous economic benefits and opportunities for the local community. For example, in 2019, (figures from STEAM economic impact report) the Yorkshire Dales National Park received 4.9 million visitors, made up of 4.2 million day trippers and 0.7 million overnight visitors. Between them, day and staying visitors combined to produce 10.4 million visitor days. These visitors brought in £374 million to the region's economy and provided employment for 5,353 (FTE) jobs. In 2020, numbers declined as a result of the pandemic, with 2.5 million visitors. These numbers of visitors make it vital that they follow the principles of sustainable tourism, minimising the negative impact of their visit on the very thing they've come to enjoy. The challenge for sustainable tourism is to develop products which drive economic development, while celebrating the special qualities of the National Park. This includes encouraging visitors to make visits for longer or outside of the peak season for example. More information about how the YDNPA and partner organisations hope to achieve this can be found here.

Healthy Living

The promotion and the development of the public rights of way network can increase access for walking, cycling and other sport and leisure opportunities that have a low impact on the environment; whilst helping to increase levels of physical activity and improve public health. For example, an objective in the current NPMP is to develop further cycling 'hubs', such as those already developed at Reeth and Settle, to promote and improve cycling access. Further objectives concerning Access and Recreation can found here.



A family about to start the Swale Trail: a mountain bike route suitable for families (©YDNPA)

Inclusion

Those who experience 'social exclusion,' for whatever reason, have limited access to benefits which many other people take for granted; anything from employment to a good home, or an outing to a nearby park. Efforts to enhance 'social inclusion' include engaging with people from under-represented groups, such as the elderly, people from BAME backgrounds and people with disabilities ('Access for all'), in a range of activities including walks, arts and skills-based activities. The YDNPA and partner organisations also has a role in ensuring that people experiencing exclusion in rural areas are not overlooked because of the general 'idyllic' perception of rural life.

The Access Resource

The access resource consists of routes or areas of land where people can legally participate in recreational activities, such as open access areas, public rights of way, cycle-ways, permitted paths and quiet lane networks. It includes access to other recreational opportunities, which are dependent on the special qualities of the area, for example, caving and rock climbing. Careful management is required to balance the provision of recreational opportunities and the impact of the activity on the conservation of the environmental resource.

Recreational Opportunities

The landscape of the National Park provides opportunities for many forms of air, land and water-based countryside recreation, offering some of the best walking, caving, paragliding, sport climbing and mountain biking in the country. Beyond maintaining general visitor facilities, such as car parks, toilets and the network public rights of way, many activities take place without formal management by the YDNPA. Intervention only becomes necessary where activities conflict with conservation interests and other users, e.g. use of 'green lanes' by motorised vehicles.

The Rights of Way Network

The extensive network of more than 2,600km of public rights of way is identified as one of the primary assets of the National Park. The YDNPA is the delegated Highway Authority for the Public Rights of Way within the National Park. It maintains the legal record of rights of way, through the continuous review of the Definitive Map and has responsibility for the physical maintenance and improvement of the rights of way network.

Long Distance Routes /

The National Park is criss-crossed by a network of official and unofficial long distance routes, including the Pennine Way, Pennine Bridleway, Coast-to-Coast and the Dales Way; together they are walked annually by thousands of walkers.



National Trail signage (©YDNPA)

Open Access

Following the introduction of the CRoW Act (Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000), the National Park now contains over 120,000 hectares of open access land, covering 60% of the park. The CRoW Act access rights entitle the public to use this land for such activities as walking, fell running and rock climbing; however, cycling, horse-riding, and the use of motor-vehicles are not allowed. Under the CRoW Act, the YDNPA is responsible for ensuring reasonable access and determining restrictions. Where this alone is likely to be insufficient, or to place an unreasonable burden of liability or cost on the land manager, the Act provides a legal system to restrict access.

Vehicle Use of Unsealed Routes ('Green Lanes')

The use of 'green lanes' by recreational motor vehicles, such as motorbikes and 4-wheel drive cars, is an emotive issue, as it affects the landscape of the National Park and the enjoyment of other users. Many of the 'rights to use' originate in what is now an unsustainable approach, based on rights established by horse-drawn vehicle use, now being claimed for motorised vehicle use. In specially protected areas like National Parks, motorised recreational activity is often not appropriate, as it conflicts with the interest of promoting quiet enjoyment and conservation of habitats.

Organised Events

Events such as charity walks and challenges in the National Park can bring huge benefits to charitable organisations and their beneficiaries, as well as the local economy. Unfortunately, they may also have an adverse impact on the environment. Appropriate recreational use of the National Park for large-scale events is achieved by promoting appropriate use, at the right level, time of year or day of the week and in locations best placed to limit potential over-crowding or traffic congestion.

Managing Accessibility

Access for All

All visitors and residents of the National Park should be able to enjoy some access to the countryside, whatever their age, race, ethnic background/religion or physical ability. They should be able to decide for themselves, whether or not particular recreational opportunities or the means

of accessing them, are suitable for them as individuals. The YDNPA seeks to integrate the principle of 'Access for All' throughout its entire management of access provision

Promoting Equality and Diversity

The National Park seeks to broaden the diversity of visitors to the National Park, whilst advancing fairness and equality of opportunities and developing good relationships between different people and groups. For example, this can be achieved by developing accessible routes for a wider audience (such as 'Miles without Stiles'); delivering events for the elderly; working with under-represented groups in urban areas, such as Leeds, Wakefield and Bradford to benefit their access to the National Park; organising various educational activities and events with families and schools and recruiting apprentices to provide young people experience of working for a National Park.



The Learning & Engagement Team leading an organised walk (©Stephen Garnett)

Support and Access for Residents

As well as visitors, the YDNPA has a duty to support local populations so that their services and infrastructure have long term viability. The YDNPA aims to support communities by maintaining or improving access to services, such as schools, public transport including bus services and GP surgeries. There is also a decline in the number of younger, working-aged households in the National Park. A 5-year programme of measures is in place to increase the support for this, such as developing affordable housing and investing in local culture and heritage, to attract younger people and businesses to the area.

Access Interchanges

Most visitors arrive by some form of motorised transport: bus, train, car, etc. This creates a need for an ‘interchange’, at the point of access to the countryside, whether on foot, cycle or horse, for example. The interchange may be as simple as a bus stop or a lay-by, or as formal as a large developed area with extensive facilities. Different levels of ‘interchange’ require different facilities, depending on the expected level and type of usage and the characteristics of the location. Some examples of the areas that need to be maintained or developed are: road safety; provision for people with a disability; security; shelter; mobile phone coverage; car parking and toilets; travel/access information; signage; way-marking and interpretation.

The Ranger Service

Rangers work closely with land managers and countryside users to continually repair and maintain the public rights of way network, whilst also increasing the amount which is ‘easy to use’. Much of

this work directly involves 'barrier reduction', e.g. resurfacing paths and tracks, providing and maintaining stiles and gates, along with building/maintaining bridges and way-marking and signposting Public Rights of Way. By 2023, the YDNPA plan to ensure 90% of all Public Rights of Way are 'easy to use' and that 10% are accessible for all users, age or ability.



YDNPA Ranger Service (©YDNPA)