

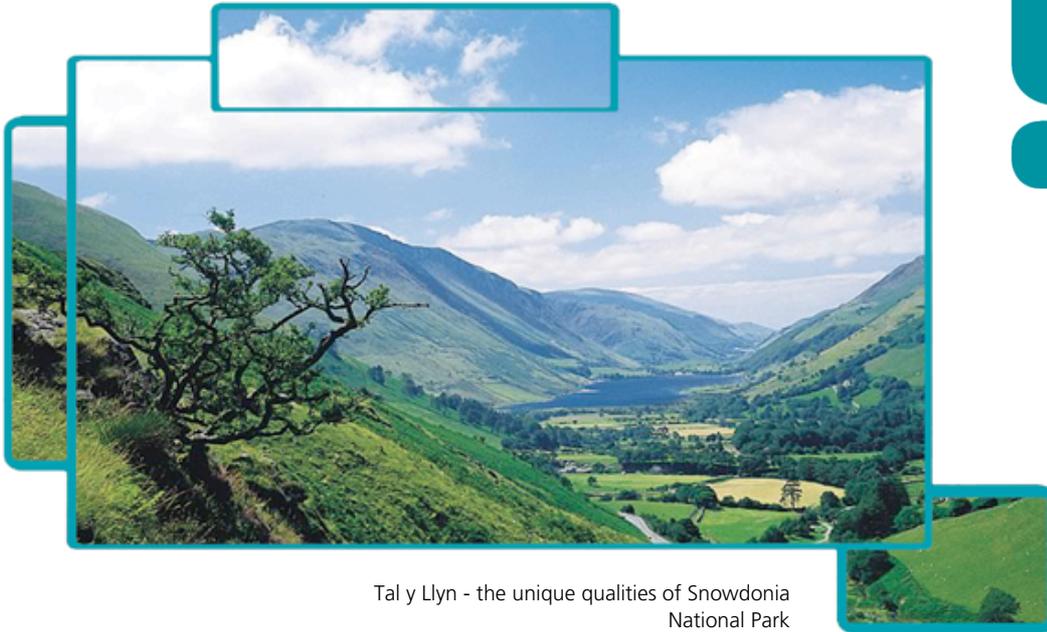
Strategic sustainability

How Snowdonia National Park are connecting and balancing sustainability.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Tal y Llyn - the unique qualities of Snowdonia National Park

Overview

Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA) are joining up the environmental, social, and economic strands of sustainability to ensure that the National Park remains a unique and special place both now and in the future.

Background

Established in 1951, Snowdonia National Park is the largest National Park in Wales and home to 26,000 people. It is a unique area that encapsulates stunning scenery, environmentally sensitive areas, a Welsh speaking population, and a variety of economic opportunities and challenges. With 6 million tourists visiting every year, the landscape and rich culture provides an opportunity for prosperity, producing around £60 million of economic output; while high house prices, a lack of opportunities for young people and the decline of Welsh speaking communities are ongoing challenges.

Results

Identify outcomes that increase the wellbeing of Wales

Evidence

Make decisions using better information

Collaboration

Work with others across boundaries

Long term

Fix the causes rather than the symptoms

Connect

Focus on the economic, social and environmental benefits

Transparency

Measure and report on the difference you make

This is one of a series of SD stories that can be found on the Welsh Government website at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/>

In its vision for 2035 the National Park will continue to be a protected and evolving landscape, safeguarded and enhanced to provide a rich and varied natural environment that provides social, economic and well-being benefits nationally and internationally

Why

SNPA's focus on sustainability has been embodied in its operations since 1995, through the Environment Act, with the duty to protect the area's environment and to promote social and economic wellbeing of communities within the National Park.

The National Park Management Plan responds to the Welsh Government's annual remit letter and sets outcomes relating to areas such as community, climate change, carbon, and the environment. Although much of SNPA's work is inevitably driven by government targets, it is also keen to act as a test bed for sustainability.

SNPA's work with partners is also a driver for sustainability, for example by signing up to Gwynedd Council's carbon initiative which is a 60% reduction by 2020, exceeding Welsh Government targets.

What they did

In 1996 SNPA agreed that 'the principle of sustainability should be central to all future policies, plans and programmes'.

If there are conflicts between the two statutory purposes - to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area, and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public, the established 'Sandford' principle requires that the first purpose (conservation) is given priority.

Through consultation and discussion SNPA has identified the special qualities that define the characteristics of the National Park and set it apart. These qualities, which include the diversity in landscape, community cohesion, and Welsh language inform the approach of SNPA and determine what it sees as important for the long term.

The Snowdonia National Park Management Plan sets out SNPA's strategic aims and objectives over five years and short term actions over two years and comprises of six main areas:

1. Carbon Management
2. Improving Habitats
3. Enhancing Landscapes
4. Promoting Cultural Heritage
5. Improving Access and Understanding opportunities for All
6. Supporting Sustainable Communities

Each area has key objectives and actions. For example, an action for Carbon Management is looking to improve the energy efficiency of buildings through sustainable design. SNPA has published a "Guidance for Sustainable Design", to offer advice on appropriate renewable energy technology, energy efficiency and suggesting the best locations for new development.

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Partnership is fundamental to the approach of SNPA. Working with organisations, communities and visitors encourages understanding, and incorporates SNPA's vision and underlying principles into their documents and actions, ensuring delivery of common goals and a shared responsibility.

SNPA works closely with communities and meets regularly with community councillors to try to solve issues such as the provision of affordable housing and a relatively weak local economy. SNPA is aiming to tackle these challenges by promoting and attracting investment for the environmental goods and services sector through renewable energy, local food, research and development, sustainable tourism and outdoor recreation.

What changed

Through the main six areas in the management plan SNPA has seen good progress, with these notable examples:

- Building revenue streams by installing renewables to power their own buildings. A hydro scheme in Plas Tan y Bwlch for instance will give a 22% reduction toward SNPA's overall carbon footprint. The money saved through this will be driven back into further programmes.
- Through partnership with Natural Resources Wales and landowners SNPA has been working on blanket bog restoration over a 43 hectare area to deliver carbon sequestration, improved water quality, ecological and landscape benefit.
- Through the Sustainable Development Fund SNPA has given out over £3 million for projects that support the National Park's vision and unlocked over £24 million of match funding.

What obstacles existed

Balancing the needs of communities, government

targets and long term vision can be a challenge. SNPA takes a proactive stance to overcome this by consulting, engaging and involving stakeholders. Another inevitable challenge are resources and budgets.

Producing affordable local housing that is sustainable involves difficult decision making and sometimes means being pragmatic. Most of the housing stock in the National Park is pre-1970, with 1900 houses listed or with conservation area status making it difficult to improve their energy efficiency. SNPA is a partner in a European project to make whole buildings more energy efficient using modern technology, cladding, and paint. Through this project SNPA can train people in the relevant skills and help them remain in the local area and improve economic development.

“Because we're small and constrained by resources we can't always do as much as we'd like to, particularly down the path of sustainable economic development. When you're looking at a budget of £6-9 million a year you can't go investing in projects as you'd wish. There are lots of things we would like to do but it's a question of resources being available. It's about realising what we can do in our budgets.”

Ifer Gwyn, Principal Policy Officer,
Snowdonia National Park Authority.

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Difficult decisions have to be made regarding objectives, for example around housing. Generally SNPA try and push developers to go for the highest stage within the Code for Sustainable Homes, but where a good scheme's viability is threatened and financially unviable, SNPA has had to take the strategic decision to reduce the cost by for example being more lenient on restrictions, such as stone cladding and slate roofs.

What they learned

Being a small organisation has helped SNPA pursue sustainability objectives, push boundaries and set high standards. Setting the sustainability context around the unique nature and 'special qualities' of the National Park has given the agenda a common understandable theme for stakeholders.

Working with partners and bringing expert opinion has been key. SNPA has worked well with organisations such as the Carbon Trust to provide significant energy reductions on their buildings and estate.

SNPA has learnt the value of failure and taking calculated risks. It recognises that not everything will work and it is happy to act as test bed for ideas and collaborate with others. They were the first to invest into the Centre for Alternative Technology's Wales Institute for Sustainable Education (Wise) Building, to pay the architect fees which helped pull in other needed investment.

Snowdonia National Park Authority are now seeking to work closer with businesses to link economic development to a more sustainable local economy.

SNPA is beginning to engage businesses about the opportunities presented alongside the installation of multiuser paths in the area. It is also looking at visitor gifting, where for instance a £2 charge is added to a hotel bill to help to contribute towards National Park maintenance and create a more sustainable tourism sector. In addition, it has utilised Visit Wales funding to provide one-to-one visits to tourism businesses keen to improve their environmental sustainability.

"We have tended to leave business advisory roles to government and the regeneration services of our constituent local authorities, but in fact with the skills of our staff we could play a more important role. Economic development in National Parks should largely be based on natural assets and their sustainable use, either for production or enjoyment."

Ifer Gwyn, Principal Policy Officer,
Snowdonia National Park Authority.

Contact and Links

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[Snowdonia National Park Authority's Environment pages](#)
[Snowdonia National Park Management Plan](#)
[Centre for Alternative Technology WISE building](#)

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