

University of Brighton

Strategic Planning of Water Related Sports and Recreation in Wales

Workshop Summaries

Workshop	Wrexham
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Current Participation and Potential Future Demand

There is a strong demand for memberships to good angling clubs (both coarse and game), with attention paid to disabled access to angling platforms. There is a specific requirement for angling access to the Lower Dee. Wirral game fishing club have a waiting list. Good clubs with access to good water have excess demand.

We perhaps need to understand more about the sport of coarse angling. It is popular with disadvantaged groups and offers opportunities to get people fishing in more sustainable ways. Coarse angling can take place in small areas of water that can perhaps be created in / or in close proximity to urban areas.

There is a strong demand for coastal marinas and moorings, particularly for larger craft that act primarily as a 'second home'.

Walking and cycling alongside water and swimming offer the greatest potential for mass participation. These activities will have greatest impact on health and numbers participating.

Local people are best placed to care for local communities and the environment; angling clubs are a core part of many communities and have played an important role in attracting hard-to-reach communities in inland Wales. Problems tend to be created where external pressures/demands are brought to bear on local relationships and partnerships; this is particularly the case for new sports, or where there is pressure to intensify use by existing sports (angling and canoeing as one example). Too much external pressure can lead to voluntary arrangements breaking down; the claim by locals is that outsiders do not/do not want to understand the dynamics that underpin the arrangements. External pressure brought to bear on local arrangements can (and often does) lead to conflict.

There is a need to explore the educational possibilities of water sports – with disadvantaged youth, crime prevention.

There is a need for more/better information about the opportunities that exist. These are issues around the need for a countryside access database.

The Resource Base and Constraints to Use

Have to look at individual activities; some activities can increase but not all. There is a need to consider at geography – this is the environmental constraint issue. Sentence doesn't make sense.

Estuaries and sea offer potential – space. This point related to the constraints of many of the rivers which are small and offer limited potential because of angling leases. However, estuaries/coasts are not always accessible, while the use of estuaries is constrained by tides.

Rivers and lakes – have constraints for some activities, and lakes are a finite resource.

There are also equipment constraints: there is nowhere locally to hire a dinghy. This was a comment from a sailing instructor who indicated that there was a shortage of equipment hire outlets. And equipment needs to be of the right quality.

Rafting is a popular activity and there is a need for more/better information on when rivers are available.

Social Benefits and Impacts

For social benefits to be realized, there is a need for education, raising awareness of the environment. There is also a need to challenge the perceived dangers associated with different sports.

Personal intrusion (e.g changing in public) – on inland waters and at the coasts – remains a negative impact

Environmental Impacts

Traffic, parking, travel (long trips) all have a negative impact on the environment. Rather, the strategy should encourage as much local access and use as possible.

Noise leading to disturbance of habitats is also an issue, as is erosion (banks, gorge walking).

The solution to most environmental impact issues is for users and representative bodies to take responsibility; this means being able to identify users and accepting that there may be some limitation on the available areas of use.

Sea-based sports – some estuary environments are very sensitive (in terms of the bird life), while the over-use of rivers can lead to damage to habitat, banks, the effects on wildlife.

Conflicts

The emphasis here should be on collaboration and cooperation, rather than conflict. However, with the increasing collapse of canoe access agreements, anglers are desperate to find ways of managing canoeing, so that not all of it is unmanaged. There is a lot of anger in the angling community, feeling at end of their tether. The same is the case for riparian owners: who do they go to for help in keeping canoeists off river? Anglers want local solutions and access agreements – they definitely want to keep control, to keep the upper hand.

What is needed now is negotiation training (and brokers) for anglers and canoeists – to form long-lasting agreements and reduce the conflict.

Jet skiing is also a problem requiring licensing/regulation.

Management Issues

Voluntary agreements for the shared use of resources are no longer as effective as they once were. This is largely about the ineffectiveness of regulation and policing if one or more parties no longer recognise the agreement.

Many land owners and clubs are concerned about their legal liability for those who participate in sport/recreation activities on their property (there was a strong feeling that all people recreating in countryside should carry their own insurance, or accept the risks). While CRoW is seen in some quarters as a step forward (limited legal liability), it has opened up previously inaccessible property which may, in some cases, lead to a heightened occupier liability. This means that riparian owners now feel liable in a way that they did not previously.

The leaders (of activity groups) should be properly supported by government, and not scapegoated if anything goes wrong. This would encourage them to continue to lead groups and introduce people to outdoor recreation.

Management of rivers (canoeing, angling, etc.) should be managed by River Trusts rather than individual clubs.

Statutory Planning and Governance Issues

There is a need for consistent regulation (across England and Wales).

EA should be broker, regulator and where necessary, prosecutor of access agreements, with all parties equally subject to regulation. All water sport users to be licensed, so that individuals can be identified, and should pay for use (in order to pay for enforcement staff). Third party insurance should also be compulsory for all water sports users.

Some support was expressed for using TAN 16 planning gain to benefit water sports. However, not all participants were positive about this, believing that the benefits

would be swallowed up by the local authority.

Funding and Finance

There should be an emphasis on attracting people into the area (economic benefits that come with this – e.g Highlands and Islands research which identified how much each mountain climber and walker spent while visiting the area).

Local access agreements: the finance raised should be put back into river or local area. Permit prices need to market led.

Examples of Good Practice

- North West Wales Partnership
- Dee Valley Way (the walking path next to / near the river)
- Bala (the situation has improved for multi-use through dialogue and communication)
- Access agreements (canoe)
- Environmental management example: Afon Ddu Gorge, Conwy Valley (has a management group)
- rock climbers avoiding designated cliffs because of nesting birds (specific example, Holy Island) – reasons: peer management; and “there is a lot of information out there”
- Increasing urban provision of angling – for example in parks (lakes and ponds). Examples in Wrexham are Acton Park and Moss Valley – project by / with NACRO
- Plas Madoc Summer holiday coaching scheme (for angling) they worked with local community, disadvantaged youth. 3 days per week for 6 weeks. Approximately 30 kids participated. They learnt and practiced 3 kinds of angling: in river, lake and canal. Project led to a 50% drop in crime rate.
- Treweryn – good example of provision by Welsh Water Company.

Implications for the Strategy

This strategy needs to be linked to the current policy arena relating to water-based sport and recreation, especially in terms of who makes decisions, where and when, and what will help them to make better decisions. The Welsh Assembly Government lead on the strategy will be paramount: will it be linked into key agendas for local authorities (health, education)? Relevance to local political priorities will win a place for the strategy within spatial planning in Wales.

How do you reflect local voluntarism in a national strategy?

How can new demand be directed to spaces and areas that can accommodate it without over burdening the local population and communities?

There is also a need to link the funding of new opportunities and developments to

local sustainable development; this will entail environmental assessment of potential sites (although recognising that the politics of who owns the strategy – from WAG down – will be more important sooner than the source of funding).

There is a question of finance from national licenses being divided between England and Wales: how is this to be achieved, particularly if all water users are licenced? There is, here, the question of a Welsh license.

The issue of water related recreation (eg bird watching) is a vital part of outdoor water related recreation and could offer opportunities to increase participation. It is not specifically listed as one of the activities we are asked to look at and perhaps requires discussion with the steering group? Access alongside water is key – rather than on/in it. There is a need to understand the priority of the steering group – do we need to map the areas where there is greatest opportunity to open up access alongside water. What is the feeling in Wales about the priority for opening up access to watersides?