Natural Resources Wales

Health Impact Assessment

Proposed Designation of a New National Park in Wales

(Version 0.4 – August 2025)

Environmental and Health Assessment Team

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V.2	11/04/2025	Draft for internal review with Designated Landscapes Team and Northeast and Mid People and Place Team Draft for External review with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Powys Teaching Health Board.
V.3	06/06/2025	HIA issued for consideration by NRW Board
V.4	08/2025	Boundary revisions related to the 2025 'Wales's New National Park Proposal: A Summary of Evidence' and the submission to the NRW Board – See Addendum.

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Executive Summary

The Welsh Government intends to designate a new National Park centred on the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape (formerly an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). A National Park Authority is a dedicated body with legal duties including producing a Management Plan, holding full planning powers over the Park, and receiving long-term funding from the Welsh Government, local levies, and other sources.

To inform the decision-making process, NRW has undertaken a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to explore the potential effects on health and well-being. HIA considers how wider social, economic, and environmental factors, known as the wider determinants of health, may impact different population groups. This assessment provides evidence-based recommendations to maximise positive health outcomes and minimise potential negative impacts linked to the proposed designation.

Impacts on Population Groups

The HIA identifies groups that may be disproportionately affected, but many challenges already exist. With thoughtful implementation, the designation offers a key opportunity to reduce inequalities, improve well-being, and invest in underserved communities.

- Income-related groups
- Age-related groups
- Groups at risk of discrimination or social disadvantage
- Geographical groups
- Occupational groups:

Determinants of Health and Well-being

This HIA finds that designating a new National Park could significantly affect the wider determinants of health, with long-term impacts on the population. It presents a key opportunity to reduce health inequalities and improve well-being, particularly in underserved areas, if supported by strong policy, investment, and community engagement. While some improvements may occur without it, the Park could act as a catalyst, aligning efforts, attracting funding and creating a strategic, inclusive framework for lasting change. Potential negative impacts must be carefully managed, but the designation also offers a chance to address existing challenges more effectively.

Opportunities and Positive Impacts of a new National Park Designation:

- Climate and Health Co-benefits
- Biodiversity Resilience
- Improve Economic Growth and Community Well-being
- Cultural Heritage Conservation
- Enhancement of Health and Well-being through Access to Nature
- Integrated Stewardship
- Promotion of Active Travel
- Sustainable Agriculture

Negative Impacts and Unintended Consequences of a new National Park Designation:

- Resource Limitations
- Overtourism and Strain on Local Infrastructure and Services
- Development Pressures
- Impacts on Healthcare Access
- Social Exclusion
- Economic Pressures on Farming
- Housing Affordability Issues

Areas for Action:

If designated, integrating these action areas into the new Welsh National Park's management will maximise its environmental, social, and economic benefits for future sustainability.

Enhanced Cooperation and Funding: Strengthen collaboration between Park authorities, communities, government, and businesses to coordinate tourism, infrastructure, and land use, while addressing local needs

Climate Resilience, Adaptation, and Nature Recovery: Embed climate resilience and adaptation at the heart of National Park planning and management.

Sustainable Tourism Management: Visitor management, sustainable travel, environmental protection, and safety awareness.

Affordable and Sustainable Housing: Prioritise affordable housing initiatives for local communities, balancing conservation with the socio-economic needs of residents.

Inclusivity and Access: Expand accessibility initiatives within National Parks to ensure underrepresented groups can fully enjoy these spaces.

Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Enterprise: Provide ongoing support for farmers in National Parks to adopt sustainable practices, Promotion of sustainable rural enterprises.

Adaptive Planning Policies: Review and adapt planning policies to strike a balance between conservation and the practical needs of local communities.

Enhance Mental and Physical Health Opportunities: Utilise the natural environment to improve health by encouraging outdoor activities that promote physical and mental well-being.

Support Local Food Systems and Health: Promotion of local food production and procurement and other sustainable rural enterprises.

The proposed National Park presents a unique opportunity to improve health, equity, and sustainability through better access to nature, coordinated investment, and inclusive planning. Many challenges—such as rural inequality and economic pressures—already exist, but the designation offers a strategic framework to address them. Success depends on equitable implementation, careful management of risks, and long-term commitment to environmental and social outcomes.

1. Background

In its Programme for Government (2021-2026), Welsh Government set out its intention to designate a new National Park in Wales based around the existing Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape (formally known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)).

The proposal to create a new National Park highlights the role National Parks play in conserving and enhancing the environment and supporting sustainable rural development by helping

- tackle the nature emergency
- achieve more sustainable tourism[1]

The designation area covers five local authority areas.

- Gwynedd
- Denbighshire
- Flintshire
- Wrexham
- Powys

This would be a fourth National Park for Wales, and the first new such Park to be established in Wales since 1957.

Welsh Government has commissioned Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to evaluate the case for the designation. NRW are the Welsh Government's statutory adviser on landscape and natural beauty and the designating authority for any new National Parks and National Landscapes.

National Park **purposes** are set out in Section 5(1) National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (NPAC 1949):

> (a) conserving and enhancing its natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and;
> (b) promoting the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities by the public.

Section 5(2) of the NPAC 1949 lists the **criteria** NRW must cover in considering a National Park designation. The Act defines that a National Park must be an 'extensive tract of country in Wales which it appears to NRW that, by reason of its:

> (a) natural beauty and:
> (b) the opportunities it affords for open-air recreation
>
> having regard to both its character and its position in relation to centres of population, it is especially desirable that it is designated for National Park purposes.

[1] Welsh Government (2024) New National Park Designation Project Available at: New National Park Designation Project | GOV.WALES (Accessed 8.5.2025)

Natural beauty and opportunities for open-air recreation are therefore the designation criteria which must be satisfied for an area to be designated.

A National Park is a government-designated area aimed at preserving the natural environment for public recreation, enjoyment, and conservation. Each park is managed by a National Park Authority (NPA), which is a dedicated body with appointed members and legal responsibilities, including producing a Management Plan. The NPA holds full planning powers within the park, overseeing the Local Development Plan and deciding on planning applications. Funding comes from long-term support by the Welsh Government and a local authority levy, with opportunities to secure additional resources.

As the Designating Authority in Wales, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) must ensure that there is sufficient evidence to designate a new National Park. This decision follows a statutory process, which NRW aims to complete within the current Senedd term (by 2026).

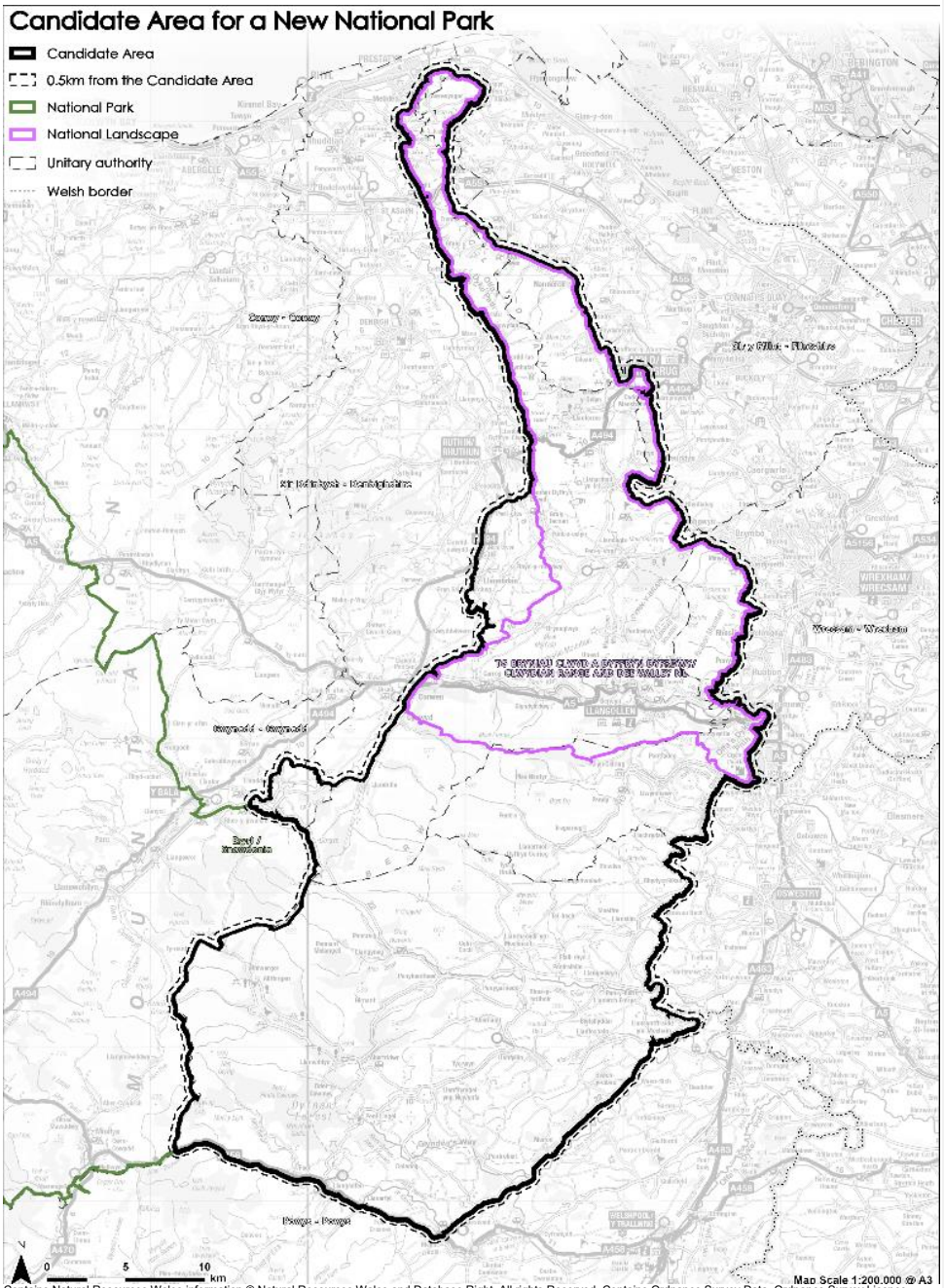
As part of the designation process, NRW commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) Ltd. to undertake an assessment of the 'Forces for Change'—the key dynamic influences impacting the area's special qualities. Following this, LUC conducted a detailed evaluation of various management options, comparing their potential to address these forces and deliver positive long-term outcomes.

The options considered included:

- No change.
- A National Landscape (AONB) conservation board over a larger area.
- Alternative models such as the Valleys and South Pennines Regional Parks
- A National Park

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has conducted a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to ensure that health-related considerations are fully incorporated into the assessment process. This HIA is based on the National Park option, which was identified by LUC as the preferred approach in the Management Options assessment commissioned by NRW.

NRW's Board will decide on the nature and desirability of a new designation and the HIA will contribute to ensuring that the Board can make a fully informed decision. If the evidence supports a new designation, a Designation Order will be submitted to the Welsh Government and all relevant evidence will be made publicly available which may help inform the final decision. Ministers will then consider whether to confirm, refuse, or vary the Order. If confirmed, the Welsh Government will proceed with establishing Wales's fourth National Park.



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2. Aims and Objectives

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a means of assessing the health impacts of a policy, programme or project using quantitative, qualitative and participatory techniques.[2] It encompasses the World Health Organisation (WHO) definition whereby "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".[3]

HIA operates on a social model that acknowledges the influence of various factors, known as the wider determinants of health (including income levels, environmental conditions, access to services, housing etc), on physical and mental health and well-being. Furthermore, a HIA can identify and explore health inequalities as these determinants can affect different vulnerable population groups in distinct ways.

This HIA is undertaken on the belief that the designation of a new National Park has the potential to influence the determinants of health. Changes in these health determinants subsequently result in changes in health outcomes or the overall health status of those who reside, work, study, or visit areas within or adjacent to the Park's boundaries.

The objective of this HIA is to develop evidence-based recommendations that enhance potential positive health effects and mitigate potential unintended negative health impacts, to help in guiding the decision-making process on the potential designation of a new National Park in Wales. Although Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is not yet statutory in Wales (it will become so when the Health Impact Assessment (Wales) regulations as part of the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 are enacted), Natural Resources Wales considers it best practice to support the decision making process.

It is anticipated that by the time a decision to designate a new National Park is made, the Health Impact Assessment (Wales) Regulations will be enacted. Should the designation proceed, it will become a statutory requirement for the National Park Authority, as a public body, to conduct its own Health Impact Assessment (HIA) under certain circumstances. The findings from this HIA could then be utilised by the National Park Authority to inform its assessment.

Furthermore, HIA aligns strongly with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by supporting its core principles of long-term thinking, prevention, integration, collaboration, and involvement. HIA provides a structured approach to identifying how plans or policies may impact health outcomes, particularly for vulnerable groups, enabling public bodies to make decisions that promote a healthier and more equal Wales. By evaluating both positive and negative unintended health impacts, HIA helps to prevent future harm, aligns with the Act's goal of sustainable development, and contributes to several well-being goals, including a healthier, more equal, and cohesive society. It also encourages cross-sector working and community engagement, ensuring that decision-making reflects the needs of both current and future generations.

[2] Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (2012) Health Impact Assessment: A Practical Guide Available at: Health-Impact-Assessment-A-Practical-guide.pdf (Accessed 7.4.2025)
[3] World Health Organisation (2025) Available at: Constitution of the World Health Organisation (Accessed 6.3.25)

3. Methodology

This Health Impact Assessment (HIA) follows the methodology outlined in WHIASU (2012) Health Impact Assessment: a Practical Guide.[2] HIA is a standard 5 step process and the methodology for the HIA is summarised below,

1. Screening: Collaboration between internal teams within Natural Resources Wales identified that the designation of a new National Park in Wales could impact on health and wellbeing, where wide ranging population groups could be affected.

2. Scoping: Resources were allocated and agreed by NRW. The HIA is being conducted in-house by the Environmental and Health Assessment Team as a rapid, strategic-level assessment, using a focused methodology supported by robust evidence at a broader population level. The timeframe aligns with the designation programme timeline.

3. Appraisal – Evidence Gathering: As part of the assessment, the evaluation of evidence to identify health impacts will incorporate an Understanding Populations and Communities Report, stakeholder and community engagement/consultation and a literature review.

    - The Understanding Populations and Communities Report offers a detailed overview of the demographics, socio-economic factors, and specific characteristics of the populations that may be affected by the proposed project or policy. This helps identify vulnerable groups, potential health inequalities, and local conditions that need to be considered in the HIA.
    - Stakeholder and community engagement and consultation ensures that the perspectives, concerns, and local knowledge of those directly impacted are incorporated. This process allows for the identification of health issues that may not be fully captured in existing research or data, highlighting specific community needs and priorities. It also ensures that the HIA reflects the lived experiences and unique challenges of the affected populations.
    - The literature review provides an evidence-based foundation by summarising existing research on health impacts, relevant policies, and best practices. This connects the HIA to a wider perspective, offering insights into health outcomes related to similar scenarios elsewhere.

    Together, these elements synthesise to inform the HIA by integrating evidence, local context, and community perspectives. This combination ensures the HIA will be both comprehensive and contextually relevant, allowing for a thorough assessment of to identify key health impacts, both potential positive and unintended negative consequences on all those who may be impacted by the designation decision.

4. Reporting and Recommendations: The report will be compiled with suggested actions, followed by quality assurance with key stakeholders. Publication of the HIA and dissemination of the report will be through the Designated Landscape Team.

5. Review, reflection and monitoring: A review and evaluation of the process of carrying out the HIA will be undertaken.

4. Candidate Area Community Profile Key Findings

The purpose of the Understanding Populations and Communities Report is to provide a comprehensive insight into the demographics, lifestyle behaviours and inequalities for the population who will be affected by the designation of a new National Park in Wales. This includes and those who live, work, learn and spend time within or near the Park's boundaries.

It is important to understand the local demographic trends, but it is also important to understand this in relation to the national context in order to ascertain whether the designation is able to maximise outcomes to address wider health inequalities through delivery of multiple benefits for people, the environment and the sustainable management of natural resources.

The Understanding Populations and Communities report identifies key health evidence along with demographic, economic, environmental, and social statistics. The full report may be accessed in Appendix A.

The designation area covers five local authority areas Gwynedd, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham, and Powys. The key findings from the Understanding Populations and Communities Report are as follows:

The designation area has an aging population. In line with the rest of Wales, population numbers have increased in the age group 65+ in the five local authorities within the designation area in the 10-year period 2011 -21, with these numbers projected to increase[4].

The number of ethnic minority communities is below the national average. Wrexham is the only local authority area where the number of ethnic minority communities are more in line with the national average[5].

In Denbighshire, 23.3% of residents experience long-term health problems or disabilities, exceeding the Welsh average of 21.6%. Conversely, the proportions are lower than the Welsh average in other regions: 19.1% in Flintshire, 19.2% in Gwynedd, 20.3% in Powys, and 20.4% in Wrexham[6].

Over 60% of households in Wales are either single-person households or two-person households without children. These types of households have become the most common, with their numbers steadily increasing between 2012 and 2023. This trend is evident across all five local authority areas[7].

In Gwynedd, 64.3% of residents (aged 3+) report speaking Welsh, far surpassing the national average of 17.8%. Similarly, Denbighshire also exceeds the national average with

[4] Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 28 June 20225, ONS website, statistical bulletin Population and household estimates, Wales Census 2021.pdf
[5] Stats Wales (2023) Ethnicity by area and ethnic group Available at: Ethnicity by area and ethnic group
[6] Nomis Data, 2021 Census. QS303EW- Long-term health problem or disability. Available online at: https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/select/getdatasetbytheme.asp?opt=3&theme=&subgrp=
[7] Stats Wales Househod projections by household type and year (2011) Available at: Households by Type and Year

22.5% of its population speaking Welsh. In contrast, the Welsh-speaking population is below the national average in Powys (16.4%), Wrexham (12.2%) and Flintshire (11.6%)[8].

In terms of socio-economic status, the majority of residents (between 18.3% and 20.4%) of Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Powys and Wrexham residents are in lower managerial, administrative, and professional occupations, which is the same as the Welsh average. Additionally, 18.8% and 14% of residents in Powys and Gwynedd respectively are small employers and own account workers, which is significantly higher than the Welsh average of 10.1%[9].

There has been an increase in the number of individuals aged 16-18 classified as Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) between 2015 and 2022. In contrast, the number of individuals aged 19-24 in the NEET category has decreased over the same period[10].

In the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019, significant areas of high relative deprivation were identified in the coastal and border towns of North Wales. The proposed National Park designation area contains 55 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Wales, spread over 5 local authority areas: Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Powys and Wrexham. LSOAs comprise between 400 and 1,200 households.

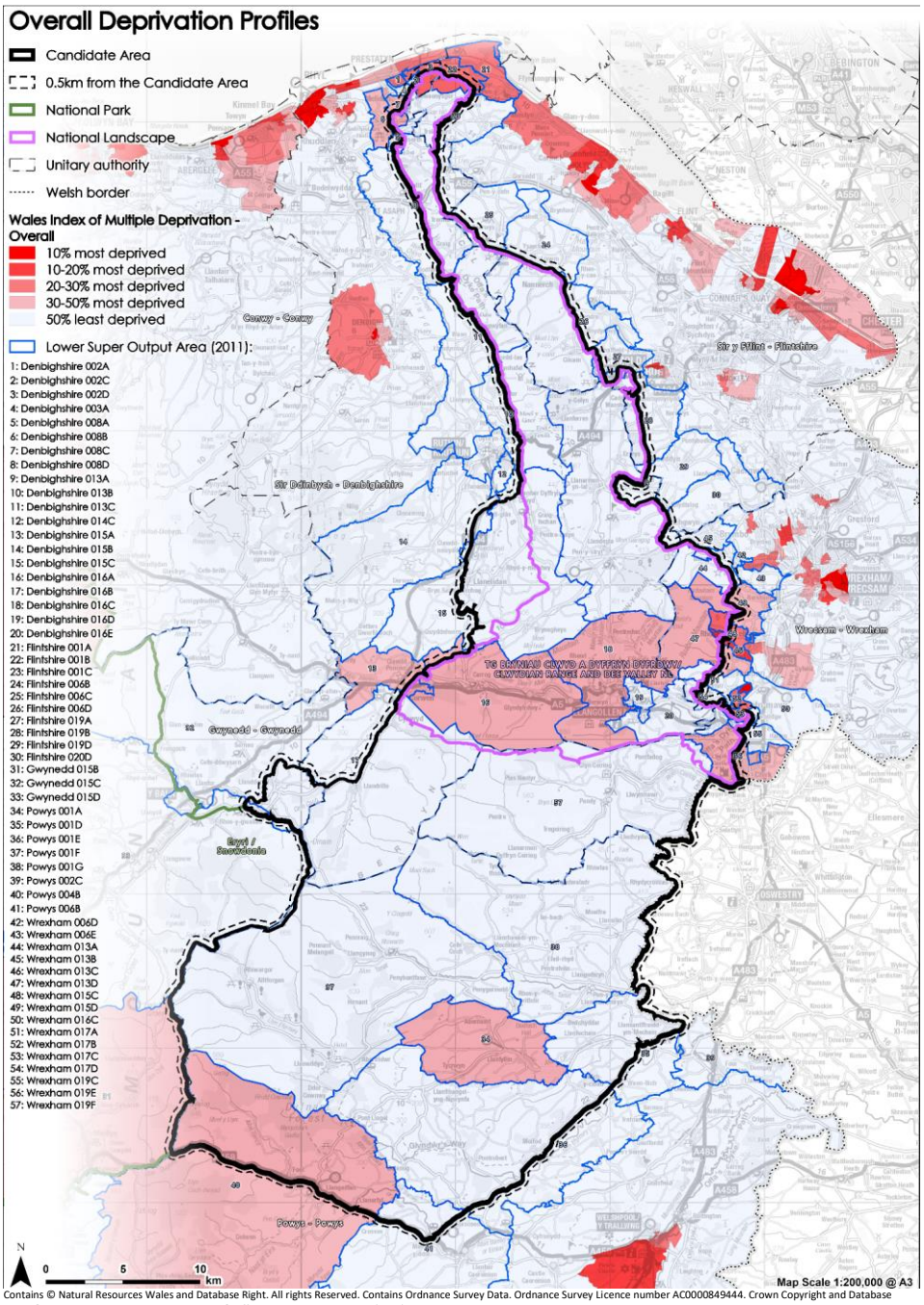
- 19 LSOAs fall within the 50% most deprived in Wales Overall (See Map 1).
- 15 LSOAs fall within the 50% most deprived in Wales for Health (Map can be accessed in Appendix A)
- 6 LSOAs fall within the 50% most deprived in Wales for the Physical Environment (Map can be accessed in Appendix A)
- 43 LSOAs fall within the 50% most deprived in Wales for Access to Services

The deprivation profile for all 55 LSOAs is available via this link WIMD Deprivation Profile Proposed National Park Designation Area[11] (This is attached as a separate document for external reference).

The Access to Services domain of WIMD measures deprivation as a result of a household's inability to access a range of services considered necessary for day-to-day living, both physically and online. Gwynedd travel times are higher than the national average for both public and private travel. Within both Powys and Denbighshire travel times are higher than the national average for public travel. Whilst for private travel, the travel times in Powys are more in line with the national average but remain higher.[12]

Flintshire and Wrexham are the only local authority areas with the percentage of households with proximity to accessible natural green space higher than the national average of 77%. Powys falls significantly below the national average by nearly 14%.[13]

[8] Stats Wales (2021) Ability of people aged three or older to speak Welsh by local authority and single year of age, 2011 and 2021 Available at: Ability of people aged three or older to speak Welsh by local authority and single year of age, 2011 and 2021
[9] Nomis Data Nomis Data, 2021 Census. TS062 - NS-SeC. Available online at: No dataset selected - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics
[10] Stats Wales (2023) Estimated 16-24 year olds not in education, training or employment by economic activity and age groups Available at: Estimated 16-24 year olds not in education, training or employment by economic activity and age groups
[11] The Welsh Index Of Multiple Deprivation (2019) Available at: WIMD - Home Page (gov.wales)
[12] Stats Wales (2023) Available at: Indicator data by Local Authority - All Domains (gov.wales)



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Across Wales, most children spent recreational time outdoors in green spaces or back gardens daily or a few times a week, with 49% of urban and 56% of rural children spending time in back gardens, and 24% of urban and 13% of rural children spending time in parks, mainly engaging in activities like playing outdoors, walking, running, or riding a bike[13].

Over 75% of adults in Wales across all age groups reported recreational outdoor visits within the past year and month; mainly for walking, fresh air, health, enjoyment, or family time. Barriers included time constraints for most and age, disability, or health issues for older adults and those in material deprivation.[13]

In terms of Active travel, typically, 50% of the population of Wales use walking (for more than 10 minutes) as a means of transport on a weekly basis. More than 90% of the population rarely or do not use a bicycle as a means of transport[14]. (The active travel data cannot be disaggregated at the local authority level due to insufficient sample sizes)

The national average shows the inequality gap in healthy life expectancy at birth between the most and least deprived in Wales is 16.9 years for females and 13.3 years for males. In Flintshire, Denbighshire, and Gwynedd, the gap is below the national average for both genders. In Wrexham, it is significantly above average for males (18.8 years) but below for females. In Powys, the gap is above average for males (15.2 years) but below for females[15].

Within the five local authority areas, around 60% of adults (16 +) are overweight or obese – with a quarter of those classified as obese. Just over 50% of adults meet physical activity guidelines[17].

In Gwynedd (13%), Denbighshire (12.2%), and Wrexham (12.4%), the percentage of children aged 4-5 who are obese exceeds the national average of 11.8%. Meanwhile, Powys (10.5%) and Flintshire (11.2%) fall slightly below the national average.[17]

In Wales, 79.1% of children aged 11-16 report being in the "Under/Normal weight" BMI category, with Powys, Wrexham, Denbighshire, and Gwynedd above the national average, and Flintshire slightly below. Daily physical activity rates for males aged 11-16 in Wales are 20.7%, and for females, 11.9%. Activity rates for females in Gwynedd, Powys, Flintshire, and Denbighshire are slightly above average, while Wrexham is below. For males, Powys and Denbighshire exceed the average, while Gwynedd, Flintshire, and Wrexham are below.[17]

The National Survey for Wales considers whether people have a sense of community. Varied responses were seen across the five local authority areas, Gwynedd had the highest score, with 73% of respondents expressing a sense of community, this was followed by Powys (71%), Denbighshire (69%). In contrast, both Flintshire and Wrexham scored the lowest at 63% and 59% respectively, which is below the national average of 64%.[15]

[13] National Survey for Wales (2023) Available at: National Survey for Wales | GOV.WALES
[14] National Survey for Wales (2023) Active travel (walking and cycling): April 2022 to March 2023 [HTML] | GOV.WALES
[15] Public Health Outcomes Framework (2024) Available at: PHOF Reporting Tool

Perceptions of climate change currently affecting Wales were highest in Gwynedd (83%), Powys (81%) , and Flintshire (75%), each scoring at or above the Welsh national average of 75%. In contrast, perceptions in Wrexham and Denbighshire were the lowest, at 66% and 64% respectively, both falling below the national average.[15]

People were asked about their concern regarding changes to species diversity in Wales. Responses varied, with Gwynedd, Powys, and Denbighshire showing the highest concern, Flintshire closely reflected the national average with moderate concern, while Wrexham had the least concern.[15]

5. Stakeholder and Community Engagement

As part of the HIA, an appraisal of the potential positive and unintended negative health and well-being impacts associated with the designation of a National Park has been carried out by identifying essential information, knowledge, and evidence provided by the local population and external stakeholders.

Stakeholder and community engagement helps identify local health concerns, gather diverse perspectives and ensures inclusive decision-making. It promotes transparency, builds trust, and improves the relevance and effectiveness of health interventions.

Stakeholder and community engagement consisted of the following:

Community Engagement 2023

Natural Resources Wales held an early engagement (9 October–27 November 2023) to gather feedback on an Area of Search map for the NP proposal. This was not a formal consultation but it offered an opportunity to share the initial Area of Search map and gather feedback and information, especially from residents and stakeholders. It aimed to understand perspectives, gather evidence, and raise awareness among the local population.

During the seven weeks, 11 events were held: six were held on-line and five in-person drop in events. A further four other online events were targeted toward specific stakeholder groups; elected members, environment and heritage groups, tourism and recreational groups, and the renewable energy sector. Unfortunately, the targeted landowners online session was withdrawn due to insufficient interest. All attendees were invited to complete a questionnaire.

In total, 619 attended in person, 105 online, with 966 questionnaires completed and additional feedback via emails.

Further detailed information regarding Community Engagement 2023 can be found here.

Public Consultation 2024

A 10-week public consultation on the proposed new National Park in Wales ran from 7 October to 16 December 2024, allowing attendees to learn about the project, review evidence, ask questions, and provide feedback on the draft Candidate Area Map.

The Candidate Area map identifies areas that, after detailed evaluation by an independent and experienced landscape consultant, are found to meet the statutory criteria for a National Park.

During the consultation period, 20 events were held: nine were held on-line and eleven in-person drop in events. Ten of the drop-in events were open to the public; one drop in event was targeted at the Agricultural sector and landowners. Of the nine on line events, three

were open to the public, whilst six were aimed at targeted groups including elected members, recreational and access groups, environment and heritage groups, renewable energy sector, utilities and business and tourism. All attendees were invited to complete a questionnaire.

The questionnaire responses from both the Community Engagement 2023 and Public Consultation 2024 included thousands of comments expressing a wide range of views and opinions regarding the proposed designation of a new National Park.

The responses have been organised into an appraisal table of impact, themed around the wider determinants of health, allowing for a structured evaluation of potential health outcomes. This table helps categorise the duration of impacts as well as the affected demographics. This systematic approach ensures the Health Impact Assessment is guided by evidence rooted in local knowledge and stakeholder priorities, ultimately fostering transparent, community-centred decision-making.

The full spectrum of impacts are captured in the Appraisal Table of Impact in Appendix B. The key themes from the appraisal table of Impact can be found below.

- Global ecosystems, climate stability and biodiversity
    - future risks from increase climate change
    - affects biodiversity resilience,
    - influence government policies,
    - affect regeneration.

- Natural and built environment
    - affect pollution (e.g. water/air/noise/waste),
    - affect access to green infrastructure,
    - influence land use planning,
    - impact on housing.

- Living, working and learning
    - Influence the local and tourism economy,
    - affect community safety,
    - impact employment, education and training opportunities,
    - influence active travel,
    - impact on access and quality of services (e.g. public amenities, public transport, leisure and health services).
    - Impact personal and household debt.

- Resilient communities and healthy lifestyles
    - Influence connection to nature,
    - Impact community safety and anti-social behaviour,
    - influence healthy food choices,
    - influence the ability to be physically active (e.g. play, walking and cycling, gardening, recreation and sport),
    - impact on mental health and wellbeing,
    - influence community cohesion,
    - influence sense of control,

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- risk taking activity.

6. Literature Review Key Findings

6.1 Global ecosystems, climate stability and biodiversity

The Environment Act 1995 requires that when managing a National Park, the authorities must ensure that the Park's development promotes the social and economic well-being of local communities, balancing conservation with community benefits. Furthermore, National Park Authorities are required to prepare and publish a Management Plan setting out the vision, objectives and special qualities of the area which are to be conserved and enhanced.[16]

Evidence demonstrates that National Parks provide one of the largest single sources of climate change mitigation and secure ecosystem services alongside their more recognised roles of biodiversity conservation and recreation[17]. However, proportionally, National Park Authorities own little land within the National Park. Since their establishment, National Park Authorities and National Landscape partnerships have engaged in cooperative efforts with farmers and land managers, acknowledging agriculture as the primary land use and an essential approach to tackling nature and climate crises.[18]

Welsh Government initiatives to support climate stability and biodiversity resilience measures was produced through the Biodiversity Deep Dive. It aims to protect 30% of Earth's land and oceans by 2030 through a prioritised nature restoration plan integrated into strategic planning and establishing a new National Park in Wales to drive climate mitigation and nature recovery.[19]

Existing National Parks are undertaking projects to promote nature restoration and strengthen climate resilience within their regions, including the restoration of damaged peatlands, the protection and restoration of Celtic rainforests and flood management.[20] Restoration projects in Eryri National Park aim to restore peatlands and wetlands, such as at Bwlch y Groes, using carbon funding and grants. Efforts like blocking drainage ditches and re-vegetating peat improve carbon sequestration, water retention, reduce flood risks, enhance water quality, and support wildlife habitats.[21]

Climate stability and biodiversity resilience measures within a National Park environment present various health opportunities or “co-benefits”, such as promoting active travel and can improve access to green, blue, and natural environments.[22] These actions can lead to increased opportunities for outdoor activities and recreation, encourage tourism in Wales,

[16] Environment Act 1995 Available at: Environment Act 1995 (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[17] Dudley, N et al (2013) National Parks with Benefits: How Protecting the Planet's Biodiversity Also Provides Ecosystem Services [Online} Available at: https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=716c16b429494a34a49811000da71c7a8e0a8db9 (Accessed 4.3.25)
[18] Landscapes Wales (2025) *The Wales Biodiversity Deep Dive – Unlocking the potential of Designated Landscapes* [Online] Available at The Wales Biodiversity Deep Dive – Unlocking the potential of Designated Landscapes - Landscapes Wales (Accessed 4.3.25)
[19] Welsh Government (2022) *Biodiversity deep dive: recommendations* [Online] Available at: Biodiversity deep dive: recommendations [HTML] | GOV.WALES (Accessed 4.3.25)
[20] National Parks UK (2025) *Climate Change* Available at: Climate Change - National Parks
[21] Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri (2025) Peatland Restoration Projects Available at: Eryri peatland restoration work | Eryri National Park (Accessed 18.3.2025)
[22] Active Travel England (2024) Working with National Parks Available at: Working with National Parks | Active Travel England (Accessed 17.3.2025)

improve air quality, and foster connections with nature in green and blue spaces, benefiting physical and mental health and well-being.

However, there may be trade-offs in the benefits of climate resilience and biodiversity restoration, leading to unintended consequences, such as exacerbating inequalities. For example, some communities or individuals may not have equal access to the health benefits of these initiatives, and the redistribution of health impacts may shift to different areas or groups. [23,24]

Each year, the three Welsh National Parks attract an estimated 12 million visitors, with three-quarters of Wales's population benefiting from the great outdoors through National Park visits.[25] Evidence suggests that the designation of a National Park can boost visitor numbers, which, in turn, may have negative effects on biodiversity and the unique environments within these areas, as seen in Eryri National Park after the Covid restrictions.[26,27] Over-tourism can degrade sensitive ecosystems, jeopardising the long-term sustainability of these Parks for both human recreation and biodiversity conservation. These potential impacts are being assessed alongside an economic assessment commissioned by NRW to ensure a balanced understanding of the designation's effects.

The challenges faced by Wales's National Park Authorities in managing access and sustainable tourism are compounded by their lack of control over broader tourism strategies. The visitor surge in 2020 highlighted the delicate balance between the statutory purposes and duties of National Park Authorities. Legislation clearly states that if a conflict arises between these purposes, conservation must take priority over recreation.[28]

Tourism growth has placed increasing pressure on infrastructure, leading to issues such as fly-tipping, anti-social behaviour, and irresponsible parking. Some of these challenges stem from inconsiderate visitor behaviour, while others arise from a lack of designated parking to accommodate increased visitor numbers. These impacts not only affect the quality of life for local residents but also put additional strain on essential services. [29,30]

Increases in tourism, particularly from visitors unfamiliar with local flood risks, can make certain groups more vulnerable during flooding events. Those staying in low-lying

[23] The Royal Society and The Academy of Medical Sciences (2021) *A healthy future – tackling climate change mitigation and human health together* Available at: A healthy future – tackling climate change mitigation and human health together (Accessed on 7.3.2025)
[24] Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (2023) *Policy position: Climate change and women's health* Available at: climate-change-and-womens-health-rcog-policy-position.pdf (Accessed 7.3.25)
[25] Audit Wales (2022) *Sustainable Tourism in Wales's National Parks* Available at: *Sustainable Tourism in Wales' National Parks* (Accessed 3.3.2025)
[26] Eryri National Park (2025) Report sheds light on how wildlife is impacted by visitor numbers in North West Wales Available at: Report sheds light on how wildlife is impacted by visitor numbers in North West Wales | Snowdonia National Park (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[27] Action to Protect Rural Scotland (2025) Social and Economic Benefits of National Parks Available at: Social and Economic Benefits of National Parks - Action to Protect Rural Scotland (Accessed 7.3.2025)
[28] National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 Available at: National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (Accessed 3.3.25)
[29] Daily Mail (2024) It's absolute mayhem every weekend': How hordes of TikTokers and staycationers are descending on Snowdonia to find a 'secret quarry' - flooding the area with hundreds of cars, piles of rubbish and anti-social behaviour' Available at: 'It's absolute mayhem every weekend': How hordes of TikTokers and staycationers are descending on Snowdonia to find a 'secret quarry' - flooding the area with hundreds of cars, piles of rubbish and anti-social behaviour | Daily Mail Online (Accessed 19.3.2025)
[30] Express (2025) Beautiful natural gem in UK is now an overcrowded tourist destination
Available at: Beautiful natural gem in UK is now an overcrowded tourist destinati | UK | Travel | Express.co.uk (Accessed 19.3.2025)

campsites, caravan parks near rivers, or short-term accommodations in high-risk flood zones face heightened risks. [31]

Furthermore, Wildfires in UK National Parks have significant ecological, economic, and social impacts, including habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, and the release of carbon emissions that contribute to climate change. These fires also harm local economies by reducing tourism revenue and increasing firefighting and recovery costs, while threatening human health through smoke inhalation.[32, 33]

While substantial infrastructure improvements are needed, statutory responsibilities often fall on local authorities, police and other public sector organisations, or private landowners. This division of responsibility can lead to gaps in addressing key challenges. Limited funding and fragmented governance further hinder efforts to achieve long-term, sustainable tourism planning

Moreover, relevant authorities are required to consider the purposes of National Parks referred to as the "Section 62 duty".[34] Collaboration between National Park Authorities, the Welsh Government, Local Authorities, and Corporate Joint Committees—who are responsible for the road and transport network—can help coordinate visitor management and sustainable travel initiatives. This collaborative approach can lead to targeted solutions for addressing traffic congestion and parking issues, benefiting both local communities and visitors

Further solutions to traffic congestion and parking issues include safe active travel systems, green initiatives and sustainable public transport. Examples in Welsh National Parks include the Sherpa'r Wyddfa[35] and the Recharge in Nature partnership with BMW, which provides e-charging points and supports projects like the Pembrokeshire Puffin Shuttle.[36],[37] The health benefits of active travel are well-documented, including improved physical activity, social interaction and improved accessibility. Moreover, lowering vehicle emissions improves air quality benefiting respiratory health. [38] To encourage more active travel, prioritising walking and cycling in planning and integrating active travel infrastructure into transport systems are key strategies.[39]

6.2 The natural and built environment

[31] DEFRA (2012) Developing a joint approach to improving flood awareness and safety at caravan and camping sites in England and Wales Recommendations of a government-industry working group Available at: Developing a joint approach to improving flood awareness and safety at caravan and camping sites in England and Wales (Accessed 8.5.2025)
[32] University of Cambridge (2025) UK peatland fires are supercharging carbon emissions as climate change causes hotter, drier summers Available at: UK peatland fires are supercharging carbon emissions as climate change causes hotter, drier summers | University of Cambridge
[33] Jollands, M., Morris, J. and Moffat, A.J. (2011). Wildfires in Wales Available at: http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/wildfiresinwales#finalrepor (Accessed 9.4.2025)
[34] Environment Act 1995 Available at: Environment Act 1995 (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[35] Sherpa'r Wyddfa (2025) Sherpa'r Wyddfa | Snowdon Sherpa | a network of connecting buses to get you around Eryri National Park | Snowdonia National Park (Accessed 7.3.2025)
[36] National Parks UK (2022) BMW – Recharge in Nature Project Available at: BMW - National Parks (Accessed 18.3.2025)
[37] Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (2025) Available at: Coastal Buses - Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (Accessed 7.3.2025)
[38] Public Health Wales (2018) Creating healthier places and spaces for our present and future generations Available at: Creating_healthier_places_and_spaces_for_our_present_and_future_generations.pdf (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[39] Sustrans (2017) Active Travel Toolkit - The role of active travel in improving health Available at: Active Travel Toolkit - The role of active travel in improving health - Sustrans.org.uk (Accessed 10.03.2025)

It is inevitable that certain types of large development will have significant effects on both the character of the landscape and the integrity of a National Park environment. A designated National Park Authority is the planning authority for the Park area and oversees the Local Development Plan, Management Plan, and Development Management System.

The policy framework for Welsh designated landscapes, outlined in Planning Policy Wales: Edition 12, ensures National Parks receive the highest protection from inappropriate development. [40] It emphasises the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage, alongside promoting public enjoyment. Planning authorities must support local community well-being in ways compatible with National Park objectives. Major projects are allowed only in exceptional cases with a proven public need after rigorous assessment.[41]

Planning permission in National Parks is required for most developments, sometimes with additional controls in place. Proposals must consider the impact on the landscape, and successful outcomes are possible through planning applications and discussions with the National Park Authority. Between 2016 and 2022, National Park's planning authorities in Wales had an approval rate of 91.4% of all planning applications received – higher than the national average for Wales.[42]

Nevertheless, conservation-focused planning policies in National Parks can sometimes fail to address the practical needs of local residents. For example, strict regulations may limit access to essential services or restrict land use for traditional practices like farming or grazing, which are integral to local livelihoods.[43,44,45] These policies can create tensions between conservation goals and the day-to-day realities of the community, highlighting the need for a balanced approach that respects both environmental priorities and the well-being of inhabitants.[46]

The requirement for planning authorities adjacent to National Parks to assess the impact of their decisions on Protected Landscapes, including areas outside the Park boundaries, helps strengthen protection against inappropriate development. This obligation is often supported by strong Local Development Plan policies. However, there are also cases where the duty is poorly understood or inadequately enforced.[47]

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (2021) outlines Wales's renewable and low-carbon energy strategy.[48] Large-scale wind and solar developments are prohibited in National

[40] Welsh Government (2024) *Planning Policy Wales: Edition 12* Available at: Planning Policy Wales - Edition 12 (Accessed 7.3.2025)
[41] Marsden, T. et al. (2015) The Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales. Available at: https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019- 05/areas-outstanding-natural-beauty-national-parks-2015-report.pdf (Accessed 17.3.2025)
[42] Welsh Government Planning Services Reports (2020) Planning services performance reports. Available at: https://www.gov.wales/planning-services-performance-reports (Accessed 19.3.2025)
[43] National Parks England (2024) NPE Response to the Exclusion of Protected Landscapes from Changes to the Town and Country Permitted Development Rights 2024 Available at: NPE Response to the Exclusion of Protected Landscapes from Changes to the Town and Country Permitted Development Rights 2024 — National Parks England (Accessed 27.3.2025)
[44] The Guardian (2023) Tory MPs and farmers in clash with Natural England over Dartmoor sheep Available at: Tory MPs and farmers in clash with Natural England over Dartmoor sheep | National parks | The Guardian (Accessed 3.6.2025)
[45] Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (2023) Protected Landscapes that Work for all Available at: Protected landscapes that work for all - Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (Accessed 3.6.2025)
[46] Campaign for National Parks (2017) Local Plan Policies on Major Development in National Parks Available at: Local-policies-on-major-development-in-National-Parks.pdf (Accessed 17.3.2025)
[47] Sheffield Hallam University (2016) An Examination of the Development and Implementation of Planning Policy Relating to Major Development in the English and Welsh National Parks Available at: MergedFile (Accessed 17.3.2025)
[48] Welsh Government (2021) Future Wales: The National Plan 2024 Available at: Update to Future Wales - The National Plan 2040 (Accessed 10.3.2025)

Parks. Instead, pre-assessed areas have been designated for wind energy, where significant development and landscape changes are considered acceptable. Beyond these zones, proposals for other technologies must ensure they do not cause substantial harm to the surrounding landscape. All three National Parks in Wales support small-scale renewable energy projects, provided they align with conservation goals, the projects are environmentally sensitive and do not compromise the Park's natural beauty. National Parks can guide the scale and type of renewable energy through their planning policies.[49,50,51]

Limiting major development in National Parks not only preserves the natural environment but also has significant health benefits. Reducing noise from construction and industrial projects ensures the Parks remain quieter, preserving the natural sounds of wildlife and landscapes. By cutting emissions from increased traffic, energy consumption and industrial activities, air quality improves, benefiting respiratory health and helping mitigate climate change. Additionally, minimising large-scale development reduces the risk of water pollution from runoff, sewage systems, etc. safeguarding clean water sources that are vital for climate resilience and the health of local ecosystems and communities.

However, restricting inappropriate development within a National Park often results in development being pushed to its boundaries. National Parks in the UK are already seeing significant housing development around their borders. These new communities will inevitably impact areas such as water abstraction and treatment, transport systems and access to the Park, as people will want and should have the opportunity to enjoy the National Park.[52]

Over the last 20 years, declining homeownership among young adults, driven by the gap between salaries and house prices, has forced many to leave rural communities for better jobs and affordable housing.[53] This migration can lead to workforce shortages, economic decline, and potentially cultural erosion.

There is limited robust evidence that addresses the impact of second homes on community sustainability and cohesion, including for example on Welsh language and culture.[54]

Emerging evidence suggests that homes within National Parks may attract a significant price premium, estimated at nearly 25% above comparable properties outside the Parks, based on the UK average house price.[55] This potential increase is influenced not only by planning restrictions on new development but also by the attractiveness of the natural environment. While premiums of over 100% have been observed in some English National

[49] Bannau Brecheiniog (2025) Bannau Brecheiniog National Park Local Development Plan Available at: Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Local Development Plan | Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority (Accessed 18.3.2025)
[50] Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri (2025) Eryri Local Development Plan 2016 – 2031 Available at: Cynllun-Datblygu-Lleol-Saesneg.pdf (Accessed 18.3.2025)
[51] Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (2020) Local development Plan (End Date 2031) Available at: Draft Community Involvement Statement (July 05) (Accessed 18.3.2025)
[52] South Downs National Park (2025) Major Issues Available at: Major Issues - South Downs National Park Authority (Accessed 19.3.2025)
[53] Institute for Fiscal Studies (2018) *Barriers to homeownership for young adults* [Online] Available at: GB9%2520-%2520housing%2520pre-release%2520-%2520final%2520from%2520Judith.pdf (Accessed 5.3.25)
[54] Welsh Government (2021) Research on second homes: evidence review summary Available at: Research on second homes: evidence review summary [HTML] | GOV.WALES (Accessed 10.3.25)
[55] The Guardian (2024) Houses in national parks in England and Wales sell for 25% more, study finds Available at: Houses in national parks in England and Wales sell for 25% more, study finds | House prices | The Guardian (Accessed 19.3.2025)

Parks, the impact in Wales appears to vary, with smaller increases in certain areas.[56] This issue is subject to further analysis and is being directly explored through a separate economic assessment commissioned by NRW.

Data demonstrates a rise in short-term holiday lets and a decline in second home ownership in Gwynedd has been driven by council tax premiums on second homes and the financial benefits of switching to non-domestic business rates. While holiday homes dominate coastal areas, urban ownership is increasing, pricing 65.5% of residents out of the housing market. In response, Cyngor Gwynedd introduced an Article 4 Direction to regulate homes used as second homes or holiday accommodation, ensuring more housing for local needs.[57]

In addition to the Article 4 Direction, further options to regulate the use of homes as second homes or holiday accommodation include planning policy to limit new housing to principal residences, financial measures to increase second home premiums and adjust non-domestic business rate criteria and mandatory licensing for holiday accommodation providers.

Conversely, the Article 4 Direction and other such measures could lead to decreased property values in certain areas and a shift in holiday home ownership to locations not covered by the regulation. This could create an imbalance in the local housing market outside National Park areas, further impacting community stability and limiting access to affordable housing for residents.

Policies that promote sustainable and affordable housing development, especially for local communities, are supported by National Park authorities, ensuring that local housing needs are met in a way that aligns with conservation goals. A recent example of this is the support of Eryri National Park Authority with Cyngor Gwynedd's Buy to Let scheme by partially funding the purchase of residential properties, which will be rented at affordable rates to local people.[58]

National Parks offer opportunities for walking and hiking, cycling, water based activities (swimming, kayaking etc) climbing and adventure sports (rock climbing, bouldering etc) and nature-based fitness events (marathons, yoga sessions etc) and other activities to residents and visitors. Providing such opportunities is built into the statutory purposes of the National Parks. Studies show that those that engage in outdoor activities experience heightened enjoyment and satisfaction and indicated a stronger intention to engage in them again in the future.[59]

Implementing sustainable tourism management strategies that expand access to green spaces, whilst providing community facilities that foster social connections are all considered highly effective strategies for preventing mental health issues and promoting

[56] Lloyds Bank (2020) The costly call of the wild: National Park properties now command an extra £155,000 Available at: Planning-Appendix-1-Lloyds-press-notice-2020.pdf (Accessed 3.6.2025)
[57] Cyngor Gwynedd (2024) *Article 4 Direction* [Online] Avalable at : Article 4 Direction (Accessed 5.3.25)
[58] Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri (2025) National Park Authority Supports Affordable Housing Schemes Available at: Article - Park Authority (Accessed 19.3.2025)
[59] Coon et al (2011) Does Participating in Physical Activity in Outdoor Natural Environments Have a Greater Effect on Physical and Mental Wellbeing than Physical Activity Indoors? A Systematic Review Available at: Does Participating in Physical Activity in Outdoor Natural Environments Have a Greater Effect on Physical and Mental Wellbeing than Physical Activity Indoors? A Systematic Review | Environmental Science & Technology (Accessed 10.3.25)

overall well-being.[60] Public health initiatives that provide social, economic, and environmental advantages—such as safe green and blue spaces and active transportation options—have proven to be cost-effective and offer strong potential returns on investment.[61] Individuals living near high-quality green and blue spaces tend to be more physically active, engage with these spaces regularly, and make greater use of them.[62]

Public Rights of Way enhance access to green space by providing legal pathways for people to explore natural areas, encouraging outdoor activities like walking, cycling, and horse riding. National Park status in the Bannau Brecheiniog has preserved Public Rights of Way, prioritising historic route restoration and enhancing accessibility through initiatives like the " Bannau Brecheiniog Easy Access" program.[63,64]

However, accessibility to National Parks is disproportionate. Evidence shows that people of colour travel farther, visit less frequently, and were less likely to engage in active recreation.[65] Furthermore, many people with disabilities have encountered barriers to nature areas.[66] There are also prohibitive costs of accessing and spending time in natural environments or perceived attitudes of nature spaces being gentrified.[67,68] Studies on visitor demographics to National Parks have shown that younger visitors are generally willing to travel longer distances compared to older visitors.[69]

6.3 Living, working and learning

National Parks contribute to sustainable development by utilising the environment as a foundation for numerous successful businesses and supporting a vibrant rural economy, which includes sectors such as agriculture, forestry, tourism and outdoor recreation.

National Park Authorities employ staff directly and can boost indirect employment by sourcing goods and services from local businesses. Studies demonstrate that National Park designation can draw more visitors, increase their spending and extend the visitor season, all of which supports tourism-related jobs and sustains small-scale tourism

[60] World health Organisation (2021) Green and Blue Spaces and Mental Health: New Evidence and Perspectives for Action Available at: 9789289055666-eng.pdf (Accessed 12.3.2025)
[61] Public Health England (2020) Improving access to greenspace A new review for 2020 Available at: Improving access to greenspace: 2020 review (Accessed 12.3.2915)
[62] National Institute for Health and Care Research (2024) Local green spaces are linked with better mental health Available at: Green spaces are linked with better mental health (Accessed 12.3.2025)
[63] Bannau Brechieniog (2019) Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2019 – 2029 Available at: Microsoft Word - BBNP ROWIP 2019 - 2029.doc (Accessed 19.3.2025)
[64] Bannau Brechieniog (2025) Easy Access in the Brecon Beacons Available at: Easier Access - Brecon Beacons National Park, Wales (Accessed 19.3.2025)
[65] Byrne, J., Wolch, J., & Zhang, J. (2009). Planning for environmental justice in an urban national park. Available at: Planning for environmental justice in an urban national park: Journal of Environmental Planning and Management: Vol 52 , No 3 - Get Access (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[66] Aguilar-Carrasco, M. J., Gielen, E., Vallés-Planells, M., Galiana, F., & Riutort-Mayol, G. (2023). Assessment of barriers for people with disability to enjoy national parks Available at: Frontiers | Assessment of barriers for people with disability to enjoy national parks (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[67] Natural England (2022) Included outside: Engaging people living in low-income areas in nature Available at: Included outside: Engaging people living in low-income areas in nature - TIN183 (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[68] Tibber et all (2021) The association between income inequality and adult mental health at the subnational level—a systematic review Available at: The association between income inequality and adult mental health at the subnational level—a systematic review | Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology (Accessed 13.3.2025)
[69] Sebastian Dario Rossi, Jason Antony Byrne, Catherine Marina Pickering (2015) The role of distance in peri-urban national park use: Who visits them and how far do they travel Available at: The role of distance in peri-urban national park use: Who visits them and how far do they travel? - ScienceDirect (Accessed 10.3.2025)

enterprises.[70, 71] Additionally, National Parks often attract higher levels of investment, especially in tourism, outdoor recreation, and leisure development sectors.[72]

Furthermore, many National Park staff including countryside rangers, planners, archaeologists, and education officers, require professional qualifications and experience. These roles can help retain young people in the area or attract well-qualified professionals, contributing to the revitalisation of rural communities.

However, National Park Authorities face resource limitations that hinder their ability to deliver on-the-ground work.[73] Charities within the Parks rely heavily on donations, which are insufficient to fund the workforce needed and while grant funding is valuable, it rarely supports recruitment.[74] The reliance on volunteers in countryside management is well-known, with some advocating for it as a way to gain experience, while others see it as an exploitative practice.[75, 76] Volunteers play a key role, but paid green jobs and apprenticeships are crucial to support those committed to nature conservation.

Programs like the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust's government-backed apprenticeship scheme demonstrate the potential to train and retain local talent.[77] Such initiatives could be expanded across all National Parks, catering not only to young people but also career-changers with transferable skills, ensuring fair opportunities and sustainable employment in the sector.

Farming in the candidate area is varied, encompassing activities such as livestock grazing—primarily sheep and cattle—forestry, dairy farming, and small-scale arable farming, predominantly managed by private landowners.[78, 79] However, farming communities are facing growing apprehensions due to various challenges, including future funding and uncertainties surrounding inheritance tax proposals. If the unique pressures of operating within a National Park are not addressed with adequate support, there is a significant risk that many farmers may abandon the profession which could have serious consequences for biodiversity, food production, economic decline and cultural heritage.

Financial support provided by the Welsh Government is centred around the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS). Announced for 2026, SFS aims to support sustainable food production, environmental stewardship, and resilience for rural communities. This Scheme

[70] Journal of Environmental Management (2023) Evaluating economic impacts of protected areas in contexts with limited data; the case of three national parks in Iceland Available at: Evaluating economic impacts of protected areas in contexts with limited data; the case of three national parks in Iceland - ScienceDirect (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[71] Andrea Szabó, Gergely Ujhelyi (2024) National Parks and economic development available at: National parks and economic development - ScienceDirect (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[72] Scotland's Countryside Charity (2025) Social and Economic Benefits of National Parks Available at: Social and Economic Benefits of National Parks - Action to Protect Rural Scotland (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[73] Audit Wales (2024) Governance of National Parks Authorities Available at: Governance in National Park Authorities (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[74] Campaign for National Parks (2025) Securing proper funding Available at: Securing Proper Funding - Campaign for National Parks (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[75] Third Sector (2017) Too much focus on full-time volunteering 'could risk charities being seen as exploitative' Available at: Too much focus on full-time volunteering 'could risk charities being seen as exploitative' | Third Sector (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[76] Vercammen et al (2020) A Reflection on the Fair Use of Unpaid Work in Conservation Available at: Conservation and Society (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[77] Yorkshire Dales Millenium Trust (2025) Rural Apprentices Available at: Rural Apprenticeships Yorkshire Dales | YDMT (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[78] Welsh Government (2021) Future Wales: The National Plan 2024 Available at: Update to Future Wales - The National Plan 2040 (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[79] Natural Resources Wales (2024) North East Wales Area Statement Available at: Natural Resources Wales / Introduction to North East Wales Area Statement (Accessed 10.3.2025)

can help farmers adapt to climate change, improve food security, and promote the well-being of farming communities resilience.[80]

Furthermore, the Welsh Government's Ffermio Bro: Farming in Designated Landscapes initiative delivers targeted investment to support farmers working in partnership with National Parks and National Landscapes (formerly AONBs). This programme promotes sustainable land management while enhancing environmental outcomes, visitor experiences, and local community wellbeing. Because Ffermio Bro and future iterations under the Sustainable Farming Scheme, are specifically designed for Designated Landscapes, farms located outside these areas are currently ineligible for support through this mechanism. As such, designation has a direct and foreseeable impact: only those farms within the existing National Landscape or newly designated National Park would gain access to these benefits. [81]

Tourism in National Parks serves as a vital source of employment, supporting local communities. Nevertheless, large volumes of visitors to National Parks can impact on access and quality of services, leading to overcrowding, reduced access to green spaces, and increased pressure on local services. This can negatively affect both the quality of visitor experience and the well-being of local communities, highlighting the need for effective management strategies to balance tourism with conservation and service provision.[29, 30]

High visitor numbers in remote or sparsely populated National Park areas can lead to accidents, injuries, or illness, placing additional strain on emergency services, particularly during peak tourist seasons.[82, 83] After being named a top destination by *The New York Times* in 2024, Bannau Brycheiniog National Park saw a surge in visitors. Authorities added buses and tour guides, urging influencers to respect 'countryside morals' and refrain from treating waterfalls like beaches. Many arrived ill-prepared for the Park's remote, unpredictable terrain.[84] North Wales Police stipulated that volunteer mountain rescue crews were being stretched to breaking point by the number of callouts. Early 2025 had seen an unprecedented number of call outs with two deaths over a 10 day period. In 2024, the Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team alone was called out 320 times, including on Christmas Day. Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram have driven an increase in the number of people exploring mountains and coastal areas.[85]

Many parts of the proposed National Park area are rural, and while there are a number of smaller community hospitals and GP practices, more specialised health services (e.g., emergency care, intensive care) are located in larger towns such as Wrexham or Llandudno. People living in or visiting the remote areas of the National Park may face challenges accessing healthcare, particularly in urgent situations, due to the significant distances to major hospitals, which can be further compounded by overtourism and traffic

[80] Welsh Government (2024) *Written Statement: Future of Farming in Wales* Available at: Written Statement: Future of Farming in Wales (14 May 2024) | GOV.WALES (Accessed 7.3.2025).
[81] Welsh Government (2025) Ffermio Bro - Farming in Designated Landscapes Available at: Ffermio Bro - Farming in Designated Landscapes | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES (Accessed 17.3.2025)
[82] The Free Press (2021) Tourist population boom puts strain on NHS and Delta variant spread warn Betsi chiefs Available at: Tourist population boom puts strain on NHS and Delta variant spread warn Betsi chiefs | Denbighshire Free Press
[83] NHS North Cumbria Integrated Care (2020) Public urged not to visit Lake District yest Available at: Public urged not to visit Lake District yet :: North Cumbria Integrated Care (Accessed 18.3.2025)
[84] Fobes (2024) Overtourism May Prompt Tourists To Rethink 2025 Travel Plans Available at: Overtourism May Prompt Tourists To Rethink 2025 Travel Plans (Accessed 18.3.2025)
[85] BBC (2025) Mountain rescue teams stretched to breaking point Available at: Mountain rescue: Volunteers dealing with 'unprecedented' demand - BBC News (Accessed 18.3.2025)

congestion. Furthermore, the changing climate can disrupt access to services through flood-damaged roads, storm-related power outages, and increased pressure on emergency and healthcare systems, making it harder, especially for vulnerable groups to reach or receive essential support.[86]

6.4 Resilient communities and healthy lifestyles

Using effective and sustainable management strategies, broadening access to the natural environment in National Parks, along with providing community facilities that promote social connections, is essential for enhancing public health and well-being.[87] Evidence shows that spending time in the natural environment can promote and protect good health and wellbeing to people of all ages and abilities.[88, 89] The benefits of physical activity are well-established, including a reduction in the risk of obesity and chronic conditions.[90] Studies have also shown that environments with a variety of natural features are linked to greater improvements in mental well-being.[91, 92]

Moreover, retaining and protecting the natural soundscapes and Dark Skies in National Parks offers key health benefits. Natural sounds, free from noise pollution, reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and improve mental clarity, while fostering tranquillity.[93,] Preserving Dark Skies allows for stargazing, enhancing relaxation and improving sleep quality by regulating circadian rhythms.[94] Together, these features create a restorative environment that supports both physical and emotional well-being.

Offering spaces where people can come together, such as community centres or outdoor recreation areas, fosters social interactions, which are key to mental well-being.[95,] These spaces also provide opportunities for people to connect with nature, which has been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, and overall feelings of isolation.[96] By prioritising the development of such spaces, National Parks can become not only places of recreation but also hubs for strengthening community bonds and improving quality of life for all visitors.

Nevertheless, as new National Park designations increasingly involve areas with private land, larger populations and active economic activity, conflicts may arise. While public involvement in National Park management planning is expanding to ensure fairness, it can

[86] Public Health Wales (2023) Climate Change in Wales: Health Impact Assessment Summary Report Available at: PHW-Climate-Change-HIA-Summary-Report-English-Final-10_2023-002.pdf (Accessed 8.5.2025
[87] World health Organisation (2021) Green and Blue Spaces and Mental Health: New Evidence and Perspectives for Action Available at: 9789289055666-eng.pdf (Accessed 12.3.2025)
[88] Public Health England (2020) Improving access to greenspace A new review for 2020 Available at: Improving access to greenspace: 2020 review (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[89] Orsega-Smith, E., Mowen, A. J., Payne, L. L., & Godbey, G. (2004). The Interaction of Stress and Park Use on Psycho-physiological Health in Older Adults. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *36*(2), 232–256. https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2004.11950021
[90] NHS (2025) Benefits of exercise Available at: Benefits of exercise - NHS (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[91] Kings College London (2024) Biodiversity is key to the mental health benefits of nature, new study finds Available at: Biodiversity is key to the mental health benefits of nature, new study finds | King's College London (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[92] Buckley, R. (2020). Nature tourism and mental health: parks, happiness, and causation. Available at: Nature tourism and mental health: parks, happiness, and causation: Journal of Sustainable Tourism: Vol 28, No 9 (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[93] Buxton R et al (2021) A synthesis of health benefits of natural sounds and their distribution in national parks Available at: buxton-et-al-2021-a-synthesis-of-health-benefits-of-natural-sounds-and-their-distribution-in-national-parks.pdf (Accessed 18.3.2025)
[94] British Astronomical Association (2025) Protected dark-sky areas within the UK Available at: Protected dark-sky areas within the UK – British Astronomical Association (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[95] Natural England (2016) A review of nature-based interventions for mental health care (NECR204) A review of nature-based interventions for mental health care - NECR204
[96] Natural England (2022) Links between natural environments and mental health (EIN065)
Links between natural environments and mental health - EIN065

sometimes fall short due to a limited understanding of local perspectives.[97] Balancing community well-being with the pressures faced by the management of National Parks remains a key challenge for these protected areas.

Furthermore, access to National Parks is often unequal and influenced by various social and economic factors. Urban residents may face barriers such as long distances, inadequate public transportation, or the high costs associated with travel, which limit their ability to reach these areas. Socio-economic inequalities exacerbate this issue, as lower-income communities often lack nearby green spaces and may struggle with expenses like entry fees or transportation to protected areas.[98, 99] Additionally, cultural barriers exist, with some groups feeling excluded due to a lack of multilingual signage, culturally relevant activities, or the underrepresentation of their communities in outdoor spaces.[100] Furthermore, individuals with disabilities frequently encounter infrastructure challenges, such as inaccessible trails and facilities, which prevent them from fully enjoying the benefits of these environments.[101]

Access to good quality, affordable, nutritious food is important for health and wellbeing. Data reveals that children and adults in Wales face challenges in achieving balanced diets, consuming too much sugar, saturated fat, salt, and calories while not getting enough fibre, fruits, and vegetables resulting in a significant proportion of the population being overweight or obese.[102]

Welsh Government strategy to improve food systems in Wales focuses on health, sustainability, and economic resilience.[103] They address challenges like obesity, poor nutrition, and reliance on convenience foods, while promoting collaboration between industry, government, and communities to encourage healthier food choices and sustainable practices. Initiatives within a National Park can complement the Welsh Government Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales obesity strategy by promoting access to healthy, locally sourced food.[104]

Farming can play a crucial role in supporting sustainable land management through food tourism. Promoting local produce within the visitor economy helps sustain farming, supports landscape management, keeps spending local, and enhances the visitor experience.[105] Furthermore, effective planning policy and licensing regulation offers an

[97] Bjørn P. Kaltenborn, Hanne Riese and Michael Hundeide (1999) National Park Planning and Local Participation: Some Reflections from a Mountain Region in Southern Norway Available at: National Park Planning and Local Participation: Some Reflections from a Mountain Region in Southern Norway on JSTOR (Accessed 28.3.2025)
[98] Natural England (2022) Included outside: Engaging people living in low-income areas in nature Available at: Included outside: Engaging people living in low-income areas in nature - TIN183 (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[99] [99] Tibber et all (2021) The association between income inequality and adult mental health at the subnational level—a systematic review Available at: The association between income inequality and adult mental health at the subnational level—a systematic review | Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology (Accessed 13.3.2025)
[100] Byrne, J., Wolch, J., & Zhang, J. (2009). Planning for environmental justice in an urban national park. Available at: Planning for environmental justice in an urban national park: Journal of Environmental Planning and Management: Vol 52 , No 3 - Get Access (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[101] [101] Aguilar-Carrasco, M. J., Gielen, E., Vallés-Planells, M., Galiana, F., & Riutort-Mayol, G. (2023). Assessment of barriers for people with disability to enjoy national parks Available at: Frontiers | Assessment of barriers for people with disability to enjoy national parks (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[102] Welsh Government (2019) National Diet and Nutritional Survey: Results for years 1 to 9 Available at: National Diet and Nutrition Survey: results for years 1 to 9 | GOV.WALES (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[103] Welsh Government (2025) Food and Drink Available at: Food and drink | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[104] Welsh Government (2023) Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales Available at: Healthy weight strategy (Healthy Weight Healthy Wales) | GOV.WALES (Accessed 24.3.2025)
[105] National Parks UK (2024) Case Studies of Good Tourism Practices in National Parks Available at: Case-studies-of-tourism-good-practice-in-UK-National-Parks-FINAL.pdf (13.3.2025)

opportunity to restrict the presence of establishments, such as cafes, restaurants, and pop-up food vendors, within the National Park offering foods rich in fat, sugar, and salt.

National Parks aim to conserve and enhance cultural heritage by protecting historic sites, promoting traditional practices and celebrating local cultures, ensuring their preservation for future generations. Through Local Development Plans and Supplementary Planning Guidance they can support development that maintains or enhances the integrity of the Welsh language.[106] Management and Action Plans can focus on historic environment projects while promoting community engagement, education, and enjoyment of the area's cultural heritage.[107] National Parks contain many heritage assets, often intersecting with World Heritage Sites and Registered Historic Landscapes. They work with organisations like Cadw to secure funding for heritage projects and support traditional crafts, including hedge laying and drystone walling.[108]

Furthermore, adopting a Welsh-only name, as seen in the recent promotion of the Welsh language names for Eryri and Bannau Brycheiniog reflects as a powerful indicator of the status of the Welsh language in Wales.[109, 110]

[106] Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri (2021) SPG 3: Planning and the Welsh Language Available at: Supplementary-Planning-Guidance-3—-Planning-and-the-Welsh-Language.pdf (Accessed 17.3.2025)
[107] Bannau Brecheiniog National Park (2023) Bannau Past, Present, Future Available at: HEAP2023ENG.pdf (Accessed 17.3.2025)
[108] Bannau Brecheiniog (2023) Explosive Times – The Project Available at: Explosive Times – the project | Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority (Accessed 17.3.2025)
[109] Eryri National Park (2025) Available at: Paper on Place Names Principles approved in order to safeguard and celebrate Welsh place names within the National Park | Snowdonia National Park
[110] Bannau Brecheiniog National Park (2023) Available at : Brecon Beacons National Park Reclaims Its Welsh Name | Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority (Accessed 17.3.2025)

7. Key Findings: Impacts on Population Groups

This Health Impact Assessment (HIA) has highlighted that the designation of a new National Park in Wales could potentially influence the health and wellbeing of the entire population. While several key vulnerable groups may be disproportionately affected, it's important to recognise that many of the identified challenges already exist irrespective of the designation.

The creation of a National Park also offers a unique opportunity to reduce existing health disparities by improving access to health-promoting environments, services, and infrastructure. Identifying these populations is therefore essential—not only to mitigate potential risks but also to ensure that the benefits of the Park are equitably shared and contribute to improved health and wellbeing for all.

Income related groups

People living on a low income

Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often experience poorer health outcomes due to factors like limited access to healthcare, poor living conditions, and a higher incidence of chronic diseases.[111] The creation of a National Park could potentially increase property values in surrounding areas, leading to gentrification. This may result in lower-income groups being displaced, reducing their access to green spaces or affordable housing.[112] Additionally, if entrance fees or activities are introduced, they may be out of reach for people with limited financial resources.[113]

Age related groups

Elderly Populations

Older adults often face physical and mobility challenges, mental health concerns such as loneliness or dementia, and increased susceptibility to chronic conditions. [114, 115] While the National Park can provide opportunities for physical activity, the terrain or lack of accessible infrastructure could limit access for older individuals. For example, if trails or facilities are not age-friendly, inaccessible parking or if transportation to the Park becomes more difficult, older adults might be excluded. If the elderly are unable to access the Park, they may miss out on the health benefits associated with spending time in nature, such as

[111] The Kings Fund (2024) Illustrating the relationship between poverty and NHS Services Available at: The Relationship Between Poverty And NHS Services | The King's Fund (Accessed 7.4.2025)
[112] Wolch et al (2014) Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities 'just green enough', Landscape and Urban Planning Available at: Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities 'just green enough' - ScienceDirect (Accessed 7.4.2025)
[113] Natural England (2022) Included outside: Engaging people living in low-income areas in nature Available at: Included outside: Engaging people living in low-income areas in nature - TIN183 (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[114] Ake UK (2024) You are not alone in feeling lonely: Loneliness in later life Available at: you-are-not-alone-in-feeling-lonely.pdf (Accessed 8.4.2025)
[115] The Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2019) State of the Nation: An overview of growing old in Wales Available at: State-of-the-Nation-e-online.pdf (Accessed 9.4.2025)

improved mental health, reduced stress, and enhanced physical activity.[116, 117] Alternatively, if the Park becomes more developed and busy, it may lead to increased stress or safety concerns for older individuals.[118]

Children and Young People

Children, especially those in urban or deprived areas, face unique challenges related to mental health, physical inactivity, and a lack of access to safe play areas and green spaces.[119] The National Park could provide an opportunity to offer young people access to nature, which has been shown to improve mental health, boost creativity, and support physical health through outdoor activities.[120] However, if the Park is not adequately designed with child-friendly spaces, play areas, or educational programs, these benefits may not be fully realised. Without proper infrastructure to support youth engagement, the Park may not be accessible to children, particularly from disadvantaged or urban backgrounds, leading to continued barriers to physical activity and mental wellbeing.[121]

Groups at a higher risk of discrimination or other social disadvantage

People with Disabilities

Individuals with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities often experience barriers to accessing outdoor environments that are not designed with accessibility in mind.[122] The development of a National Park might inadvertently create physical or logistical barriers to access for people with disabilities[123]. For instance, the design of trails, pathways, signage, and visitor facilities might not meet the necessary accessibility standards. Inaccessible parking spaces would mean that people with disabilities miss out on the mental, physical, and emotional benefits of spending time in nature, contributing to greater social isolation and worsening health outcomes.[124]

Ethnic Minority and Migrant Groups

Ethnic minorities and migrant populations often experience health inequities, including language barriers, discrimination, and limited access to culturally relevant healthcare services and resources.[125] If the Park's amenities, programs, and information are not culturally inclusive or linguistically accessible, ethnic minority groups may feel excluded. Additionally, they might not be represented in the Park's development planning, leading to

[116] World health Organisation (2021) Green and Blue Spaces and Mental Health: New Evidence and Perspectives for Action Available at: 9789289055666-eng.pdf (Accessed 12.3.2025)
[117] Public Health England (2020) Improving access to greenspace A new review for 2020 Available at: Improving access to greenspace: 2020 review (Accessed 10.3.2025)

[118] Orsega-Smith, E., Mowen, A. J., Payne, L. L., & Godbey, G. (2004). The Interaction of Stress and Park Use on Psycho-physiological Health in Older Adults. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *36*(2), 232–256. https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2004.11950021
[119] Natural England (2022) Included outside: Engaging people living in low-income areas in nature Available at: Included outside: Engaging people living in low-income areas in nature - TIN183 (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[120] Public Health England (2020) Improving access to greenspace A new review for 2020 Available at: Improving access to greenspace: 2020 review (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[121] Dobson et al (2019) Space to Thrive: A rapid evidence review of the benefits of parks and green spaces for people and communities Available at: Space to thrive_2019. A rapid evidence review of the benefits of parks and green spaces for people and communities (Accessed 8.4.2025)
[122] Aguilar-Carrasco, M. J., Gielen, E., Vallés-Planells, M., Galiana, F., & Riutort-Mayol, G. (2023). Assessment of barriers for people with disability to enjoy national parks Available at: Frontiers | Assessment of barriers for people with disability to enjoy national parks (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[123] Natural England (2022) Included Outside: Engaging people living with disabilities in Nature Available at: Natural England Access to Evidence - Search Results (Accessed 9.4.2025)
[124] World health Organisation (2021) Green and Blue Spaces and Mental Health: New Evidence and Perspectives for Action Available at: 9789289055666-eng.pdf (Accessed 12.3.2025)
[125] NHS (2022) Ethnic Inequalities in Healthcare: A Rapid Evidence Review Available at: RHO-Rapid-Review-Final-Report_.pdf (Accessed 12.3.2024)

a lack of community engagement.[126] Marginalised ethnic minorities may experience reduced opportunities to benefit from green space, and the lack of culturally appropriate programs or outreach could limit their participation in health-promoting activities within the Park.[127]

Geographical Groups

Rural Communities

Many rural populations in Wales face challenges such as limited access to services, social isolation, and economic deprivation[128]. They may also have specific cultural ties to the land that are affected by changes in land use or Park designation.[129] The creation of a National Park could improve local economies, benefiting from tourism but potentially causing job displacement or disruptions to traditional agriculture. Economic uncertainty and displacement may increase stress and mental health issues. However, well-managed tourism and nature-based activities can improve health, social cohesion, and employment opportunities.[130]

Occupational Groups

Farming and Land Management

Farmers in National Parks face economic pressures from climate change, land management challenges, and conservation policies like nature restoration and carbon sequestration, which disrupt traditional practices.[131] Additional uncertainties, such as inheritance tax proposals, can deepen economic hardship for agricultural communities. [132] Resistance to these changes may arise as farmers and land managers struggle to adapt to new policies.[133]

Emergency Services

Increased pressure on emergency services, including volunteer mountain rescue teams, can strain resources, lead to physical harm for visitors, and compromise the safety and quality of visitor experiences, affecting the well-being of both visitors and local residents.[134, 135]

[126] DEFRA (2022) Improving the Ethnic Diversity of Visitors to England?s Protected Landscapes - BE0180 Available at: Improving the Ethnic Diversity of Visitors to England?s Protected Landscapes - BE0180 (Accessed 12.3.2025)
[127] Byrne, J., Wolch, J., & Zhang, J. (2009). Planning for environmental justice in an urban national park. Available at: Planning for environmental justice in an urban national park: Journal of Environmental Planning and Management: Vol 52 , No 3 - Get Access (Accessed 10.3.2025)
[128] Public Policy Institute for Wales (2016) Rural Poverty in Wales: Existing Research and Evidence Gaps Available at: An-introduction-to-Rural-Poverty.pdf (Accessed 9.4.2025)
[129] Northern Ireland Assembly (2007) Potential Impacts of National Park Designation with particular reference to the proposed Mourne National Park Available at: Introduction (Accessed 9.4.2025)
[130] Scottish Campaign for National Parks and Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (2015) The Socio-economic benefits of new National Park Designations in Scotland Available at: SC_SCNP-Report-1.pdf (Accessed 9.4.2025)
[131] The Times (2024) Insulting': the Welsh farmers who fear an eco land grab Available at: 'Insulting': the Welsh farmers who fear an eco land grab (Accessed 7.4.2025)
[132] IFS (2024) Inheritance Tax and Farms Available at: Inheritance tax and farms | Institute for Fiscal Studies (Accessed 9.4.2025)
[133] Barnes et al (2016) The effect of the Common Agricultural Policy reforms on farmer intentions towards food production: evidence from livestock farmers Available at: 14867830.pdf (Accessed 9.4.2025)
[134] Fobes (2024) Overtourism May Prompt Tourists To Rethink 2025 Travel Plans Available at: Overtourism May Prompt Tourists To Rethink 2025 Travel Plans (Accessed 18.3.2025)
[135] BBC (2025) Mountain rescue teams stretched to breaking point Available at: Mountain rescue: Volunteers dealing with 'unprecedented' demand - BBC News (Accessed 18.3.2025)

8. Key Findings: Determinants of Health and Well-being

The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) has identified that the designation of a new National Park in Wales could impact all the determinants of health, with the potential to lead to cumulative and long-term effects on overall population health and inequalities.

National Park designation can influence factors such as access to nature, physical activity, air and water quality, employment opportunities, housing, and social cohesion. Over time, these impacts could either reduce or exacerbate health inequalities, depending on how the designation is managed and how the benefits and challenges are distributed across different population groups. The long-term nature of these changes emphasises the need to carefully consider both the outcomes that enhance potential positive health effects and those that mitigate potential unintended negative health impacts identified in this Health Impact Assessment.

To ensure a thorough understanding, a complete summary of all identified impacts is presented in the Appraisal Table of Impact in Appendix B.

8.1 Opportunities and Positive Impacts of a new National Park Designation

Should the decision be made to designate a new National Park in Wales, this HIA provides compelling evidence that such a designation could enhance health and well-being. However, the extent to which these benefits are realised will depend on how the designation is implemented. The designation alone will not ensure that supportive policies, targeted investments, or behavioural changes take place.

Some of these developments may occur regardless of the designation, but current efforts aimed at improving population health and reducing inequalities are often delivered in a fragmented or inconsistent manner. There is evidence to suggest that, without a more strategic and co-ordinated approach, these efforts are not reaching their full potential.[136]

In this context, a National Park could serve as a co-ordinating mechanism—bringing together existing work under a unified vision, aligning priorities, and strengthening collaboration across sectors. This role could help to create the enabling conditions for long-term, inclusive, and sustainable improvements in health and wellbeing, particularly if equity is embedded in decision-making from the outset.

- **Climate and Health Co-benefits**: Restoration projects, such as peatland regeneration, improve air quality, enhance water retention, and mitigate flood risks, benefiting both the ecosystem and human health.
- **Biodiversity and Resilience**: Conservation efforts bolster biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, providing long-term ecological and health benefits through nature-based solutions.

[136] Welsh Government (2024) Wellbeing of Wales:2024 Available at: Wellbeing of Wales: 2024 | GOV.WALES Accessed 8.5.2025)

- **Promotion of Active Travel**: Encouraging walking, cycling, and nature-based tourism boosts physical activity, improving both mental and physical well-being.
- **Economic Growth and Community Well-being:** National Parks drive sustainable development by supporting rural economies through tourism, sustainable agriculture, and outdoor recreation. They generate jobs, attract investment, and foster community well-being, enhancing both economic growth and local livelihoods.
- **Health and Well-being through Access to Nature:** National Parks provide expanded access to green and blue spaces, promoting outdoor activities that promote physical activity, reduce obesity and other chronic conditions and enhance mental health. These spaces also foster social connections and community bonds, contributing to overall well-being.
- **Integrated Stewardship**: Collaborative efforts between local authorities, land managers, and communities ensure that conservation and development strategies meet local needs, promoting long-term sustainability.
- **Cultural Heritage Conservation**: National Parks protect Welsh language and cultural heritage through Management Plans, Local Development plans, community engagement, and heritage preservation projects.
- **Sustainable Agriculture**: Programs like the Ffermio Bro initiative provide the opportunity to promote environmentally responsible farming, supporting both food production and rural sustainability.

8.2 Negative Impacts and Unintended Consequences of a new National Park Designation

The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) has identified a range of potential negative health impacts and unintended consequences that may arise from the designation of a new National Park. These risks, both direct and indirect, may influence key health determinants, including access to healthcare, environmental quality, employment opportunities, and social cohesion.

Although many of these challenges already exist in the area under consideration, National Park designation presents a strategic opportunity to address longstanding issues and enhance health and wellbeing outcomes through a more integrated and sustained approach.

This section outlines key risks associated with designation and identifies areas where targeted mitigation strategies will be essential. A systematic evaluation of these impacts is critical to informing evidence-based policy and ensuring that the benefits of designation are maximised while potential harms are effectively managed.

- **Resource Limitations**: National Park Authorities often face constraints in funding and staffing, hindering their ability to implement effective conservation and community programs. Overreliance on volunteers and insufficient funding can limit the scope of initiatives.
- **Overtourism and Strain on Local Infrastructure and Services:** High visitor numbers can lead to overcrowding, environmental degradation, and increased pressure on local infrastructure and essential services. Remote areas are

particularly vulnerable, as tourism can overwhelm emergency services and heighten the risk of accidents, injuries, and wildfires. Growth in tourism also contributes to infrastructure challenges, including waste management, road congestion which can further disrupt local communities and essential public services. In addition, visitors unfamiliar with local environmental risks, such as flooding, may be more vulnerable during extreme weather events, placing further strain on emergency response systems.

- **Development Pressures**: Strict conservation policies can conflict with local development needs, creating tension between the need for environmental protection and the practical requirements of residents, such as housing and land use for traditional activities. This may result in housing shortages or economic instability.
- **Healthcare Access**: Access to specialised healthcare in remote National Park areas can be limited due to the distance from major hospitals and compounded by traffic congestion, posing challenges in urgent or emergency medical situations.
- **Exclusion & Inequality**: Barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, transportation limitations, and cultural factors may restrict access to National Parks for lower-income communities, people with disabilities, people of colour and urban residents, deepening social inequalities and limiting their participation in outdoor activities and health initiatives.
- **Economic Pressures on Farming**: Farmers in National Parks face financial pressures from climate change initiatives and evolving policies. These challenges may force many to leave farming, potentially affecting biodiversity, food security, and the rural economy.
- **Housing Affordability Issues**: High demand for housing near National Parks, coupled with stringent development regulations, can drive up housing prices, making it difficult for locals to afford to live in the area and leading to potential migration and economic decline.

9. Areas for Action:

The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) process brought together peer-reviewed evidence, grey literature, community and population health intelligence, and community and stakeholder insights, revealing that establishing a new National Park in Wales could influence all determinants of health, potentially leading to cumulative and long-term effects on population health and inequalities.

The designation of a new National Park in Wales presents significant potential to enhance health and well-being. However, the realisation of these benefits will be contingent on the effective implementation of the designation, as it alone will not guarantee the necessary policy changes, investments, or shifts in behaviour. While some improvements may occur independently of the designation, existing efforts to improve population health and reduce inequalities are often fragmented and inconsistent, limiting their full potential.

The National Park could serve as a strategic coordinating mechanism, bringing together existing initiatives, aligning priorities, and fostering collaboration across sectors. The National Park Management Plan provides a central framework for this integration, guiding shared action on conservation, community wellbeing, and sustainable development. Complementing this, the Section 62 duty requires relevant public authorities to have regard to National Park purposes in their functions, ensuring that decisions across sectors contribute to a coherent vision for the area. If equity is embedded in this approach from the outset, the National Park can help drive long-term, inclusive, and sustainable improvements in health and wellbeing, particularly for communities that have historically experienced disadvantage.

At the same time, this HIA highlights several potential risks and unintended consequences that may arise from the designation, particularly those that could impact health determinants. While many of these challenges already exist in the region, the National Park designation offers a valuable opportunity to address them in a more integrated and holistic manner.

It is crucial to assess and manage these risks through targeted mitigation strategies, ensuring that the benefits of the designation are fully realised while minimising potential negative effects. Over time, the outcomes of the designation could either reduce or exacerbate health inequalities, depending on how it is managed and how its benefits are distributed among different groups.

By integrating evidence-based actions into the management plan, the National Park can maximise its environmental, social, and economic contributions, ensuring its long-term sustainability and positive impact on future generations.

Enhanced Cooperation and Funding: Strengthen collaboration between National Park Authorities, local communities, government, and businesses to ensure coordinated efforts in managing tourism, infrastructure, and sustainable land use whilst ensuring that the needs and concerns of local residents are addressed. Increased funding for on-the-ground

management, including support for green jobs and apprenticeships is vital for long-term success.

Climate Resilience, Adaptation, and Nature Recovery: Embed climate resilience and adaptation at the heart of National Park planning and management. Align with Welsh Government's *Biodiversity Deep Dive* and the 30x30 ambition by promoting nature recovery, while supporting low-carbon land management practices. Encourage adaptive approaches that ensure new development supports net zero goals and contributes to long-term environmental sustainability. Promote green behaviours among visitors and residents to lower carbon footprints, enhance biodiversity, and build more climate-resilient communities. Ensure such efforts are inclusive and equitably distributed to avoid exacerbating existing health and environmental inequalities.

Sustainable Tourism Management: Implement targeted strategies for managing visitor numbers, including promoting off-peak tourism, encouraging safe and effective active travel systems and investing in public transport systems. Policies should also address issues such as flood risk, wildfires, fly-tipping and irresponsible parking, while ensuring that tourism growth does not compromise biodiversity and local ecosystems. Launch public health campaigns promoting safety, correct equipment/clothing, terrain awareness, responsible social media use etc.

Affordable and Sustainable Housing: Prioritise affordable housing initiatives for local communities, balancing conservation with the socio-economic needs of residents. This could include policies that limit second homes, regulate short-term rentals, and encourage housing projects that cater to local populations without undermining the natural environment.

Inclusivity and Access: Expand accessibility initiatives within National Parks to ensure underrepresented groups - such as ethnic minorities, low-income individuals, and those with disabilities - can fully enjoy these spaces. This can be achieved by enhancing infrastructure, including accessible pathways and facilities suitable for all ages, abilities, and life stages. Collaborating with local communities and underrepresented groups to design inclusive programs can help engage diverse populations in outdoor activities. Additional measures like inclusive signage, creating child-friendly spaces, affordable equipment rentals, offering subsidised or free activities and supportive amenities (such as benches and rest stops for short-distance users) can further enhance accessibility and will ensure more equitable access for all.

Support for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Enterprise: Provide ongoing support for farmers in National Parks to adopt sustainable practices, particularly through programmes like the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) and the Ffermio Bro initiative. In parallel, support should extend to other sustainable rural enterprises that contribute to economic resilience, community wellbeing, and environmental stewardship.

Adaptive Planning Policies: Review and adapt planning policies to strike a balance between conservation and the practical needs of local communities. This includes reassessing the impact of development at the boundaries of National Parks and exploring innovative solutions for managing housing, infrastructure, and services without compromising the integrity of the landscape.

Enhance Mental and Physical Health Opportunities: Utilise the natural environment to improve health by encouraging outdoor activities that promote physical and mental well-being, particularly for those in underprivileged or urban areas who may have limited access to green spaces. Implement targeted health promotion programs that focus on the needs of specific vulnerable groups. For example, wellness programs for the elderly, youth engagement initiatives, and cultural programs for ethnic minorities could help bridge gaps in participation and wellbeing.

Support Local Food Systems and Health: Encouraging food tourism as part of the visitor economy can help sustain local farming, promote sustainable land use, and enrich the visitor experience, while reducing dependence on unhealthy or non-local food vendors in National Parks. At the same time, strengthening local food production and procurement supports regional food systems, boosts food security, reinforces rural economies, and cuts the environmental impact of long-distance transportation.

10. Conclusion

The designation of a new National Park in Wales presents a significant opportunity to enhance health and well-being through improved access to nature, economic development, and strengthened community resilience. However, the success of this initiative depends on how effectively the designation is managed, ensuring that benefits are equitably distributed while potential risks are mitigated.

While many of the challenges identified already exist independently of the designation, the creation of a National Park provides an opportunity to address these issues in a more integrated and strategic manner. The National Park has the potential to serve as a unifying framework, bringing together existing efforts to reduce health inequalities and support sustainable development. Strengthened cooperation and funding will be essential for managing tourism, infrastructure, and rural economies while safeguarding local livelihoods. Climate resilience, nature recovery, and sustainable land use must be embedded at the core of planning to ensure long-term environmental sustainability.

Equity must remain a priority, addressing the needs of vulnerable groups. The Park must implement inclusive policies that improve accessibility and representation, ensuring all communities can fully benefit from outdoor spaces. Additionally, policies must support affordable housing, rural economies, and sustainable farming practices to protect local communities and prevent displacement.

The potential pressures on emergency services, tourism infrastructure, and conservation efforts must be carefully managed through adaptive planning strategies, ensuring sustainable visitor growth without compromising public safety or environmental integrity. A balanced approach to policy development, economic investment, and stakeholder engagement will be vital to ensuring the long-term success of the designation.

Ultimately, a National Park can be a powerful tool for enhancing health and well-being, but only if it is thoughtfully designed with equity, sustainability, and long-term resilience at its foundation. By integrating evidence-based actions and fostering inclusive engagement, Wales can create a National Park that supports environmental conservation while actively contributing to the well-being of all its residents.