

<i>Project Title</i>	'Morfa Dyffryn'
<i>Category</i>	Crime reduction
<i>Name of Force</i>	North Wales Police G/an Y Don Conwy LL29 8AW
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<i>Nature of the problem</i>	In recent years it had become apparent that the use of Morfa Dyffryn, a sand dune Nature Reserve within the Meirionnydd Division of North Wales Police, for naturist activities was giving rise to number of problems. Though naturists had long been tolerated in reasonable numbers, the situation began to change rapidly as a result of increased publicity for the site, particularly through the Internet, and because the unofficial boundaries of the site were no longer recognised, bringing naturists (and more particularly the fringe element attracted by these activities) into conflict with other beach users.
<i>Evidence</i>	The problem became apparent from the growing number of complaints from members of the public, the increasing seriousness of the incidents reported, and requests for help from organisations working the area, such as the Countryside Council for Wales. The issue was identified as being of particular concern to local people because of the fear of more serious offences being committed and the very real threat that it posed to the area's tourist industry.
<i>Response</i>	To establish an official area of the beach for use by naturists, so that activities within this area could be contained and regulated.
<i>Impact</i>	The number of complaints to local Police generated as a consequence of the beach being used gives the clearest indication of success. Such complaints have been eradicated as a result of this initiative

Morfa Dyffryn

Summar

In recent years it had become apparent that the use of Morfa Dyffryn, a sand dune Nature Reserve within the Meirionnydd Division of North Wales Police, for naturist activities was giving rise to number of problems. Though naturists had long been tolerated in reasonable numbers, the situation began to change rapidly as a result of increased publicity for the site, particularly through the Internet, and because the unofficial boundaries of the site were no longer recognised, bringing naturists (and more particularly the fringe element attracted by these activities) into conflict with other beach users.

The problem became apparent from the growing number of complaints from members of the public, the increasing seriousness of the incidents reported, and requests for help from organisations working the area, such as the Countryside Council for Wales. The issue was identified as being of particular concern to local people because of the fear of more serious offences being committed and the very real threat that it posed to the area's tourist industry.

Having recognised the rapidly escalating nature of the problem, in discussion with senior officers, we decided to establish a project to tackle this issue. Our main priority was to work in conjunction with local stakeholders, including the Local Community Council, Gwynedd Council and the Countryside Council for Wales, to ensure that a wide range of views was taken into account. It was decided that the most effective way to resolve the problem would be to establish an official area of the beach for use by naturists, so that activities within this area could be contained and regulated.

One of the major problems of policing the area was the difficulty of access to the remote and wide-ranging area of beach and dunes. We contacted the Countryside Council for Wales for help who offered sponsorship of a Land Rover.

The benefits of this project have been incalculable, particularly in terms of the relationships that have been established through working in partnership with others. The increased access and presence on the beach has also helped the Police in dealing with incidents such as missing children, the evacuation of casualties and the regulation of jet ski use. The most overwhelming confirmation of success, however can be seen in the statistics. Complaints to local Police involving issues related to Morfa Dyffryn beach fell from over 25 in 1999 to just 1 in 2000 and none in 2001.

Defining the Problem

The beach and sand dunes that form part of the Morfa Dyffryn National Nature Reserve have traditionally been used by naturists for many years. It is a situation that dates back as far as the 1940s, and while this activity remained at a fairly low level it was generally tolerated by local people and by tourists using the beach. Although a small number of local people were involved, most of those using the beach for naturist activities travelled to the site from outside the area.

Initially, the naturist section of the beach was well defined. From the main entrance points, naturists would walk for about ten to fifteen minutes to reach what they considered to be their section of the beach. This meant that they were well away from the main areas occupied by families and individuals who preferred to use the beach for more conventional purposes. The unofficial marker for the start of the naturist area was a disused pillbox dating from the Second World War which was situated at the edge of the dunes. However, the condition of the pillbox deteriorated to the point where it became a safety hazard, and was eventually removed by the Council. With the loss of this clear visual boundary, the distinction between the naturist and clothed areas of the beach became blurred, with naturists beginning to encroach on the areas where other members of the public had previously enjoyed using the beach undisturbed. The initial meeting between landowners, Gwynedd Maritime Officer, the Naturists Association and the Police, defined clear boundaries for the designated area.

At about this time, the number of naturists travelling to the area began to increase markedly. The existence of the unofficial naturist beach has received publicity in naturist magazines, but perhaps a more important factor in this has been the growing use of the Internet. A number of web sites have drawn attention to the beach at Dyffryn, attracting a wide range of people to the naturist area. The number of complaints received by local police increased markedly, and these included incidents of indecent exposure. It was felt that unless steps were taken to bring the problem under control, there was a likelihood of more serious offences being committed.

Local people also have a legitimate interest in the beach. The Nature Reserve is an important amenity for them which they have a right to be able to enjoy throughout the year. At times they have felt their freedom to use the beach has been under threat. They have, justifiably, looked to others, including the Community Council, the Countryside Council For Wales and the Police, for help in resolving these issues.

A situation that had been tolerated for many years was now posing a threat to the local community and to the vital tourist industry of the area. Concern was expressed by many stakeholders, including the local Community Council and the Countryside Council for Wales. There was also a lot of unfavourable publicity in the local press about the growing problems. It was clear that some sort of intervention was needed to bring the situation under control.

Objectives

This was an issue that needed to be tackled quickly and effectively. The changing nature of the problem was such that it could have escalated out of control, gaining its own momentum as publicity about it increased. The growing use of the Internet was changing the character of the site, attracting an undesirable fringe element that was incompatible with the use of the beach by local people and holiday makers. A way forward was to formally designate the site as a nudist area with prominent signage in place. Hence reconciling the needs of everyone, including conservationists, local businesses dependent on the tourist trade and genuine naturists who felt that their traditional use of the site gave them some claim on it.

The success of this initiative would be judged by the decrease in incidents of criminality and positive feedback regarding public reassurance from all concerned. The support of all stakeholders with a legitimate interest in the area, including the Local Community Council, Gwynedd Council, the Countryside Council for Wales and the naturists themselves, would be a major factor in achieving these objectives.

The Site

Morfa Dyffryn is an internationally important Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as recognised under the Natura 2000 European Habitats Directive. It is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a National Nature Reserve (NNR) designated by the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). It lies within the Snowdonia National Park and its miles of golden beaches, together with the sand dunes which support a variety of important plant communities, are an outstanding feature in an area of spectacular landscape. As an award winning Blue Flag beach it can attract many thousands of visitors during the busy summer period.

The Importance of the Site to the Local Area

Since 1962 the site has been managed as a National Nature Reserve by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW). CCW is the Government's statutory adviser on sustaining natural beauty, wildlife and the opportunity for outdoor enjoyment in Wales. One of CCW's stated objectives is to encourage and sustain access to the countryside and promote public enjoyment of the NNR's. The inappropriate use of the site by certain individuals attracted to the naturist area could become very detrimental to the long term use of the site by other members of the public. There were also increasing incidents of vandalism to fences and signs installed by CCW to inform the public and to protect the wildlife interest on the site.

Morfa Dyffryn is a vital amenity to an area that is largely sustained by tourism. Shell Island and Dyffryn Seaside Estate, two camp sites that border the NNR, can alone accommodate up to 7,000 people at the height of the season. There are a number of other caravan sites along that short section of coast, together with hotels, guest houses, shops and restaurants, that are all dependent on the tourist trade. There can be little doubt that the spectacular coastline is one of the area's main attractions. Naturists coming to the area are very much in the minority, and it is essential for the local economy that their presence should not deter the majority from visiting.

Response

The clear way forward was for those organisations with an interest in these issues to work in partnership towards a resolution that would accommodate the interests of all concerned.

Given the long-standing use of the area by naturists, a way had to be found to allow this to continue without infringing the ability of others to enjoy the beach. Meetings were initiated with Gwynedd Council and others to find a way of establishing a nude bathing area. Although there were local concerns about the existence of a designated naturist

beach in the area, talks were held with Local Community Councilors and they were reassured that a designated area would be far easier to control than the 'free for all' that was currently in existence.

This eventually led to a 900m stretch of Morfa Dyffryn being designated by the Council as a clothing optional area, the first (and only) designated naturist beach in Wales. Signs have been placed at all entrances to the beach outlining the designated area. There are additional signs advising people as they are entering the area, and warning signs reminding them that failing to dress before leaving the area may render them liable to prosecution.

In order to help maintain a presence in the area and oversee the smooth establishment of the designated beach, I approached CCW for help. They were extremely supportive of the Police initiative and offered sponsorship (£2000, to be reviewed after two years) to help with running costs of a Land Rover already in service with North Wales Police. Sponsorship was also sought from SERCO to service the Land Rover at Llanbedr Airfield at reduced rates.

At the time when complaints of indecency were being received I have donned my shorts and done some patrolling on the beach. I have advised persons sunning themselves in the nude in the wrong area to move up the beach. Name and address recorded and should they be spoken to again it would lead to a summons for Sec5 Public Order Act.

The Costs

The Land Rover used for this exercise was already in commission with the North Wales Police and maintenance carried out at sub-divisional garages at tendered rates. CCW sponsored the project to the amount of £1000 per year over two years with a review thereafter. The age of the Land Rover is the only down side, being 14yrs old it is susceptible to breakages. However with the local Airfield now in charge of the servicing and repairs at reduced cost we have still money left in the pot. The mileage is kept to a minimum due to its thirst of 16mpg. Patrols are carried out by officers from Barmouth and generally take around an hour from leaving the Station, and are usually carried out manpower allowing during good weather.

The Wider Issues

The increased Police presence on the beach and the ease of access afforded by the Land Rover has produced a wide range of other benefits. Jet ski use in the area has grown considerably in recent years with the attendant risk of injury or even fatality. It is now much easier to address jet ski users and to advise them of safe use of the waters.

Working with the Barmouth Harbour Master's Office and the Council Beach Patrol it has been possible to keep a better check on craft that are unregistered (and consequently uninsured), and ensure that they are removed from the beach and subsequently refused access to the beach by caravan site owners until such time that they have registered the craft with the harbour master. Again, this has had an extremely positive and measurable effect in that the registration of craft has increased over the period 2000/1.

The issue of missing children is one that cannot be taken lightly, particularly in the light of recent incidents in other areas involving children wandering away from their parents and drowning, or being suffocated by collapsing sand while digging in dunes. Toddlers have been found to have wandered up two miles from their families, and searching such a large area of beach can be a lengthy process. This has been made easier by the presence of the Police Land Rover, allowing Officers to work with the Council Beach Patrol and the Coastguard in locating missing children. The Land Rover can also provide a vital role in evacuating casualties from the beach. As a long wheelbase vehicle it is able to accommodate a stretcher, and is able to access areas that cannot be reached by ambulance.

The impact

Despite a cautious welcome from both local people and the naturists themselves, the initiative has succeeded beyond expectation. Local businesses have begun to cater for the naturists, and use of the designated area has increased. Those using the naturist beach, despite the initial fears of the regimentation this might impose, now welcome the existence of a secure place for them to visit and are developing their own system of regulation. The clearest indication of success, however, is given by the number of complaints to local Police by those using the beach. Such complaints have been eradicated as a result of this initiative.

The Future

One of the most beneficial aspects of this project is the relationships that have developed from working in co-operation with stakeholders. Creating the partnership with the Countryside Council for Wales has established a model, which could be developed further in the future. It has proved extremely beneficial for all concerned, not only in solving the immediate problems on both sides, but in establishing close working relationships which can be built upon. We are currently holding discussions with the Countryside Council for Wales looking for ways of working together in other areas.

Partner Agencies

North Wales Police

SERCO - Llanbedr Airfield

Coast Guard

Barmouth Harbour Masters Office

Caravan Site Owners

Countryside Council for Wales

Gwynedd Council

**Dyffryn and Tal Y Bont
Community Council**

Beach Patrol Officers

Naturist Organisations