

# BMC AND THE BIG SOCIETY



## THE BIG SOCIETY AGENDA

The British Mountaineering Council (BMC) is the representative body for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers in England and Wales. With over 70,000 members who participate in a wide range of activities from hill and coastal walking to climbing. The Big Society is about encouraging community action and supporting volunteers. Much of the BMC's work is the 'Big Society' in action, with over 500 volunteers working on our behalf. They are involved in all areas of work, from access and conservation to training and the technical aspects of climbing and mountaineering.

Our volunteers are adept at planning and running events around the country and are at the forefront of crag and landscape restoration projects.

## THE BMC'S VISION

Big Society is a cross-government policy programme which puts more opportunity into people's hands. By transferring power from central to local Government, Big Society hopes to draw on the expertise and skills of organisations and individuals to develop a society where everyone has more influence and responsibility within their community.

Public recreation and access to our countryside and green spaces are fundamental to people's understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment. The Big Society has a central role to play in delivering a cherished natural environment. This can work well by engaging with organisations such as the BMC who are already active on the ground and who have land management experience as well as a large volunteer capacity.



## THE BMC'S KEY STRENGTHS

Our key strength is that the BMC is a national organisation entirely driven by volunteer action and decisions. Over 400 people attend regular, public meetings in the nine BMC areas covering England and Wales. Local volunteers from each area go forward to make up the BMC National Council that determines BMC policy and work priorities. This volunteer structure guarantees that the BMC's work is representative of the Big Society.



## BEST PRACTICE IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The BMC's strength also lies in the quality of advice given to our members and the wider community (big society) on how best to engage and respect the natural environment whilst enjoying its unique qualities. As a landowner and manager we have responsibility for over 90 acres of recreational space with over 2000 climbing routes, of which over 30 acres have been awarded environmental protection. We have expertise in environmentally sensitive land management practices, volunteering and working in partnership with other bodies. This benefits both recreation and conservation and is increasingly called upon by private landowners, communities and recreational organisations.



# THE BMC'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE BIG SOCIETY AGENDA

## **1 Organise environmental improvements and regeneration through local community action and volunteering**

### **Example Crag & landscape restoration projects**

Working in partnership with conservation agencies, the BMC has organised several habitat restoration events around the country. Eg. BMC volunteers and Natural England have worked to enhance the SSSI status of several crags by removal of invasive species.

## **2 Encourage communities to work together to enjoy, improve and understand their natural environment and choose greener and healthier lifestyles**

### **Example Community based walking group**

The BMC and other partners have trained members of a new community based walking group in Bradford. This aids community cohesion by encouraging people from different cultures and different ethnic backgrounds to engage with each other during walks.

## **3 Provide training and development to help disadvantaged people learn new, practical skills**

### **Example BMC Equity Steering Group**

The BMC's Equity Steering Group seeks to find ways to remove barriers to participation and ensure that our activities are open and welcoming to people of all ages, backgrounds, cultures, races and religions. We regularly arrange taster climbing and walking days for inner city, under represented groups.

## **4 Help to deliver public and community benefits through good practice advice**

### **Example Good Practice Publications & Green Guides**

The BMC produces informative guidelines in partnership with others on issues such as Safety on Mountains and Green Climbing Guides which outline the conservation and habitat features of various regions.

### **Example Mountain Safety Forum**

The Mountain Safety Forum acts as a liaison group between the BMC, Mountain Rescue England & Wales (MREWW) and other bodies with a key role in mountain safety. Their purpose is to better inform the general public on various issues such as safety and personal responsibility.

## **5 Liaise and consult with a large section of community as well as hard to reach sectors of society**

### **Example Consultation with BME communities**

The BMC hold consultation seminars with people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities on the potential barriers to participation.

### **Example BMC Youth Climbing Series**

This is a popular entry level climbing competition that is open to all young people aged 7 to 16. The series is organised and run by regional and local volunteers with support from the BMC.

## **6 Develop an active and responsible membership by facilitating education and conservation projects that safeguard the access needs of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers**

### **Example BMC's Access and Conservation Trust (ACT)**

ACT funds projects which aim to support rural access and conservation, educate and raise awareness of conservation issues, research the benefits and impacts of mountain recreation and tourism, and train and support access and conservation volunteers. Over the past two years over 25 projects have been supported, including footpath repair work and the funding of a community bus service.

# ACTIVE BMC VOLUNTEER GROUPS

Over 500 volunteers contribute time, effort and enthusiasm towards the BMC's work for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers. Some of our key areas of work include:

## Access & Conservation

The BMC's national network of over 80 access and conservation volunteers is a fundamental cornerstone of the BMC's work, liaising with landowners and conservation organisations on issues such as bird nesting restrictions and habitat restoration projects.

# VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY & ENGAGEMENT



## Land Management

A team of 7 volunteer experts with over 30 years land management experience make up the BMC Land Management Group (LMG), to oversee our land ownership obligations and advise on potential new acquisitions.

## Guidebooks

Through its guidebook teams, the BMC keeps a definitive record of Peak District climbing in print in a series of widely acclaimed modern guides.

## Training & Youth

Over 150 volunteers help organise the BMC Youth Climbing Series open to children aged 7 to 16. The annual Student Safety & Good Practice Seminar also draws on guidance from volunteer instructors, lawyers, conservation experts, the police and mountain rescue team members.

The volunteers' time and effort is considerable. Representative organisations like the BMC already have experience of working with communities and delivering much of the Big Society. We must be given the opportunity to present our expertise and guidance through open and regular dialogue with central Government and other organisations in order to avoid duplicating effort, and we must be properly supported. Co-operating with others to deliver benefits to the local environment and community is an obvious way of improving outcomes and increasing volunteer opportunity and engagement.

There is a clear role for Government in setting strategic priorities for joined up thinking and a role for delivery both by its arms length bodies and the Big Society.

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The BMC (British Mountaineering Council) is the representative body that exists to protect the freedoms and promote the interests of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers, including ski-mountaineers. The BMC recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions.

