

**Minutes of the Northern Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Monday 19th April 2021 at 6.30p.m
Online Zoom Meeting**

Present - Members:

Robin Parry	Edwin Noble
Arthur Davies	John Gladstone
Mark Jones	Cllr Goronwy Edwards
Richard Williams	Calum Musket
Hillary Davies	David Firth

Officers attending / Speakers:

Peter Rutherford (SNPA)	Mary Williams (S.S)
Oliver Wicks (Ramblers Wales)	Rhys Roberts (GC)
Wyn Williams (GC)	Helen Pye (SNPA)

1. Apologies:

Mr John Hardy	Mr Dafydd Gwyndaf
Mrs Kate Worthington	Cllr Jason Parry
Mrs Molly Lovatt	Tom Hutton

PR welcomed all members and officers to the meeting

2. Election of Chair and Vice-chair

PR stated that he had received few responses to the nominations for the Chair and recommended that given that this was a statutory requirement (that the Chair leads the second meeting) then it may be more prudent to allow the previous Chair to continue for 12 months whereupon members could decide if they required another election.

Agreed that E Noble continue as Chair for 12 months.

PR also recommended that to achieve a balance then the position for Vice-Chair should ideally go to a member from the user groups – he would circulate a list of those members to enable them to have a discussion amongst themselves (or via PR) to nominate a Vice Chair.

Agreed PR would circulate a note to the members

3. Previous Minutes

Approved

4. Matters Arising

i) Bwlch Moch site – Update PR

PR mentioned that although there were mixed views from the members at the last meeting. Officers had since had an internal discussion and based on what is considerable field staff experience, they had agreed that the upper wall required completion to deflect those mistakenly taking the Crib Coch route but that no lower wall would be built. The existing PyG track stiles would remain in place.

As a Grade 1 scramble new signs may also be necessary showing the NP `extreme` symbol for ascent/descent at the ByM entrant itself and near the upper stile where it was more sensible for people to make the decision turn back if they were not confident.

EN commented that he thought this a sensible way forward to try to solve that particular problem.

JG commented that what is proposed was a subtle change to make people think twice on their route choice before leaving that point.

He added that he was it worthy of exploring grading for wheelchair/Tramper trails.

PR thought this a good idea and would give this some thought but that it may be worth reviewing what was already out there.

MJ commented that Disabilities Sport Wales were currently running a marketing workshop and it may be useful to look at that aspect.

PR added that although there was a suite of stuff out there getting some commonality would be useful and he would look at this.

ii) NP symbols for walking and scrambling

PR showed the NP grading symbols/icons that are used for all paths (also contained in the minutes) and the most extreme would be used for Crib Coch indicating that walkers required the requisite skills for that route. Hopefully, this would make some people think again. There is also specific wording that accompanies each symbol. The information is on the NP website.

iii) Area Statement workshops

PR asked if any members had attended any of the workshops. He himself had not attended the latest round.

No members indicated that they had attended but if PR heard anything in terms of access, then he would report back to the members.

iv) Gwynedd Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) Update

Brought forward from the agenda at this point.

WW introduced himself as Countryside Manager for Gwynedd Council and was responsible for managing the Rights of Way Team and subsequently production of the ROWIP review.

He explained that this had gone to Scrutiny Committee in late February and was now in rough draft form which could now be circulated to groups such as the LAF's and the SNP. A final version would go to the public later on in the year. It was important to consider that this document was a review of the original document.

Any subsequent work programme would appear as an addendum to this document.

There is a specific subgroup meeting of the three local LAF's (Arfon Dwyfor, Snowdonia North and Snowdonia South) where this would be discussed in more detail. But he asked that if members had any observations or comments then he would gladly consider them.

The emphasis within the documents in terms of RoW management were based on three themes including the categorising process.

- A – Maintenance and management of the Rights of Way network
- B – The Definitive Map and Statement
- C – Meeting users needs

As a matter of policy Gwynedd some 15 years ago had decided to adopt a categorisation system based on level of use, purpose and importance and an exercise was undertaken in conjunction with the community councils to categorise paths on their respective network. This was similar to the approach of other local authorities.

Since that time there have been significant reductions in local government funding and some 5 years ago it became prudent to prioritize only category 1 & 2 paths which account for some 45% of the network. He acknowledged that by concentrating on category 1 & 2 paths then possibly the rest may suffer.

He added that potentially the use of PRow has changed since the original exercise and what was considered important at that time may not be applicable today as local communities' needs in particular may have changed - such as the use of the local network for leisure, health, and well-being – *exacerbated by the advent of Covid* and any review must be seen in that light.

Categorisation's prime purpose was matter of targeting limited resources and remains an important factor as the core resources available at that time are not what is available today. He acknowledged that he categorisation system has been questioned in the past but for the local authority it has proved instrumental in determining work priorities, allocation of resources and it is useful for statutory purposes.

Hopefully, categorisation was one of the fundamental issues that would be discussed by LAF sub-group.

He thanked the members for the opportunity to speak and would welcome any suggestions or ideas that they wished to bring forward.

PR asked WW if Covid had influenced how people were using their local network and would this alter their thinking.

WW stated that it would make a difference in that patterns of use had changed – particularly within people’s local areas. The question was whether this was temporary or for the longer term and this may influence where they allocated their resources – in local networks or longer strategic routes.

PR commented that Covid had certainly stimulated a reconnection of local communities with their Rights of Way and that this was also a benefit in terms of peoples physical and mental health and well-being.

He added that the subgroup was on the 23rd of April and would be hosted by the NP. Members were David Firth, Edwin Noble and John Gladstone.

EN thanked WW for this important information. He would be attending the sub-group.

PR added that if members wished to add their views then they were welcome to send them to him (who would forward them on) or directly to WW.

v) SNPA Draft Recreation Strategy

EN asked when we could get to see a copy of this to view and comment.

PR showed a copy briefly on screen and stated that hopefully this will be in time for the next meeting once approved by Management Team (i.e., then to go out for consultation). He explained that he had been consulting with some individuals representing various outdoor activities but was not yet in the public domain so the LAF members would get the first opportunity to see this.

This document was very much influenced by the National Park Management Plan and other national policies.

It tried to follow national trends and changes in activities and was also the first time that they had used `activity statements` for each of the specific outdoor activities which was novel. He hoped that this would be welcomed.

He would circulate this as a soon as approved by Management Team and to a wider stakeholder audience.

5. Correspondence

None

6. Countryside Code – NRW briefing paper – Peter Rutherford

PR mentioned that the NRW were still in consultation with England as indicated by the briefing note which explained what had happened to date and the NRW codes system for various activities. It was very useful indeed to have them all in one place.

The NP would carry these links.

He added that this year Visit Wales would also be actively promoting the Countryside Code through their ADDO scheme which would be useful. This would also enable more consistent messaging across the sector. This was additionally important given some of the negative activities we have seen – particularly fly camping, poor parking and littering as the result of Covid.

RP asked if it was the NRW who were steering this.

PR commented that it was the NRW driving this but if any members had anything to raise then he could liaise with them directly or through PR.

GR stated the code had gained more importance given the significant increases in visitor numbers following Covid lockdown and some behavioural patterns. Therefore, it was important that its message was easily available, easy to follow to ensure that people took notice of its advice.

ED asked what the rules were in terms of dogs and who would police this.

PR acknowledged that policing this would be difficult especially in the more remote areas in the NP. But he was confident that this would be largely self-policing, However, the SNP would do their best, but a good national PR campaign is required.

HP added that she would circulate a note regarding this. She also mentioned that the positive messaging was largely targeted at the new visitors to Snowdonia who may not be used to visiting the countryside but acknowledged that this was a challenge. This messaging would run throughout the coming season.

The NPs UK and AONBs were also working on similar messages and significant funding had been allocated to this.

GE mentioned that it was his understanding that the National Curriculum (NC) is changing to promote better understanding of children's local environment. The Countryside Code would be a good starting point and also to create a sense of place and appreciation of their local environment.

HP commented that she would be happy to convey those messages to the WG at the next opportunity.

PR would ask what changes are planned for the NC and bring them to the members.

EN thanked PR for the update and that it was important that the Countryside Code was shared with the public especially at this time.

7. Update on Snowdonia Society Volunteer Programme – Mary Williams

MW introduced herself as the Conservation Officer with the Snowdonia Society.

The Societies aims and objectives were similar to the National Parks:

“To protect and enhance the beauty and special qualities of Snowdonia and to promote their enjoyment in the interests of all who live in, work or visit the area both now and in the future”.

To enable this a great deal of their work involved working with volunteers on practical conservation projects and this will be the focus of her presentation this evening.

Some of the work involved working with other partners such as National Nature Reserves with the NRW, Coed Cadw (the Woodland Trust) and the National Trust dealing with invasive species – Himalayan balsam & rhododendron but also other conservation work - including training days and activities for tree planting and footpath maintenance work.

She showed various screen shots of their Officers and volunteer activities and explained that they were always ready to assist other organisations in their conservation work.

Litter clearance was also an important part of their work and had worked closely with the Marine Conservation Society and Gwynedd Council organising beach litter clear ups in places such Harlech.

She explained that the Society was very much involved with the National Park in the post Covid lockdown Croeso Nol scheme – where volunteers carried out litter patrols and assisted the public with information around Snowdon.

The new scheme in place to follow the next lifting of lockdown is called `Caru Eryri` This will be a similar volunteer driven initiative similar to Croeso Nol and again will be in conjunction with the SNP. Certainly, the Croes Nol period was a challenge given that we saw so many additional and different visitors to the area.

It was hoped that other places within the Park could be manned by volunteers this coming year including Cadair Idris and the Bala area.

This year Accredited Training Units could be offered to volunteers for their personal development.

EN asked why the new post Covid scheme was called `Caru Eryri` (love Snowdonia) and not `Care for Eryri`.

MW replied that there was another online group with that name so to avoid confusion a new name was adopted. This would also appear on their logos are well. She was sure that members would hear more in the coming weeks.

HP mentioned that the messages will be for visitors to plan – discover and protect.

RP thanked MW for her presentation. He explained that he was a representative of the North Wales Rivers Trust and that they also undertook environmental improvements in riverine environments and asked if they could possibly liaise with the Society and explore the potential for some joint working.

MW stated that this was possible, and that RP could contact the Society to discuss this.

PR volunteered to send the Societies details to connect the two organisations.

GE thought that the Croeso Nol and Caru Eryri initiatives were excellent and thanked the Society for its work. He added that there was a Tourist Ambassador Scheme available and involved a simple online tutorial which added to what the volunteers had achieved.

MW commented that they would be encouraging their volunteers to take part in this scheme once they were up and running this year. They also had a similar project called `Snowdonia as a National Park` to enable volunteers to gain more information and understanding about the NP and in turn to enable them to better inform the public.

MJ asked if the Adventure Smart information was shared with the volunteers that is in terms of mountain safety and in people`s preparation for days out on the hills. And did they carry these messages on their touch screen information.

MW stated that they had produced some training videos for volunteers and one element was about adventure Smart messaging.

HP stated that during Covid plainly touch screens had been problematic and not useable but once there was a degree of normality then that messaging would be carried. For this approaching year, the messaging was very much adventure smart orientated.

EN thanked MW for her time and interesting information this evening.

8. Update on Cambrian Way – Oliver Wicks

OW thanked the members for the opportunity to update them on the route developments.

He explained that a major part of his work as a Walking Spaces Officers with Ramblers Cymru involved working with various community and volunteer groups across Wales who assisted RA with work on the PRow network. The other element to his role was as the Cambrian Way Officer.

He gave an overview which showed the entire route running from Cardiff castle to Conwy castle which is 298 miles in length and passed through both Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia National Parks. He emphasised that this was not a route for the casual walker as it was a difficult, long, and frequently mountainous route which would only appeal to experienced long distance walkers. Within Snowdonia it entered via Machlwyd and took in most of the upland peaks all the way to the Conwy Valley.

He explained that the route originally created by Tony Drake in the 1960's and important point was that this was done in a pre-CRow era. And where much of the route which was not on Public Rights of Way was only on a *de facto*¹ access. Sadly, he had died in 2012 but had left some legacy monies and a number of people carried on with the work.

¹ De facto access describes access that already exists even though not recognised by law.

In 2015 the Cambrian Way Trust was formed, and this was when Ramblers Cymru became involved with a working group. The group considered that the original route and guide (first published in 1984) needed revision hence the project to review some of the route and produce a new professionally finished guidebook.

The process involved a great deal of consultation and discussion with a number of local authorities, Community Councils, the National Parks, the National Trust, the NRW and landowners.

On completion the new guidebook was launched in 2019 and the Ramblers Cymru held a series of guided walks to celebrate this with some national media coverage.

Signage was always minimal, and this was an aspect that the various organisation raised, and those locations have been agreed with waymarking completed just before the advent of Covid including Snowdonia.

The next phase and an ambition of the Trust is to get the route on the OS maps. They were currently discussing this with the local authorities and National Parks to gain some support for this.

They were conscious of the fact that that any promotion sent out the right messages particularly about its difficulty and this was reflected in all their promotional material or information for the media.

PR offered his congratulations to OW and Ramblers Cymru for taking on this significant project. The SNP were now in agreement with the waymarking - in that it should be kept low key and placed only at strategic locations and also the degree of severity of the route was highlighted in any public information.

JG commented that as a Director of Disability Wales – local authorities have a duty to consider accessibility so was this part of their thinking?

OW commented that he fully understood their responsibilities and there have been changes in some areas along the route where stiles were changed to gates when the terrain was suitable. As a matter of principle this was always in the Ramblers Cymru thinking generally – and to open the countryside to a wider audience.

He added that Ramblers Cymru did have some limited funding to make some changes and they may wish to offer some small assistance to some local authorities to make more inclusive changes.

GE commented that it was important to work together with landowners so that changes can be made to the network and allow more people to access the countryside especially if expectations were raised. However, he was aware that some `online information may be incorrect or misleading but it was a matter of landowners and the public having confidence in the PRow network and what was on the OS map.

OW stated that the routes sustainability was an important factor in the work of the Cambrian Way Trust and Ramblers Cymru. This included longer term management of the route including monitoring, way markers and signage.

PR through the Chair wished to make two points: i) when replacing waymarking roundels it may be useful to include grid references as some of the locations are remote and this had been successfully used in the uplands by the National Park as a guide but importantly as a safety measure. ii) whilst he understood JG position regarding less abled accessibility the Equality Act did say where reasonably practical and the Cambrian Way terrain was a severely limiting factor. But he was confident that the Trust in conjunction with Ramblers Cymru would consider least restrictive options when opportunities arose.

DF (back online!) wished to make two points:

- i) He hoped that the waymarking was minimal and given its degree of difficulty that this route should not be undertaken lightly.
- ii) Potentially the inclusion of the route on the OS map - arguably already cluttered may add to confusion.

OW commented that there had been a great deal of discussion regarding waymarking and about the character of the route and they fully understood these dynamics and it was not their intention to imply that this route was `easy`. By default, and given the terrain, it was not practicable to install way markers as one would expect on other routes. Striking the balance between too little or too much whilst providing reassurance was difficult but what DF has said is entirely valid and they did not wish to lull walkers into a false sense of security. The messaging for people is that they should do their homework on this. He appreciated that the OS mapping would potentially raise its profile, but it would widen the information and appeal to the more discerning walkers and hopefully give it national appeal.

EN thanked OW for this Cambrian Way overview interesting presentation and discussion.

9. Brief Introduction to the Draft Gwynedd Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Already discussed under item 4.iv

10. All Wales Coastal Path Update - Rhys Gwyn Roberts

Unfortunately, RGR could not attend this evening. PR would inquire as to whether he could attend the next meeting.

11. Recommended Agenda items for next meeting

- i) Carneddau HLF Landscape Partnership update
- ii) SNPA Recreation strategy draft
- iii) KW had requested a briefing on the motorcycle access on the Moelwyn.

PR would discuss this with the power station and make further inquiries, but it is a difficult to deter them as there are so many potential access points. But they would revisit this.

12. Any Other business

i) PR asked DF what the latest was in terms of the Welsh Highland Railway operations post Covid.

DF stated that the intention was to open a limited service from the 1st of May. They would be running train from Caernarfon to Beddgelert and at a later point in the year they would run a train from the other direction from Porthmadog to Beddgelert. But there would not be trains running all the way through from Port to Caernarfon. WHR have Covid screens between seating.

The Ffestiniog train (with separate compartments) would only be running as far as Tan Y Bwlch and currently there are no plans to run onwards to Blaenau other than possibly a few special occasions.

ii) HD asked if there were changes to the Sherpa bus service now that Pen Y Pass was a booking system only.

HP replied that they had agreed with Conwy and Gwynedd to provide an enhanced service to Pen Y Pass and encourage people to actively use the park and ride and to reduce people `cruising` up and down looking for parking. At the moment she fully accepted that we were not in full season mode, but the situation was being monitored.

HD also asked if there was any sort of service from Bethesda.

HP stated that there would be additional buses in the holiday season on weekends every hour but currently there are no additional services. Hopefully, this service would encourage more use and potentially to then expand this further if it becomes viable.

DF mentioned that the last weekend the restricted parking efforts (and tow away signs) at various points seemed to have worked. This was also the case in Ogwen – although he did not like the `Snowdconia` effect - it did work.

PR note: This new term is now attributed to DF.

GJ asked if members could receive a parking and transport update at the next meeting.

HP stated that she would ask Catrin Williams or Angela Jones to do this.

iii) JG mentioned the issue of Vice Chair.

PR stated that he would circulate a note to the members from within the user groups and ask them if they were willing to nominate someone from within their LAF members.

13. Date of next meeting – 7th June 2021

Probably by Zoom but depending on Covid Regs.

PR thanked members for their attendance and contributions, and he appreciated how difficult for this everyone via Zoom.

EN thanked all members and officers for their contributions this evening