

**Minutes of the South Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting held on
Tuesday 15th June 2021 at 6.3 pm
Online Zoom Meeting**

Present – Members:

Mr Hedd Pugh (Chair)	Mr Alun Edwards
Cllr John Pugh Roberts	Mr David Coleman
Mr Delwyn Evan	Mr Emlyn Roberts (part)
Mrs Leslie Amison	Mr Andy Hall
Mr Geraint Rowlands	Eryl Jones Williams
Mrs Gaynor Davies (part)	MR Alun Williams (part)

Officers / Observers:

Peter Rutherford (SNPA)	Oliver Wicks (Ramblers Wales)
Gwynn Lloyd Evans (GC)	Rhian Williams (SNP)]
Arfon Hughes Cwmni Nod Glas	Rob Lewis (SNP part)
David P Jones (SNP)	

HP as Chair welcomed all to the meeting this evening - and thanked the translators in advance.

PR stated that if anyone was having difficulties with the translation facilities then please would they indicate to him rather than struggling through so they could address any issues early.

1. Apologies

Ashley Charlwood & Alun Wyn Evans.

2. Declaration of Interest

None

3. Election of Vice-chair

PR asked that given that so few of the new members knew one another and that consequently electing a Vice Chair was difficult then it may be prudent as the current Chair is from the landowners then it was fair to ask for a Vice Chair from within the user group members.

He asked if members would allow the previous Vice Chair Andy Hall to sit as Vice Chair for the following 12 months until such time as they could hold a proper meeting around the table to revisit this.

Agreed

4. Previous Minutes

Agreed with clarification on Rights of Way liability.

5. Matters Arising

i) ER mentioned that just for clarity in the last Minutes – the question arose over the landowner's liability for people using Rights of Way including roads on their land was what he had asked.

He was seeking some clarity over this. PR had indicated at the last meeting that landowners were not responsible for people using an Unclassified Road (UCR).

HP reiterated that he thought the question was – if people were using a PRow or roads then then who was responsible, and PR had replied that they was no liability.

PR clarified that there was a need to be careful in that interpretation in that landowners still had a duty of care under Occupiers Liability – in that anything known to be a danger to the public should be dealt with to mitigate against it. But any UCR is a highway similar to any road they are simply unsurfaced, so the normal rules of the road apply.

GLE agreed and added that it should be remembered that Rights of Way furniture was also the responsibility of the landowner.

HP commented that if there were people on private land, even on a PRow, then who was responsible for their activities.

ER confirmed that this was his question. Surely landowners cannot be held responsible for everyone using PRow or roads within their land.

AE commented that it was possible for someone to carry out illegal acts by using a PRow or legal track with landowners then facing the penalties.

PR commented that such an occurrence would fall under other legislation such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act or even other criminal law. The Highways legislation was aimed primarily at the public rights on PRow.

GD commented on a local UCR users are pulling stones out of the wall to enable them to pass over muddy stretches – she asked who was responsible for this.

GLJ stated that any Unclassified Roads (UCR's) came under the jurisdiction of Highways and not Rights of Way and any issues should be referred to them. He offered to send those details to the relevant officer at Highways if this helped for this particular situation.

EJW suggested that we seek further clarification on this possibly from a legal officer, so everything was clear.

HP clarified that what was required was to ascertain who was responsible if there was damage to that land.

PR would look into that, but the original question is whether landowners are responsible for damage to land caused by vehicles. The second question was regarding generally the landowners' legal duties surrounding PRow. He would look to clarify these.

ER confirmed that he was asking if landowners were responsible for activities by others on their land either PRow or UCRs.

PR would try to arrive at a suitable response to this, but he would have to seek advice from specialists in this field.

ii) *p5 GD asked if Network Rail had contacted any of the landowners with regards to the proposed path from Llwyngwrl to Tonfannau. And would like this be within NR curtilage.*

PR had not heard anything, but this was an All-Wales Coastal Path initiative led by GC, and any discussions would be undertaken by their coastal team. He would inquire with the officer concerned but he knew that this was still under consideration.

6. Correspondence

7.1 Additional agenda item

Cwmni Nod Glas

HP introduced Mr Arfon Hughes

AH thanked the members for the opportunity to explain what the scheme was about and the role of Cwmni Nod Glas (CNG).

This was a community enterprise based in Dinas Mawddwy area with a remit to improve the local economy, create business opportunities and improve the local environment. They had been successful in receiving grant monies from the Welsh Government's Rural Development Programme which is EU based funding.

This was two grants – one up to £130k and the other £70k. One of the projects was to try to improve the access provision by creating a selection of promoted routes in and around Dinas Mawddwy village using the existing Public Rights of Way.

This scheme did not allow for funding a full-time person, so they had been reliant on great deal of help and expertise from various stakeholders such the National Park, Gwynedd Council, local enterprises, and volunteers to accomplish this.

He explained that there had been a great deal of local support from the community, users' groups, and most landowners as they saw the future economic and health and well-being benefits of this type of project where visitors and the local community could benefit from having a better network within walking distance of the village.

They were also now working with a Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS) in the area to achieve similar things in the uplands. This is managed through a partnership comprised of the National Park, Gwynedd Council, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the National Trust. This grant funding required some matched funding this to a value of 20%. They had managed to do this from various other funding sources. Additional

funding was necessary in this case to appoint a Co-ordinator to work with landowners and stakeholders.

One of the most beneficial routes that was included was the circular using the new Pont Dolybont bridge which had an `all ability` ramp.

He further explained that CNG also own a shop and flats in the village and had recently acquired a local woodland which would be for the benefit of the community.

They are also constantly looking for additional funding to enhance their activities in the area but hoped that most of the work from these grant funds would be completed by 2023.

PR asked how many of the routes were now complete from the original map set of 7.

AH stated that although some works had been completed in part they were still working on other sections. He confirmed that these were the set of routes originally agreed. The thinking behind having 7 in total was that people could walk each route over a full week.

JPR commented that there was co-operation between CNG and the SMS scheme which is looking at carbon management and access and that both schemes were working together on certain paths to avoid duplication, but the CNG and the SMS are separate entities.

PR asked if they had seen a change in the use of the local Public Rights of Way in the area due to Covid.

AH commented that there had been no firm evidence for this but from his observations there had been a definite increase in the use by local residents in the immediate area. Therefore, the more improvements they made then the greater the opportunities in the future.

DE asked if this included an all ability route which has been to subject of recent discussion in Dinas Mawddwy.

JPR replied that the route in question was the Bont Dolybont access and there was a question as to whether a gate was required. Most people had indicated that a gate may be unnecessary. However, it may be an idea to arrange a site visit for the LAF members at the next opportunity to see this for themselves.

DE asked if we could meet on site to assess this route.

JPR supported this idea of having a site visit to get some opinion from the members.

EJW commented that obviously there are two opinions on this matter and asked what the National Park`s stance on gates would be.

PR stated that whilst it was always preferable to have no gates or go for the `least restrictive option` in many locations within the NP sometimes this was not possible due land management (usually for stock control) or were boundaries or where the terrain

didn't allow a gate. Each site had differing requirements and characteristics. Whatever is installed on any Public Right of Way it should not impede the public's right to and re pass.

He asked HP what stock grazed that piece of common.

HP commented that graziers sometimes had stock on the common land adjacent to the ramp where previously a gate on one side of the bridge stood to stop stock from accessing the bridge. In a Community Council meeting a promise was made to look into whether a gate could be incorporated into the new ramp design.

PR He suggested a site visit if required together with DE, HP, JPR, GLE, or any other interested parties.

He would try to arrange this.

Agreed.

HP thanked AH for his presentation and update on these projects.

7. Cambrian Way Update – 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 wished to assist RA with work on the PRow network. The other element to his role was as Ramblers Cymru Cambrian Way Officer.

He gave an overview which showed the entire route running from Cardiff castle to Conwy castle and 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 long distance walkers. Within Snowdonia it entered via Machlwyd and took in most of the upland peaks all the way to the Conwy Valley.

Chiefly In the south of the NP the route ran from Mallwyd via Dinas Mawddwy- Cadair Idris, Barmouth the Rhinogydd, Maentwrog, the Moewynion and onwards to the north.

He explained that the route originally created by Tony Drake in the 1960's and important point was that this was 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. In 2015 the Cambrian Way Trust was formed, and this was when Ramblers Cymru became involved with a working group.

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

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 produced 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 2019² 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 had raised, and those locations have been agreed with waymarking completed just before the advent of Covid.

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.

He stressed that waymarking of the route was minimal and only placed at strategic locations as agreed with 9 local authorities and 2 National Parks and major landowners such as the NRW and National Trust along its length. This was completed in March 2020 using a large group of Rambler Cymru and CWT volunteers often in conjunction with local authority staff.

Ramblers Cymru, the CW Trust, National Parks and local authorities were keen that the route should be sustainable in the long term, and they were developing a volunteer base across all sections in Wales.

Re launching the guidebook had also been a formidable task which involved many people to check the routes sections in detail. This had received some publicity including television and radio coverage in several places along its route close to local communities and some may choose to take advantage of this especially in terms of accommodation or supplies. Some authorities have asked for additional waymarking with key messages that indicate the routes character and to have safety messaging included.

Their next stage will be to submit a request to Ordnance Survey (OS) to put this route onto their maps as a strategic route running from north to south Wales. This was still under discussion with local authorities and the National Parks and indications are that most supportive.

PR thanked OW for this update on the project and was pleased to hear that the question regarding its sustainability and longevity were being addressed. He asked how far the discussion had gone with OS.

²² *The Cambrian Way* - Guidebook published by Cicerone 2019

OW stated that these were ongoing.

DE asked if they had consulted with Disabilities Wales or any of the access groups. It was apparent that there were many stiles and kissing gates to negotiate. Some sections may be difficult for less abled people.

OW replied that they had not specifically discussed the route with those groups given the routes characteristics which was largely an upland mountainous route this was difficult. In terms of furniture, they were very much led by local authorities on this aspect. They would always consider making any route more widely available and they would look at this if there are obvious opportunities where this was possible.

EJW commented that RC should be careful in terms of using volunteers in the long term as it was more difficult post Covid to re-establish groups.

OW appreciated this observation and they were well aware of the difficulties of volunteer recruitment in the long term, and this will be a priority for them.

AE commented that he had some trails running through his land including the Macmillan Way and Taith Mary Jones. He asked if the future was `digital mapping` rather than old fashioned way marking on the ground to avoid a plethora of signage.

GLE commented that AE was correct in that there were many trails waymarked across the area and it sometimes it seemed to be somewhat competitive to get routes onto the OS map. However, it is up to landowners to give consent for additional waymarking.

OW replied that they were aware of this issue and had discussed their waymarking with the relevant authorities and the RC and CWT had agreed from the beginning to have a minimal signage philosophy.

PR mentioned that they should not be despondent regarding volunteers. Many volunteers had come forward following Covid to assist the National Park Croeso Nol and Caru Eryri schemes via the Snowdonia Society and it was gratifying as people plainly wanted to help. This was also good for their own physical and mental well-being.

In relation to DE question on disabled provision on the CW. The CW was an extremely rugged and mountainous route and was a challenge for walkers, but he was sure that if there was any potential to improve some furniture of short sections then they could be looked at.

In terms of the route being adopted by OS – the NP had only support a few over the years chiefly the North Wales Path, the Pilgrims way, the All-Wales Coastal Path, the Cross Britain Way and recently the Slate Trail.

He explained that the CW had never been promoted or supported formally by the NP's in the past as the route was well before CRoW and open access and ran over what was then private land in many parts – although there are many sections using PRoW. However, by today given that it is all now legally available and with the caveats they have discussed (minimal waymarking, amendments to the guidebook and some safety messaging) then they would support this and provide a link via their website.

HP asked for any observations in relation to the OS issue.

JPR commented that he would not have any issues with this being on the OS map as there were many users who stopped in various communities along the route (including Dinas Mawddwy), and this was good for the rural economy.

GD added that she had come across the CW herself and acknowledged that this was a challenging route and would not have any objection to see this on the OS route.

LA commented that some parts were incorporated into their Barmouth Walking festival, but it was an important Welsh route. She acknowledged that it was a serious undertaking, but it should be included on the OS map.

AH thought that there may be a danger of having too many routes and it may be more difficult for OS to place this on the map.

DC added that this was indeed a `mountain connoisseur's` route and was well-known as a difficult undertaking but thought that if it did appear on the OS map then that may encourage other less skilled to use it leading to difficulties.

GR commented that as a strategically important route linking north to south Wales he thought this worthy of having it in the OS map. Albeit it must be made clear throughout that it is for expert walkers only.

AE added that in his experience it was usually the very experienced walkers that used maps. In terms of the CW the NP did have a grading system and that may be applicable if they were considering any links to the CW website.

ER commented that anyone who goes out into the countryside should always do their research beforehand. It was unusual to have a north to south route as most run east to west and he thought this should be supported.

DE added that not all disabled persons were wheelchair bound and many were considerably adventurous and these included sections of the CW.

HP stated that most people were supportive of the route going onto the OS map but appreciated the other observations and comments.

PR stated that the mountain safety messaging and the character of the route had been a subject of their discussions with RC along with other authorities and was confident that these issues had been addressed.

HP thanked OW for his presentation and update on this interesting project.

8. Draft recreation Strategy – Peter Rutherford

PR explained that he had begun to write this some 12 months ago but for obvious reasons this had been delayed. Although this was initially meant to be a review and update of the previous document written by the NP's old Policy Unit, it was felt that it

required a complete overhaul and to encompass new trends and activities within the NP including those affected by Covid 19.

This latest document must be tied directly to the Management Plan outcomes and actions, but the **activity statements** were unique in that the NP has laid out its stance on various activities which have been split up rather than simply applying generic terminology typically example was `cycling` - where in fact this could mountain biking, road cycling, family cycling and/or E bikes.

He had given this to Management Team today and possibly they wish to move a few things around so this not yet available formally, but he thought it useful to show its basic content and layout today. He stressed that when available he would invite comments observations from the LAF members and also from our wider stakeholders at that time.

In recent months he had undertaken some dialogue with certain sector representatives who had each contributed in their areas of expertise and this had been most useful.

He would be very grateful if members could add their comments/observations and send them to him.

HP mentioned other activities and suggested that `Wild Camping` may need to be separated out.

PR showed some slides of what had been occurring post Covid within the NP such as littering and fly camping. This continues to be a difficult situation and post lockdown the NP has been unprecedented visitor numbers across the area, and this has put staff members under considerable strain. This was exacerbated by an influx of additional visitors who did not normally come to NP's and may not understand the countryside or be aware of the Countryside Code.

Whilst it is gratifying that so many people have come back to the NP, and one of the prime purposes of the NP was to encourage people into the countryside it has sadly also attracted those who do not respect what we have. Our challenge over the next two years or so will be to address or mitigate in some way these issues as best we.

The NP has been working closely with many partners including local authorities and other organisations. This included the use of volunteers for our Caru Eryri Volunteer programme carried out in conjunction with the Snowdonia Society which has been a great success and for which the NP is grateful to the Society for assisting. This includes talking and informing the public and organising litter picking on a regular basis (a perennial problem).

HP commented that we should be glad to see people return and this was good for the economy and health but agreed with PR that they should be respecting what we have. EJW had read some of the Recreation Strategy activity statements and noted that possibly there should be a mention of balloons and lanterns. It was possible for organisations such as the local authorities, the NP, or the National Trust to stop them. It was more difficult for local landowners, and these can travel many miles and clearly these were detrimental or even dangerous to buildings and stock so their use should be discouraged formally.

PR stated that EJW had made a good point and he would consider this and also for the putting something similar in the NP's Events Guidelines. They did receive requests particularly on Snowdon which they always declined given the potential for fires or a danger to the public, buildings, wildlife, and stock.

GD stated that she had witnessed this that very morning with a balloon coming in from the sea and landing in the middle of a herd of cows which being curious one calve tried to eat it which could have proved fatal unless it was removed by her. So, they were a problem.

HP recommend that we write to the WG to recommend curtailing their use in some way in the countryside.

PR would discuss this with the NLA Chair and draft something.

Agreed

*HP mentioned that under **Dog Walking** the stock issue may need re worded to include stock management as well as ground nesting birds.*

ER referred to the definition of CROW. Described as `freely accessible` to the public and possible that may need change this. And also use `Cader` Idris instead of Cadair.

HP agreed that that may be confusing to the public and suggested a small change to the wording in relation to CROW access land.

ER commented stated he would like to see the NP Purpose` moved around so as the bottom one which referred to the communities was first and not last.

PR stated that it was important to note that the NPs purposes and duties were not arranged in any order or prioritisation and that they all had equal status. He acknowledged that the third was not a statutory duty *per se*, but this was simply the convention that the NP used and were cited in all the NP's policies and documents. *Albeit not within the remit of the LAF he would inquire.*

HP added that the last statement was not a statutory duty when in fact it should be, and the Authority should look at this when the local communities were such an important part of the NP.

JPR stated that he had mentioned this before and would be pleased for more support.

PR thanked HP, EJW and ER and would note their respective observations.

9. Recommended Agenda items for next meeting

- a) Dark skies update
- b) Recreation Strat
- c) ROWIP Subgroup update – PR would inquire with Wyn Williams at Gwynedd as to next stage in this process as this was basically a pre-draft version.

- d) Update from the Wardens Service (DPJ) on their activities post Covid.

10 Any other business

- i) PR informed the members that the following the discussions of the Access Reform Groups (ARAG) the NRW had submitted their report to the Minister, and he had been informed that this would be publicly available hopefully sometime towards the end of July beginning in August. This will be an important document which may shape what access provisions and mechanisms will be in the future in Wales.
- ii) PR, through the Chair, as DPJ was in attendance he wished to express his thanks to the Warden Service for their forbearance and ongoing work post lockdown – this had been difficult for all, and they had borne the brunt on the ground on a daily basis.

HP supported that view and also expressed his thanks.

- iii) Dysynni. PR informed the members that it was possible that the mean high-water mark on the Dysynni may be moved lower down the river by OS in which case that section of water would then become `inland water` by default rather than tidal estuarine water. He had been in discussions with the various stakeholders including landowners and users to pre-empt any issues and get a positive outcome to this. He had recommended a better understanding between parties to achieve sensible working solution including a code of conduct. He was confident that we can achieve a favourable solution and he would update the members when things became clearer.

It was also important that the NRW become more active on this site as there had been issues of trespassing, poaching, and shooting out of season within what is an important SSSI. So, messages relating to the SSSI would also be included.

It was also possible that there may be legislative changes in future that may also affect their thinking on access to inland water generally.

- iv) LA mentioned that the Three Peaks 10k race is now cancelled due to the current C19 restrictions. The Mountain Rescue race around the Traws lake is going ahead.
- v) AH mentioned that there was an issue developing in the caravan site in Llwyngwril to allow public access the beach. There are obstructions across the Public Right of Way.

GLE (GC) commented that it was his understanding that there was some history to this as an ex-military camp but according to the highway record (list of streets) there is a route (UCR) through that site and the Highways Department were looking into this.

11. Date of Next Meeting – 14th September 2021

September 14th venue or Zoom. Not yet confirmed either way due to the prevailing Covid restrictions.

HP thanked all members and officers for their attendance and contributions this evening.