

**Minutes of the South Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Tuesday 27th April 2021 at 6.30 p.m.
Online Zoom Meeting**

Present – Members:	Mr Hedd Pugh Mr Aled Thomas Cllr John Pugh Roberts Mr Alun Evans Cllr Dewi Owen Mrs Gaynor Davies	Cllr Eryl Jones Williams Mrs Leslie Amison Mr Delwyn Evans Mr David Coleman Mr Emlyn Roberts Mrs Janette Holmes
Officers / Observers:	Peter Rutherford (SNPA) Mary Williams (SS) Molly Lovatt (part)	Rhys G Roberts (GC) Julian Birley (Bala Lake Railway)

PR welcomed all members and officers to the meeting

1. **Apologies** Mr Gwyn Lloyd Evans (GC)

2. **Declaration of Interest**

None

3. **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 Hedd Pugh 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 those user group members

4. **Previous Minutes**

HP continued as Chair

He asked who EN was from page 3 in the last minutes.

PR apologised and this was the Chair of the northern LAF - that that particular section (on e-bikes) was cut and pasted from their minutes as it was the same topic. He would note that mistake.

P11 (item 10) PR informed the members that after what had been a lengthy ARAG consultation process it was his understanding that following deliberations the NRW had now written and submitted a report to the Minister. Although this will be delayed by the elections he was hopeful given the momentum that something would emerge as many of the issues had dragged on for so long.

If anything appeared then he would update the members at the first opportunity.

P14 EJW. He asked if PR was getting the latest news directly from Network Rail concerning the planned Barmouth viaduct closures.

PR replied that he had not received anything directly but was keeping any eye on progress. But he was grateful to EJW for keeping him in the loop – this was important given its strategic linkages to Barmouth from the Mawddach trail and also as a section of the All-Wales Coastal path. He was also disseminating this information to staff and other interested parties.

5. Matters Arising

i) Off roading update – Brynchrug – Cwrt

PR informed members that the Green Lane Association (GLASS) had crowd funded monies to assist in carrying out repairs to the very poor mid-section of the Unclassified Road (UCR) between Cwrt and Rhyd Yr Onen. Given its difficult location this required about 80 tons of materials and a heli lift. The NP had offered to facilitate this and assist with the logistics and safety. Hopefully, this could be tagged onto the second lift planned for Cadair Idris this summer.

He showed slides showing signage agreed for the one-way system - this runs from Rhyd Yr Onnen to Cwrt west to east and hopefully the users would keep to this.

This would also help landowners to access that area the works are complete.

He would ask the GLASS representative to come to one of the LAF meetings to give their view on this when an opportunity arises.

DO commented that he was aware of some issues on the Llyn Barfog route.

PR added that there had been a recent complaint about some inappropriate activities once again on that section and that he had put the complainant in contact with the GLASS representative to see what could be done to alleviate this by social media messaging, but it was important to note that not all off road users were members of formal associations.

RGR may wish to update us on this repair work during his presentation.

AE asked that if 4 + 4 vehicles were going from east to west on that route did this also include motorcycles.

PR replied that motorcycles could use the route either direction – the main issue was sometimes convoys of vehicles trying to pass one another and creating issues such as land damage and erosion. Therefore, a one-way system was more appropriate for them.

AE added that in its current condition it was not possible to get a quad bike up and any improvements would be welcomed.

ER asked who was technically responsible for this route.

PR explained that these Unclassified County Road (UCR`s) are the responsibility of the highway's authority – in this case Gwynedd Council. However, the NP was assisting in facilitating these works and create a better understanding and working relationship with legitimate users. It was important to remember that any vehicle using UCR's must be road legal therefore their vehicles must be taxed, insured, and have a valid Mot. Failing this will result in prosecution.

ER commented that therefore the landowner was not responsible for the condition issues on such highways.

PR added that this was generally the case unless landowners know of any dangers or have created anything that may constitute a danger – and this also applies to access land or Public Rights of Way then this was another matter – and under Occupiers Liability they have a duty to do something about it. But generally, it was the highways authority who were responsible for their surfaces but understandably UCR's are not a priority.

ii) Barmouth Viaduct – Network Rail work and closure update

PR stated that he had received the latest information over the proposed Barmouth viaduct closures. He would circulate this to the Warden service and other interested parties. This contained all the closure dates¹.

The main work will close the viaduct between the 12th of September until the 12th of December but given the vagaries of the weather then things could change so it will be best for anyone to check first. They will be advising over any transport alternatives that are in place.

PR asked RGR if there was a need to close the footpath formally as it was only a permissive route granted by NR.

RGR confirmed that the closures for next September would affect the All-Wales Coastal Path.

¹ Contact details for information: 03457 11 41 41

• emailing crwales@networkrail.co.uk

• or visiting our website

www.networkrail.co.uk/barmouth

But that no formal closures would be required for the viaduct as this was a permissive route only. However, they would have to provide an alternative route for the AWCP to Penmaenpool to avoid the viaduct when closed to the public.

PR asked EJW if any alternative bus services had been agreed as yet?

EJW stated that there were ongoing discussions between Transport for Wales and NR, but this was complex as the longer through routes by bus were required for Machynlleth but also to maintain a service to the smaller villages.

PR thanked EJW for keeping him in the loop.

LA added that this had also affected their schedule of walks for the Barmouth Walking Festival and they had amended their dates and walks to accommodate this. The 12th of September was not the original date – this was the 17th. This had also forced them to re-think the way they operate the festival so this can be done in a socially distanced environment – given that it was difficult to see what the Covid regulations would be required at that time.

6. Correspondence

None

7. Resources Wales – briefing note relating to the Countryside Code

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.

HP asked if the NRW were planning to produce any leaflets/fliers highlighting the main issues to accompany this promotion.

PR stated that he was unaware of any such plans but that he would ask ML (NRW) to provide any information on this.

8. All Wales Coastal Path – Update on the developments in Gwynedd

RGR thanked the members for the opportunity to update them on the progress of the AWCP.

He explained that he was the All-Wales Coastal Path Officer for the Gwynedd area. This stretched from Machynlleth bridge to the Conwy boundary near Llanfairfechan in the north.

He showed some slides of work undertaken in 2020 – but explained that Covid had compounded their difficulties in completing their work programme including its maintenance.

They had undertaken significant works on the UCR above Aberdovey (as mentioned earlier) as this was part of the coastal path network which required considerable drainage works. Originally monies were not available, however, they successfully applied for additional monies from Welsh Government for improvement works and a local contactor completed the works which was in difficult terrain and ground conditions. They also completed some improvement works on a major drain near the town.

It was disappointing to find out that some users recently were found to be unnecessarily *off piste* again in that same area. This may be due to the fact that it was now too easy to use and not difficult enough, but this reflected badly on those who are responsible users.

PR mentioned that he had asked the GLASS representative to discuss this with the landowner to see what messages they could help with to discourage this. But it was disappointing given that so much public monies had been spent to improve it.

RGR continued - work was also undertaken on the Harlech zig zags this year and where it crosses the rail line and new safety rails installed.

They were also looking into the possibility of working together with Network Rail to get an alternative route along the coast running from Llwyngwrl to Tonfannau. This is a narrow corridor but would be a significant 5-mile section and would be the second longest section agreed on the AWCP in Gwynedd. This is still under discussion but would be a significant change as the existing line is on top of the hills along a UCR.

The AWCP has also been Google Street viewed - so the route is now available to see along its entirety. This would be very useful for people who may not be familiar with some sections or for those who have not visited before including those who may be disabled or partially disabled to enable them to make their own decisions of what they can achieve.

This year they had also applied for funding to carry out environmental improvements within the coastal path corridor and some interesting ideas have come forward. The WG is very interested in piloting this in Gwynedd through a joint group of the WG, the NRW and Gwynedd Council. The various ideas will be `scoped out` and decisions made on where such schemes are suitable and then look to fund this.

They will also be looking at sections can be made more accessible for less abled use by making minor improvements.

Another local issue is the section north of Harlech gold club and to try to link into the old roadway adjacent to the woodland via Ffridd Rasus and giving a better link to the town rather than the current line through fields and housing.

He reported that following several complaints and negative comments (including those from the LAF) about the condition of the paintwork on the Tonfannau bridge. He was happy to report that the original contractor has now agreed to half fund the sandblasting and re-painting of the bridge – with Gwynedd matching this cost. Hopefully, this will happen over the coming summer.

Over the Covid period many areas of the coastal path had suffered with some nine sections falling into the sea and other sections damaged. These included sections in Criccieth, Nefyn and Porthmaethwy. These will now have to be moved inland and that involves substantial and additional work apart from the ongoing development of the route.

EJW thought that to salvage this then possibly a joint approach should be made between GC, the NRW and the NP to WG to bid as a special case above the normal coastal path funding for this extraordinary situation. It seems unfair that AWCP monies should be diverted to rectify these.

RGR stated that the WG had been generous in the past and had assisted when this sort of situation had occurred and agreed that ideally it always come out of a separate funding allocation.

PR took the opportunity to thank RGR for his work on the Aberdovey UCR – this has caused considerable consternation in recent times, and this was a very positive outcome.

AE asked if he could report the Tonfannau bridge work to town Council as this was a matter that had been raised many times. He also took the opportunity to thank RGR for all the rest of the works on the UCR's and the AWCP.

RGR stated that this was of course in order to do so.

HP thanked RGR for his attendance and for this update on the AWCP.

9. Cambrian Way – Update – Oliver Wicks

Postponed until June

PR explained that has asked OW to attend to next meeting.

Agreed

10. 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.

This will run until the end of September.

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.

What RGR had said about improving the biodiversity along the AWCP coastal strips was very interesting and hopefully they could offer to help with this if the opportunity arose.

PR took the opportunity to express his thanks to the Society and officers for their support especially post lockdown with the Croeso Nol and the new Caru Eryri initiative. He hoped that more people would volunteer from the south of the NP.

She explained that in the past the majority of their activities had been in the north, but they were keen to expand southwards and hoped that LAF members may know some local people in the area who may wish to become volunteers with the Society, and they were welcome to contact her via their details of their website.

The new project will be launched at the beginning of June.

HP thanked MW for her contribution this evening and hoped that more volunteers would come forward in the south.

11. Bala Lake Railway – Development Update – Julian Birley

JB thanked the members for inviting him back to update them on the latest Bala Lake Railway extension developments.

He explained that the new railway development was moving ahead steadily and that they had received considerable support from the community, the public at large, the NRW and Visit Wales.

Since he last reported to the Forum members it was hoped that the work can begin later this year.

Their plan was to move the existing terminus 1200m from the existing Pen Y Bont station – this is isolated, it has no facilities or parking and involves people having to walk to the site. The idea was to move it to the new station site located within the town.

Although only a kilometre long this was a challenging project and is the first new railway to be built in the UK at this time.

So far they had raised somewhere in the region of £1.5m in hard cash and donated services. The detailed planning application will be submitted by the end of May. The formulation of the planning application submission was in the region of £155k and the heavy cost was due to the environmentally sensitive nature of the area and the level of detail required for the application.

The NRW – who have been most supportive of the scheme, will undertake some of the engineering works whilst carrying out their £6.5m upgrading of the Bala flood embankment works. This section amounts approximately one third of the route and the BLR will contribute £277k to this.

This support is reflected in their fund-raising efforts - In the most recent round from February 1st they required the final £50k and by the 28th of Feb they had totalled £71k and by today this is in the region of £90k. It was pleasing that these monies had come from across the globe and also from the local area.

An important ethos of the project is that Bala will be a `destination` and a beneficiary of the project rather than simply a place to pass through. The railway terminus will help to stimulate the town's economy and where visitors can leave their vehicles in the car park and take a trip down the lake to Llanywchlyn and back and hopefully reducing the number of cars transiting back and forth.

Their own market research indicates that their train visitors will rise from the current 30,000 to 55,000 which is a significant increase – this translates into an estimated £1.25m additional spend in the town's economy. Additionally, this will create 6 full time jobs mainly in Bala station which will have a Tourist Information Centre, accessible toilet

facilities and a function room. He added that this was most timely given the devastating effect of Covid on the tourist economy

He showed slides of the various land purchases and what was outstanding.

He invited questions from members

PR also added his thanks and updating us on this exiting project and noted that the flood defence works will be disruptive – especially for the NP but will have longer term benefits.

He asked when the planning application was due for submission.

JB stated that had held this back until the NRW application process was complete as both have to go hand in hand. He added that the NRW had been very supportive in this project and working together will mean significant savings for them.

EJW offered his congratulations to the BLR and JB and what they had already achieved.

HP thanked JB for a very interesting presentation and update for members.

12. SNPA Draft Recreation Strategy

PR explained that this was now ready in draft form

He 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, and 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.

The final version would have many photographs or the various activities and some graphics and would be a useful reference point rather than just a policy document sitting on the shelf.

It was important that members gave their views on this when they get the opportunity especially given the expertise contained within the membership – both landowners and users.

The accessibility section had been completely revamped as the previous document was very much `old thinking` .

It was also done in the light of Covid and the changes that we had seen in access and well-being agendas over the last 12 months.

DE and EJW asked for printed copies please.

Following the consultation and any changes made it would then be submitted to the Authority for final approval.

13. Recommended agenda items for next meeting

i) Feedback from ROWIP sub-group

PR mentioned that the subgroup had met, and their discussions had been interesting, and he hoped that Wyn Williams from GC found this a useful exercise.

He stressed that if any members had any ideas or observations regarding the ROWIP process they could please contact WW directly or via PR and he would gladly send them on to GC.

ii) Draft Recreation strategy

As previously discussed

iii) Mawddach Trail – Equine Access update

PR mentioned that some safety barrier work had been undertaken based on the consultant's report and this was ongoing.

They were hopeful to have something in place by September this year if approved by Management Team. The NRW were also keen to work with the NP to provide additional (and new) equine access in Coed Y Garth which is adjacent to the Mawddach trail which would add some 3km to their network.

There would be rules for riders to abide by, but he was hopeful that this could be successful and far safer option than the road.

iv) JP recommended that we invite someone from Cwm Nod Glas to update the members of this project.

PR would try to arrange this.

12. Any Other Business

a) *DE wished to express his thanks to GC and the NP for improving the access at the Beach Road gate. The new gate is a vast improvement and also the new seating.*

PR mentioned that they had organised a site visit testing the new four-wheeler and it was not possible to get through the gate as it was, so they had mentioned this to GC. And it was they who had organised this.

DE mentioned that it was unfortunate that the toilets in that location had steps and were not accessible.

PR stated that he would mention this to GC.

b) HP mentioned that it was apparent that the Google maps sent vehicles heading to the car park on the other road in the valley which was a dead end, and this had caused some problems.

PR stated that he would look at this and discuss it with the GIS Officer in the NP who would liaise with Google.

c) *DE mentioned that the Mawddach signpost was still missing from the Marian car park.*

PR apologised for this and that he would inquire as he had asked for it to be looked into several times.

13. Date of Next Meeting – 15th June 2021

HP thanked all officers and members for their attendance this meeting