

**Minutes of the Northern Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Monday 7th March 2022 at 6.30p.m
Online Zoom Meeting**

Present - Members:

Mr Edwin Noble (Chair)	Mr Arthur Davies
Mr John Gladston	Mr Richard Williams
Mrs Kate Worthington	Mr Tim Jones
Mr David Firth (Joan)	Mr Mark Jones
Mr Robin Parry	Mrs Hilary Davies

Officers / Speakers:

Peter Rutherford (SNP)	Adam Daniel (SNP)
Rhys G Roberts (GC)	Rhian Williams (SNP)

EN Chair – welcomed all to the meeting this evening.

1. Apologies:

Mr Tom Hutton	Mr Callum Muskett
Mrs Molly Lovatt (NRW)	

2 Previous Minutes

MJ mentioned (under item 7) that he meant that there was a number of people who visited the National Park Offices asking for information (and not his business in Penrhyndeudraeth).

PR would record that amendment.

Approved

3. Matters Arising

i) Speed Limit Pen y Pass

PR informed the members that finally they had received a response from Gwynedd Highways regarding this matter (attached as item 4iii). They had stated that they had taken note of the LAF members concerns and suggestions and that they were working together with the SNP consultants and have identified areas where speed limits may need reviewing including the Pen Pass section of the A4086.

PR stated that this was something the LAF had flagged up in the past and that at we now see some reaction to their views.

ii) Dragons Back race

There had been a report of some small difficulties between sheep gathering on the Carneddau and the DB race first section starting from Conwy – these activities happen on the same day each year and there had not been any clashes in the past. He had visited the landowner concerned and had put the two parties together to

discuss this and to hopefully enable them to work around a slightly different timetable or other options.

EN asked if this had to be the same day.

PR replied that the dates for the race were set for the same time period on an annual basis to allow participants to know when they were in terms of other events and also their press and TV coverage, other event planning for all the overnight stops across Wales. This race begins in Conwy and finishes in Cardiff over a period of 5 days. The date was also the traditional date for sheep gathering on the Carneddau and it would not be fair to expect them to change it. He was confident that they could work out a practical solution as all were keen to work together amicably. The weather on that particular day may also have been a factor with substantial very low cloud which had added to the confusion.

iii) Slate Trail information

Following an observation by a LAF member PR had reviewed the Slat Trail guidebook and confirmed that there was little information regarding local goods and services such as accommodation. This was disappointing and he would discuss this with the author on behalf of the LAF members at the next opportunity to get his views in this.

4. Correspondence

i) Letter to minister – provision for off road motorcycles.

PR stated that he had received a reply – *he apologised that it was not available in the minutes. He shared screen.* The LAF letter (endorsed by both LAF's) had asked the Minister if some alternative sites could be provided for off road motorcyclists within NRW state forests particularly given the increasing number of problems occurring in the countryside including National Parks. The response had not been so favourable, but it had noted the points the LAF's had raised. The Minister had stated that next winter as part of their review of the future and direction of national forest they would be consulting widely and there may be an opportunity to us to put our views at that time.

PR added that this was a little disappointing but not unexpected, but he would monitor when the review was to take place and make sure that the LAF's are afforded the opportunity to contribute.

JG mentioned the Mines and Quarries Act may play some role here if there were suitable places.

PR replied that this was an interesting point and that there was a local group in Nantlle and the Penygroes area who had tried to get facilities and formal course in in an old, abandoned quarry. He would inquire if they had made any progress. In terms of such developments the difficulty was always the Mines and Quarries Act and also the planning system which was not flexible enough in terms of consents even though this would be a fully enclosed and supervised and be a safe environment.

DG mentioned the Pigyn Escob route in the Penmachno area this is now in a serious condition with off roaders and motorcycles using it. It is a UCR and is now so bad its difficult to walk on it.

PR noted that EN had raised this before from the Dolwyddelan end. He suggested a site visit to view this. He would try to organise something once the Covid restrictions were all cleared.

MJ mentioned that some illegal activity had been occurring in the Llyn Tecwyn Uchaf area (near Llandecwyn/Talsarnau) and then accessing the nearby hillsides.

PR would inquire further on this, as this was new information.

ii) Letter to Gwynedd Council Highways Department

iii) Response letter by Cyngor Gwynedd

Previously discussed

5. Warden Section – an update on the section’s work programme, activities, and funding for 2021-22 - Adam Daniel – Head of Service.

AD explained that they had recently received confirmation of funding for his seasonal Wardening staff this coming summer. They were also in the process of recruiting a permanent Warden for Snowdon and a temporary Warden in the Conwy Valley area whilst our permanent Warden was on secondment to the NRW until September.

He mentioned that the project work in Ffridd Uchaf to move and upgrade the bridleway had been completed and they had received some very positive feedback from the public as a new link (and circular) to Lon Gwyrfai, Beddgelert forest and onwards.

The senior Warden north had been in discussions with the UNESCO group (Welsh Slate landscapes of Northwest Wales) with a view to resolving some access issues in some of the areas around Cwm Pennant.

The section was also contributing to the HLF Carneddau scheme and helping to establish the Carneddau Circular and some community engagement works. *The project Officer had offered to update the LAF on the project in June.*

They had also received grant funding for two feasibility studies and for track improvement works in Capel Curig which hopefully should be completed towards the end of May or into June.

Cylchdaith yr Wyddfa – Snowdon circular was ongoing, and they were now close to getting a formal road crossing in Nant Gwynant to formally link east and east sides of the route (near the Bethania café). As part of the circular the Maescwm – Brithdir bridleway section is now resurfaced and complete.

The next section is Brithdir to Café Caenant on the Llanberis track (public footpath only). He explained that he was seeking the LAF members views on this and showed a map and some photos of the section that required work as its use had increased in recent years. He stressed that as a Public Footpath only the work required would reflect this so the engineering works required would be less to finish with approximately 1.25m width – largely as it is currently.

EN asked if they were undertaking work on all of that section.

AD stated that they were looking at it all but not all sections required work as some had previously been pitched and were in reasonable condition but there was work to be done on its drainage and some surfacing along some parts along its length.

PR added that it was important to note that this was a Public Footpath and not a bridleway and the type and scale of works would reflect this.

AD mentioned that this had also become an extremely popular path for local use during Covid. He asked for views on this work.

EN asked how long this work would take

AD estimated about 6 months to complete.

RP mentioned that he had been up Maescwm several times and he thought this was excellent work. He was aware that there had been some criticism.

AD replied that there had been criticism from some quarters that this may have been overengineered. But it was in a poor condition and much of the original track had been covered over by soil slip and debris, had sustained considerable water damage in some sections and side drainage was non-existent. This was a bridleway therefore it was necessary to improve it for a variety of users. It was always unfortunate that during ongoing works some people did get the wrong impression before the works are finished or have time to weather in. They were confident that this will blend into the background in a few months, and they were confident that this will be well received and be fit for purpose for the future.

KW asked if any user data was available on this proposed section to warrant the amount monies to be spent. She was aware that some section required work, but some sections were already pitched and in good condition and should be kept as they are.

AD appreciated KW views and confirmed that there was no intention of re surfacing this in its entirety as some sections were in good condition and would remain as they are and only those sections requiring work would be improved. He confirmed that there was no counters on that section but that this was a part of the Cylchdaith yr Wyddfa - Snowdon Circular and this was an important link in the overall route.

KW asked if the overall finish would be similar to the previous work in Nant Gwynant which was `growing back in`.

AD confirmed it would be but on a smaller scale.

JG mentioned pitched paths and sometimes they are difficult to negotiate in easily accessible areas for people unsure on their feet – Cwm Idwal approach is an example of this. Those people then tend to walk on the sides adding to the erosion problems.

AD commented that pitching was a skill, and they did not favour pitching everywhere as clearly it was unsuitable especially where a flat aggregate surface was adequate.

They were currently undertaking works on Mynydd Moel (Cader Idris) and clearly this required considerable pitching work but appreciated that it was not always the solution.

PR commented that he freely admitted that in some places they had overpitched in the past – the lower Maescwm section had now been replaced with an aggregate surface but at the time there was little water control from Maescwm itself and they were faced with a torrent of water which had eroded the path by about 500mm at the time. Thankfully, this had now been addressed much higher up so pitching in that section was now unnecessary. In Cwm Idwal (and 20 years ago) pitching was considered necessary work but by today with better water control (culverts/side & cross drainage) then some of it could have been given an aggregate surface.

Regardless of where they are it is necessary for the National Park to think well into the future and to provide and maintain these routes. In light of the storm damage and volume of traffic, the higher rainfall we have experienced in recent years then we have no choice other than to build tracks and paths that can withstand these conditions.

EN asked when the replacement for the seconded Officer was to be appointed.

AD hoped this was soon but that the previous seasonal Warden had been in place to help.

EN thanked AD for his update

6. *PR stated that due to logistical difficulties the 2021 Monitoring figures were not yet available for Item 6 but Rhys Roberts – Gwynedd Coastal Officer had volunteered to give us an update on their All-Wales Coastal Path activities and projects.*

All Wales Coastal Path update (AWCP) - Gwynedd Coastal Access Officer – Rhys Roberts.

RR was interested to hear about the increasing use of local paths during Covid and this was also their experience where they had seen many more local people using their particular section of the AWCP.

He explained that there was various work that were underway across the Gwynedd section of path but that he would update them on the more important points.

Some landowners had asked if it was possible to carry out other conservation works within the AWCP such as tree planting, water ponds and planting of hedgerows. Given these requests they had asked WG via the NRW if there was funding available for such work and the response from them was very positive. They had since received grant monies to run a pilot project on a farm in the Abersoch area. This work included 400m of new hedgerow banks, scrub clearance, new grazing regimes on the coastal slopes to suit the Chough (Bran Coes Coch) and other planting. This scheme is now ending and this pilot will be evaluated. He was confident that WG, based on this Gwynedd Pilot, may be keen to role this out across the AWCP.

This year the AWCP will be celebrating its 10-year anniversary. He announced that the guidebook will be translated into Welsh for the first time - Bangor to Porthmadog and will be launched in Nant Gwtheryrn early this summer.

The WG had commissioned a review of the AWCP recently and the Minister concerned had asked for feedback from various quarters including the LAF's albeit this was over a short timeframe and included discussions with coastal staff across Wales. Snowdonia National Park had also responded with their views. Future funding was one of the main concerns.

If any LAF members wished to ask any further questions he would be happy to discuss them or alternatively they could ask online via the Gwynedd website at any time.

PR confirmed that WG had sent this request relating to the coastal path review to our Chief Executive to which they had since responded. The main points SNP had made in the review were:

- To look at use of the coastal path for higher rights where possible – cycles and/or equine/ disabled users.
- To consider more coastal community links – inland to enable more to benefit.
- To ensure that future funding was adequate and guaranteed
- To decide on its formal and national status – such as a National Trail, CRoW access corridor or simply as Public Rights of Way.
- To ensure that coastal rollback due to erosion was a far easier process than it was currently under the current highway's legislation.

RR added that they had not had much of an opportunity to make their views known as this review was conducted over a very short period. He agreed that PRoW creations were slow to achieve under current legislation and simplifying and speeding up the process would be beneficial.

JG mentioned that he has received some complaints from Llanfairfechan regarding some temporary works which made it difficult for access with a wheelchair.

RR commented that he was aware of this temporary difficulty, but this was in the Conwy AWCP area and not within Gwynedd. RR would pass on the relevant Officers details and also his email to JG.

EN thanked RR for taking the time to bring this interesting update to the LAF members.

7. SNPA Draft Recreation Strategy Update – Peter Rutherford

PR informed the members that the text presented at the last meeting was more or less the final draft before it went to Management Team.

The LAF members were the first to see this and he was keen to encourage members to review this and come back to him with any ideas or support for the document particularly the activity statements. He stressed that the whole document contents must be aligned with the National Park Management Plan – *already adopted by the Park Authority*. The final document would be filled with various photographs and made easier to read as a public document.

It was important that this was a long-term strategy which had the ability to adapt to changing recreational behaviour and future legislation.

They were free to email him or contact him directly.

EN asked if there was a timeframe for this

PR stated that he hope that this would go to Management team in May but if members wished to comment on it beforehand then he would welcome any input.

8. Update on the SNP Volunteer programme Caru Eryri 2022

PR explained that a full report was not available this evening. However, the 2022 Caru Eryri scheme for volunteers will begin again this coming Easter in an equivalent manner to last years scheme with volunteers out on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Their main activities were liaising with the general public, litter picking and carrying out some basic maintenance where possible.

This was all done in conjunction with Cymdeithas Eryri - Snowdonia Society who had assisted the NP in the previous schemes.

9. Access Reform Group Update – Peter Rutherford

PR explained the latest as far as he knew it.

Access to Water:

There had been two access to water discussion groups.

Access to inland water within CRoW access land - discussed by the Access Reform Group 3 and ii) access to inland water which had been under discussion by a subgroup of the National Access Forum (NAF). So, this process had been complicated even for professional officers.

In November 2021, the Minister had indicated that he did not concur with the views contained within NAF subgroup report and did not propose to take their recommendations forward.

PR added that he had not agreed with some of the group's proposals particularly any charging regimes which would have been a retrograde step in his view. However, he did support the notion of some form of registration system within governing bodies such as Welsh Canoeing or British Canoeing Associations (and subsequently insurance) which would be useful to landowners in the case of liability or others monitoring rivers.

Give this situation it was difficult now to see what the WG thinking was on this issue, but this had been the subject of lengthy discussion since 2015. It was more than obvious that our own model on the upper Conwy has worked well and had defused a previous place of conflict which had been in place since 2013. These arrangements were based on using the recognised access/egress points, having adequate water level gauges, having low key signage and the installation of some minor infrastructure.

EN asked if any insurance would be compulsory.

PR replied that that was dependant what would finally appear in any future legislation. He did not favour a voluntary scheme they should be licenced in some form and fall under some form of controlling body.

RP had seen the letter from the Minister. He quoted from the Minister's response "I have reservations of charging for paddle sports which may result in restricting access rather than broadening it particularly for people on low incomes. I do not therefore propose to fund further work on this particular model at this stage."

This was disappointing and WG were not going to fund further work, so we have come to a full stop after so much deliberation in recent years. He did agree with some aspects of the report – particularly some form of charging and/or licencing system particularly as the fishermen have to pay which seems a more equitable arrangement. In terms of licencing under a governing body – he appreciated that not all canoeists/paddlers were members of any association so that may be difficult when a great deal of such activity is `unofficial`. He was also in favour of the concept that any access to water should be environmentally sustainable.

There was also the question of who would eventually `police` access to water. The NRW did not have the resources for this (if it became their remit to do so).

JG commented that this was very much about access to water for people generally and not just about canoeists and members of clubs. Wild swimmers were an example of other users of water bodies and this activity is increasing and is good for peoples physical and mental wellbeing.

PR commented that JG had made a very valid point and if there was any further consultation then those points should be highlighted.

MJ commented that he had been a fisherman a lot longer than he had been a canoeist and had heard many perspectives over many years. As a fisherman he was more than happy to pay for his licence and river access. As a water user he has kayaks, canoes, and a paddleboard and asked how a licencing system could be applied to all his craft which may prove unrealistic.

As mentioned many `paddlers` were not members of any of the canoeing associations and many would not want to join and that may be problematic in terms of policing. His analogy was how much damage a mountain bike could do on a track compared with a canoe on water and should they also be licenced. It was still a difficult debate.

PR mentioned that he thought the definition was `portable craft`.

JG added that this was complicated further by inflatable canoes/kayaks.

DF commented that by today there were inflatable craft that can go virtually on any water. He thought that any licencing should be based on a similar system to the fishing licence administered by the water authority.

TJ added that many people who accessed the outdoors were not members of any governing bodies or associations. He did not think it was practicable to have all watercraft licenced, but it should be the individual.

He had seen for himself the issues on the Watkin Path falls which was a typical example where it seemed a chaotic situation. He thought that fundamental to this was the use and promotion of the Countryside Code to encourage more responsible behaviour in the countryside.

RP added that there was a great deal more that could be done in terms of public education in relation to access to water. There were many informal users who have no idea of what the dynamics are in terms of fish management, safety, legislation, bio security or other environmental concerns.

PR (through the Chair). Added that formalising access/egress points, having adequate water levels, conservation issues (particularly in winter on river/estuarine confluences for migrant birds) and also to in some way indemnify landowners in his view were crucial points to be agreed to managing access to water generally. However, getting those messages out there without legislation may be difficult.

EN commented that most of us are saying the similar things.

Dogs on Leads

PR commented that the general outcome was that they may recommend supporting the notion of having dogs on short leads using the phrase `in the vicinity of livestock`. Potentially they could be threaded into a revised Countryside Code.

DG commented that in his view all dogs on agricultural land should be on a lead.

EN could see DG`s point but that there would be a great deal of opposition to a complete compulsory dogs on leads at all times approach in the countryside. The public education issue would become paramount to dealing with this issue in the long term.

PR added that he fully understood this perspective, but it was what was practicable for the public and what would work on the ground.

Local Access Forums

PR explained that there was a subgroup which had been discussing various issues related to the management of Local Access Forums.

Currently the tenure is 3 years, and this was onerous to manage and a steep learning curve for new members. Some of the group (including himself) had recommended that this be a 5-year term of appointment for members. Chairs tenure could be flexible and down the individual LAF to decide on an annual basis or for the full period.

The other issue was why the LAF`s were not on the list of `statutory consultees` for matters relating to Public Rights of Way. This was an anomaly which should also be considered if regulations were to be revised.

10. Recommended Agenda items for next meeting:

- i) Access Strategy
- ii) Volunteers update
- iii) 2021 Visitor Monitoring figures

iv) HLF Carneddau project update

11. Any Other business

- i) DF for information informed the members that the Welsh Highland Railway (WHR) would resume a limited service from the end of March. Through services from Caernarfon to Porthmadog would only run Friday and Saturdays with limited services from Caernarfon to Beddgelert and Porthmadog to Beddgelert on the other days. It is now possible to get a ticket all the way to Blaenau by changing trains.
- ii) AD asked if members were happy for them to continue with the Brithdir improvements as outlined earlier.

Agreed and PR would minute this.

12. Date of Next Meeting: 6th June 2022

EN took the opportunity to thank all members and officers for their attendance and contribution this evening and hoped that next time it would be face to face.

