

**Minutes of the Northern Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Monday 6th June 2022 at 6.30p.m
At Princes Arms, Trefriw, Conwy**

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| Present - Members: | Mr Edwin Noble | Mr David Firth |
| | Mr Richard Williams | Mrs Fiona Davies |
| | Mr John Gladston | Mr Mark Jones |
| | Mr Dafydd Gwyndaf | Mr Tim Jones |
| Officers / Speakers: | Peter Rutherford (SNP) | Rhian P Williams (SNP) |
| | Dana Williams (SNP) | |

EN Chair – welcomed all to the first `live` meeting.

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| 1. Apologies: | Mrs Hilary Davies | Mr John Hardy |
| | Mrs Molly Lovatt (NRW) | Mr Arthur Davies |
| | Mr Tom Hutton | Mrs Kate Worthington |
| | Mr Robin Parry | Mr Calum Muskett |
| | Eryl P Jones | |

EN welcomed everyone to the first face to face meeting in over 2 years albeit some members were not able to attend this evening.

He recommended that there were around the table self-introductions.

ED current Chair and local landowner

John Gladstone – representative from the outdoor and disabilities and equality sector

Dana Williams – Sustainable Tourism and Visitor Monitoring Officer SNPA

Mark Jones - *Liked the idea of free food!* Representing the outdoor sector

Fiona Davies – representing accommodation providers and agricultural sector

David Firth – representing outdoor sector as former our pursuits centre manager and accommodation provider.

Dafydd Gwyndaf – representing farming sector

Richard Williams - representing farming sector

Tim Jones – representative for the National Park Authority

Rhian Williams – Admin support SNPA

Peter Rutheford – Access and Health & Well Being Manager SNPA and Secretary to both the National Parks Local Access Forums.

EN thanked everyone for this information

2 Previous Minutes

DG mentioned that he was in attendance online at the last meeting.

PR would amend the minutes for the record

Approved

3. *Matters Arising*

i) Coastal Monitoring figures for Gwynedd

PR mentioned that unfortunately Gwynedd Council's Coastal Officer Rhys Roberts was not able to attend this evening.

He explained that the NRW funded the All-Wales Coastal Path (AWCP) and its Officers across Wales. The delivery of the path continues with Gwynedd having one of the biggest sections of the route in Wales – running from Llanfairfechan (the boundary with Conwy) all the way down to Machynlleth – (the boundary with Powys/Ceredigion) with approximately 100 miles of the AWCP within the NP. Responsibility for this lies with Gwynedd and the NRW as funders. Although RR keep us up to date on progress and liaises with field staff and PR when required.

In terms of the visitor monitoring figures Gwynedd had found a similar pattern to the National Park – that there were behavioural changes which occurred within local communities and visitors during and after Covid lockdowns following the lifting of travel restrictions. Some patterns indicated that local communities had rediscovered their immediate networks and links to other communities. It was apparent that visitors been using the network and the NP had received many inquiries about areas where activities were lower in the past.

ED asked PR if he thought that patterns might return to some form of normality.

PR stated and this was a good question but difficult to answer at this stage being so close to the lifting of lockdowns and travel restrictions. There was no doubt that many local communities had rediscovered their local networks as convenient ways to get active during lockdowns and was good for their health and wellbeing. Circular routes had proven to be very popular. He had inserted some of these changing patterns within the Recreation Strategy.

ED mentioned that give the change of use of some paths then possibly the categorisation done during the first ROWIP may now need re assessing.

PR added that EN had made an important point and one that they should make when reviewing the Gwynedd ROWIP in the coming months. Certainly categorisation would be a discussion point.

In terms of visitors, NP staff continue to see some disappointing and challenging behaviour – fly camping, litter/waste issues, aggressive behaviour, poor parking and where some visitors were not engaged with the Countryside Code or the countryside generally and some challenges still lie ahead. This was not helped by a great deal of misinformation carried by many social media platforms which frequently made matters worse.

In terms of `normality` he was uncertain what lay ahead. WG has been generous in various grants to the local authorities and the NP's following this period but this was really needed was increases to the annual baseline budget. Grants were difficult to administer and were often in the short term.

When he received the actual coastal figures he would pass these onto members for their information.

ii) Off roaders in Llyn Tecwyn area

PR has made some inquiries into this but could not find any information and had not received any complaints or inquiries. *The original information coming from MJ.*

MJ mentioned that he had been there himself and had seen some damage caused by motorcycles and had heard them in the area. There was an off-road vehicle parked which he thought had been carried up there.

PR said that he continues to make inquiries with some local residents.

iii) Slate landscapes.

PR mentioned that the World Heritage slates landscapes of North Wales had met recently – although he was not able to attend, he had recommended that they create an access subgroup with a remit to improve their accessibility where necessary – using existing tracks and/or footpaths and using the Slate Trail as their main link between the various sites. This was already well established.

He would keep the LAF informed how that was received.

TJ commented that this type of `branding` was important to this World Heritage status. Such a group would be a useful asset.

ED added that the overall structure was quite widespread, and a working group would be useful for them. What he had heard so far was very tourist orientated rather than infrastructure.

PR added that before this Gwynedd, Conwy and the NP had helped with the Slate Trail project when it first appeared but given the World Heritage status then the route now had developed a higher significance. It is 83 miles in total. The NP would always be willing to assist where it could.

iv) DG mentioned that Pigyn Escob (UCR¹) had been raised again but that it was not in a useable condition. This also links Penmachno to Ysbyty Ifan. Some off roaders had been trying to use it in parts but as it is not `doable`.

PR added that it was also problematic in trying to find a link down to Dolwyddelan. Ideally as its condition and routing stands it should be a bridleway, but the UCR status would be difficult to change as it is a highway maintainable at the public expense. The difficulty was that if it was made fully functioning (at great expense) then it may attract more attention from off roaders compounding problems.

4. Correspondence

¹ UCR – Unclassified County Roads – usually unsurfaced but understood to open to use by motorised vehicles. They are recorded on the County Council's List of Streets (record of highways maintainable at the public expense).

i) NRW briefing note – Countryside and Rights of Way Act Access Mapping – extension to the mapping review date.

PR explained that under the CRoW Act 2000 the open access map was to be reviewed every ten years. The first one was 2013 and at the time some landowners had attempted to question CRoW access on their property, and some had applied to remove it. Many were spurious and were very time consuming for the NRW and the NP. The next map review was supposed to take place in 2023 but the Minister, via the NRW, has now decided to postpone this until 2029. This seemed an inordinate amount of time for an extension but was welcomed by many. The Access Reform Groups (ARAG) had recommended that this very onerous mapping process be replaced by a rolling process where applications could be considered on an individual basis.

There were some candidate sites that were removed from the previous map in 2013 – Pandora Mine spoil heap, which was mapped incorrectly, was one area which clearly did not meet the CRoW access land criteria and should have been removed earlier but the mapping review system did not allow for this. Having this on a rolling basis would be easier and cheaper for such cases.

This may also be a method of delaying the map review until such time as it can be built into new legislation before that time (to remove the need for a 10-year review) as well as changing provision for access to water, PRoW, rules on dogs and other access reforms – many as outlined by the ARAG groups.

TJ concurred with this view and that potentially there may be new legislation in between and this would mean that the NRW would not be compelled to carry out this work once again in its entirety across Wales. He noted that the sentence at the end of the letter did say “if a reformed review process is introduced before 2029 the NRW will follow the new process”. In his estimation this indicated that some legislative changes may occur before that time.

ii) PR mentioned that the Minister had also rejected the final report of the Access Inland water group so this leaves us waiting to hear what the WG's next steps will be. It was disappointing that they had not followed up on the SNP Conwy model which was an exemplar of how access to water could work.

It is worthy to note that access reform issues had now been ongoing since 2015.

DF added that reform was necessary as in recent years the numbers of people using inland water had increased exponentially and there was a serious case for reform. This included activities such as wild swimming and paddle boarding. The Conwy pilot and also the Glaslyn system work very well.

PR commented that for landowners it was very much a matter of liability and if this aspect were addressed in a similar fashion to CRoW access land but included man made features along rivers/lakes then landowners would have greater protection and confidence when these activities occur. This should also include adequate water level indicators and some form of conservation assessment particularly where rivers meet estuarine waters in the winter months (wintering birds etc). The upper Conwy model used by the NP has worked well on this basis since 2013. He would also favour some form of registration for some types of craft which could potentially bring with it in some form insurance cover.

DF commented that canoeist had to be registered with British Waterways is they used canals and thought that it would be useful if everyone were registered but appreciated that not all paddlers were members of the Welsh Canoeing Association or British Canoeing.

TJ added that there was certainly a shift in the demography around the type of users on water from the more traditional canoeist/kayaks to the new trends such as paddleboards and wild swimmers. And only very few would be aware of any type of governing body or affiliations.

MJ commented that with so many new users the majority would consider themselves to be candidates for any form of registration or seek formal affiliations to national bodies.

JG added that whilst more people are partaking in these activities it was relevant information and guidance that was required as well as legislation.

MJ added that for confusion – it was arguable who represented the paddleboard sector – Surf Wales have laid claim as the governing body for this activity and is recognised by Sports Wales. He was aware that there were discussion underway which may result in Canoe Wales being the governing body for inland water and Surf Wales the governing body for estuarine and coastal waters.

This was important in that any high-risk sports and their associated clubs required affiliation to their respective governing bodies and Sports Wales has a definitive list of these governing bodies.

GJ commented for information Canoe Wales was a subsidiary of British Canoeing.

JG mentioned also that it was requirement and well understood in France that you need to register locally prior accessing any water bodies. In Britain this was not something water users were used to.

PR thanked the members for that information.

iii) Snowdon Partnership Newsletter – Spring 2022

PR mentioned that there was only one point he wished to raise on this item. The LAF had on a few occasions raised the issue of the speed limit at Pen Y Pass which is currently 60mph. We have now received a response from Gwynedd Highways indicating that as part of the Pen Y Pass parking and road safety audit and they would be looking into this issue.

He thought this long overdue and hoped that this would result in a reduced speed limit at that point. He would advise the members on any findings.

JG asked if there had been any progress on the Pen Y Pass – Nant Peris footpath link as many people are walking on the road particularly from Cromlech upwards.

PR explained that he concurred with GJ view but eventually this would be part of the Cylchdaith Yr Wyddfa – Snowdon Circular route. He added that this was a difficult

area to access in some places given the terrain and they were looking at the options. Pen Y Pass downwards had no Public Rights of Way, but was CRoW access land. He mentioned that (and to dispel some myths) the route was never intended to be bridleway status all the way around. Some parts may lend themselves to cycling/equine but some did not so it would be a mixture of rights attached depending on the section. The next section to be developed will be the Nant Gwynant power station to the Nant Gwynant but they had experienced difficulties with the NRW. He would inquire as to current situation and progress.

ED asked what the timeframe for the CyW Pen Pass – Cromlech section.

PR stated that this was open ended given that there were so many variables attached to this route and it also depended on goodwill and funding. He stressed that the WG continues to be very supportive of the scheme and the NP did receive additional grant monies for this.

TJ added that sections priority was in need of reviewed particularly when there were so many more people accessing Pen Y Pass on the road which was inherently dangerous in itself.

PR added that they had discussed putting in simple marker posts with the Wardens, but it was a difficult situation as there was a need to deter people from parking in the pass and walking up as potentially this would cause more car congestion not less and when we are actively encouraging people to use the bus service. Cromlech is also problematic with people parking in the lay-by`s and waiting for buses that are frequently full resulting in people walking up on the road.

TJ commented if they were walking then it should be off road on some form of path.

ED added that it should be a priority given the issues on increased people on the road. He thought that there was some form of existing route which was CRoW access land.

PR confirmed that this was CRoW access land and not a PRow. But the route was wet in places and not ideal for high volumes – and where damage would certainly occur and eventually we would need to put in a hard surface which would be contentious.

But he would discuss this once again internally.

DF commented that there had been serious accidents on that section resulting in a fatality only last year as buses and cars overtake pedestrians on this windy and busy road.

TJ added that there had been a similar situation from Pen Y Pass to Pen Y Gwryd with many walkers that previously used the road were now on the new path and this worked well.

PR commented that TJ had made a very valid point. PR himself had stopped many times near Pen Y Pass to advise people to use the new path some simply ignored this advice and continued to walk on the road, but most used the new section – monitoring figures indicated that this was in the region of 7,500 + a year which is a significant reduction of people who would have normally used the road.

JG mentioned that there was no specific information regarding the disabled parking on the pre booking website for Pen Y pass car park and asked what could be done about this. In his view this information needed to be clearer

PR reported that he had made inquiries with other staff who were part of this work and they had informed him that the disabled parking provision in the car park was unaffected. But he appreciated JG point, and he would inquire as to what information the website carried about this and if this could be improved. He would report back on this.

5. Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) for Ffridd Uchaf and Snowdon Ranger Path

PR explained that these DMMO`s (using the maps) have been in the pipeline for some time and were required to make modifications to **i)** the existing bridleway at Ffridd Uchaf to the new line from Gors to make this significant safer and away from a roadway and **ii)** to move the line of the definitive map to the walked line required for lower sections of the Snowdon Ranger path and at the same time moving the existing bridleway link (Llanberis – Snowdon Ranger) running up to Maescwm onto its new constructed line and away from the line of the old bridleway which was difficult to find.

This was the final process in work that had been radically slowed by Covid and hopefully this legal process would be concluded within the next 4- 5 months.

TJ asked fi they were expecting any opposition to the DMMO`s.

PR stated that the legislation required formal consultation, but he was confident that this would not face any obstacles given that the British Horse Society, the local Ramblers Cymru group and the mountain bikers were involved from the onset and that these changes were of significant benefit to users.

The Ffridd link was particularly useful in that it had moved users from a dangerous section of road and at the same time created a link directly to Lon Gwyrfa for either Beddgelert or Rhyd Ddu and was already proving popular with all users. The changes for the Snowdon Ranger realignments were beneficial to people using Gps mobile mapping in poor weather and they could now use legally the long-established walked line and any new OS information would now show only one line.

6. Gwynedd Rights of Way Improvement Plan (Review)

PR reported that the document will be received soon and required a response from the LAFs. Although any members may respond as individuals.

It had been agreed in the past that a subgroup of the joint LAF`s (Arfon Dwyfor, attend a joint meeting between the three LAF`s which PR would host. Two members plus the Chair. He asked if the members would agree to continue with this method of having a joint response.

Agreed.

Members will be Richard Williams, Mark Jones, David Firth, and the Chair.

PR would inform this group when this meeting will occur. The venue will be Plas Tan Y Bwlch.

7. SNPA Visitor Monitoring figures 2021 – Dana Williams

DW explained that she was responsible for the monitoring figures and was going to present the 2021 figures and that the LAF were the first to see this data.

They were still missing some data due to technical issues – with some hardware issues, mostly battery problems not resolved during Covid.

The Llanberis track had also been problematic in recent months due to a missing counter.

DW mentioned the Pen Y Gwryd path which showed a total of 23,000 people using this path. The half figure was the actual number back and forth giving a total of 11,500 which was significant. Some of whom may also be accessing Pen Y Pass from the Nant Gwynant footpath.

The trends show that the first months in the year are lower than normal counts and Covid was a significant factor here. The summer trends show that the figures were crammed into the July, August and September which exceeded the normal figures by almost 5% or more with weekends being the most popular.

Llanberis was particularly busy with an additional 10,000 walkers compared with previous years counts.

However, and very likely due to the Covid travel restrictions, the Miners track was down from 116,000 in 2019 compared with 84,570 in 2021. The Pyg track saw a similar trend with 131,000 in 2019 down to 106,410 in 2021 which were significant decreases.

The Snowdon total for 2021 was in the region of 544,487.

Certainly, the concentration in July, August and September was (and looked) busier than average but overall, the figures for the whole year were down.

PR added that the Watkin path has seen a significant increase in the counters, but it was thought this was due to the number of people accessing the Watkin path waterfalls – there is no data to substantiate this, but they were looking into this phenomenon to get some numbers based on daily manual counts carried out by volunteers. He would report back their findings but added that this was National Trust property so he would need to discuss this with them also.

MJ added that the popularity of the Watkin path waterfalls was very much influenced in recent years by social media, and this included local people.

DW added that in some instances – for example Nant Peris `infinity pool` where certain misinformed information had appeared in local newspapers leading to people accessing places where there were no legal right to do so, and this was problematic.

In terms of Ogwen this area reflected the Snowdon trends but was slightly more spread out.

PR mentioned that there was a new bus service which ran twice a day from Bangor to Corwen which stopped in Ogwen Cottage. Ogwen had never had a service of any sort in the past and the public service link from Bethesda to Ogwen proving very popular. The figures for Ogwen had remained static over a number of years as the parking provision was finite with no public transport available previously. A sustained bus service may change these figures.

MJ mentioned the Grwp Cymunedol Bethesda who were discussing an electric bus service from Bethesda.

PR mentioned that parking was of real concerns in recent years but had always lacked public transport even though the area itself has a large carrying capacity in terms of walkers.

DG mentioned that he had seen people simply moving cones on the roadside and accepting fines if applied.

DW continued and mentioned that figures and the mid-summer increases were similar across the NP including Cader Idris with peaks in July/August. Although the drop off rate on Cader and the Mawddach Trail are always soon after the end of August whereas many areas such as Snowdon are much slower winding down.

Llwybr Cynwch - Precipice Walk showed an increase but this has a local of local use and was popular during and after Covid. It has toilets and parking.

MJ wondered if these figures are reflected in the other tourism statistics – for example caravan/campsites. And also mentioned that he does get a considerable number of people looking for the `Park` in Penrhyndeudraeth. This is what satnav does.

PR stated that it was common for people to visit the office building asking for the entrance.

DF asked if DW could e mail the 2021 figures to the members for their information.

DW stated that this could be arranged.

DF mentioned that in Nant Gwynant people were moving cones which was displacing other cars and moving the problem further down the valley. It was likely that many people are accessing the falls, but that figure was unknown. It would be useful to know this as there is considerable damage to the surrounding land.

PR mentioned that over the years the Forum had received little in terms of information about access generally so it may be an idea to ask someone to come along to explain how they managed this. He would inquire as to whether anyone from the NT would come and talk to the Forum at the next opportunity.

MJ mentioned that there are some activities such as barbeques and camping that have taken place at the waterfalls which are not an ideal situation in such a location.

JG asked if we still receive mountain rescue statistics.

PR stated that he had not seen any recently but was sure they could be made available.

TJ mentioned that again social media is responsible for highlighting some areas where people who are inexperienced should not be encouraged to go.

EN thanked DW for her presentation.

8. SNPA Draft Recreation Strategy – Peter Rutherford

PR stated that he had received a copy back from the graphic designer who has inserted various photos and other graphics as more of a finished product. However, Management had instructed him to ask the Planning and Access committee of the Authority to review this document in the first instance. This was confusing for him when the LAF are statutory advisors to the Authority. He asked members for their views on this.

After a discussion members asked why this was.

TJ commented that the expertise was around the LAF membership in the first instance as statutory advisers to the Authority so they should see this after amendments rather than the other way around.

PR would discuss this with Management once again. The activities were all now split into individual activities and it gives an honest approach to the NP's perspective on each. Certainly, Covid had changed some thinking and also to encompass health and well-being of the population. It was also necessary that the strategy is aligned with the Management Plan and its objectives and outcomes. Although this will run from 2022 – 2027 – if there are changes in the Management Plan in terms of recreation then this document will reflect those changes.

We have also made reference within the document to any legislative changes that may occur (as mentioned previously) and that we should be ready to react to changes that the WG may consider - for example to the Rights of Way legislation, access to water or access land.

A statement on Welsh place names for sites was also included.

9. Recommended Agenda items for next meeting:

- i) NT presentation on access
- ii) Recreation Strategy if possible
- iii) JG mentioned that a presentation from Craig Grimes and Rachel Thomas (NRW) may be useful to members.

10. Any Other business

- a) PR mentioned that JG had been a Guinea pig for a pilot video for each of our all-ability routes using a Go Pro and a drone cam on the NP's all ability route Foel Ispri in Dolgellau. The thinking behind this was that people with disabilities could view the video online and then make up their own minds as to whether a route was suitable for them or not. It was not for the NP to be prescriptive in such matters

JG commented that it was important that we get away from preconceived ideas what disabled people needed from routes – not short circuits back to their cars but routes that enable them to explore and enjoy the countryside to within their maximum capabilities.

- b) PR mentioned that there was an old **non**-PRoW footpath (a dotted black line pre-CRoW) which goes through private land – leading from the north end of LLyn Geirionydd upslope. Importantly this did not link into the RoW network and was not CRoW access land and ran through a private yard and past a private dwelling. This was confusing for walkers as they assume that this was linked to the PRoW creating other issues such as frequent disturbance and trespass etc.

After looking at this issue he was minded asking OS to remove this line as the area is served by PRoW to the same end. He had discussed this with the NRW, who had indicated that they would support this, and had also presented this to the Conwy Ramblers for their views. But he was keen to get views and thoughts from the LAF members.

TJ asked where it stopped.

PR replied that it stopped on a rocky slope and the edge of the forestry, which was not good ground, but this line was confusing and was not good ground.

RW stated that PR had shown us what the issue is and that we should support it.

DG mentioned that the old line was linked to something that was in that area in the past – old mine workings which was now unused.

PR thanked the members for their support, and now he would wait until the Conwy Ramblers had discussed this issue and then he would report to the LAF.

- c) *DF thanked the NP for their efforts in promoting the Sherpa service and also that for the first time a timetable is now available. And he also asked that the NP encouraged the Snowdon Mountain Railway to open the summit station next year by train. This was compounded by the lack of toilets and all that comes with this and also litter generally.*

TJ concurred with this view in that the level of human waste is unacceptable.

PR would mention the toileting issue in dispatches.

- d) *FJ mentioned that there had been complaints about the temporary bridge on the upgraded Capel Curig route.*

EN asked why this could not be a ford?

PR replied that the bridges were temporary, but a ford may be an option. He would discuss this further with our Project Officer.

FJ mentioned the dogs on leads issue and what was the current thinking given the number of attacks that had occurred recently.

PR stated that WG and the NRW were minded using the phrase `dogs on leads in the vicinity of livestock` which is the phrase the NP has used for many years. On Snowdon this was a matter of signage and education. He would also discuss this with the Wardens.

EN favoured `on a lead` and not under close control.

RW added that many of these dogs may not be vaccinated which was an added problem for landowners.

11. Date of Next Meeting: 5th September 2022

Apologies in advance received from TJ

EN thanked all for their contribution and attendance this evening.