

**Minutes of the Northern Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Monday 6th December 2022 at 5.45p.m
at Pen Y Pass YHA**

Present - Members:

Mr Edwin Noble (Chair)	Mr Arthur Davies
Mr John Gladston	Mr Richard Williams
Mrs Hillary Davies	Mr David Firth
Mr Robin Parry	Mr E P Roberts
Mr Callum Muskett	Mr Dafydd Gwyndaf
Mr John Hardy	

Speakers and Officers

Peter Rutherford (SNPA), Bethan W Jones (SNPA).	Rhian Williams (SNPA),
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EB (Chair) welcomed all to this evening's proceedings.

1. Apologies

Mr Tim Jones	Mrs Molly Lovatt (NRW),
Mrs Fiona Davies	Mr Marc Jones
Mrs Kate Worthington	Mr Tom Hutton

2. Previous minutes

Approved

3. Matters arising

- i) PR reported that following an inquiry from a member concerning the ladders and ropes on the Fisherman's path on the Afon Lledr he had discussed this with the National Trust, as this was their property, They had advised him that they were shortly to remove the ladders and ropes given their poor condition and the risks they posed and there were no plans to replace these.

Given their history and the fact that many outdoor centres had used the site for many years them this was unfortunate, but they were in poor condition and were becoming a liability and removing them was understandable.

EN added that there was also a parking issue associated with this site as minibuses and cars frequently parked in inappropriate places on what is a dangerous trunk road.

4. Correspondence

None

5. Pen Y Pass – Cromlech path

PR stated that some members had asked for an update on this path and would it be useful to reinvigorate this given the concerns as to how many people were walking up and down the road between the two points.

PR reported that he had recently walked this line again together with the Warden and the NP Project Officer. *He also showed various photos of the site from Pen Pass to Cromlech.*

It was apparent that the original waymarking and signage was not fit for purpose and was not easy to navigate in terms line of sight between the two points. The ground was reasonable if people found the correct line.

The dotted (black & White) line was apparent on the OS map (OL17) but was not a Public Right of Way (PRoW) but was within CRoW access land.

Having walked the line it was also apparent that some small works were required such as pitching one or two sections, new gates, new waymarking posts and signage at both start/end points. One or two short sections were actually wrongly used as there was little definition on the ground at certain points and this led to confusion.

Hopefully the NP will then give this line a little bit more attention and encourage people to use it and stay off the road. This will have to be done carefully as there was potential for more surface damage, and this would need to be monitored. We would always prefer people to use the public transport to avoid this area, but the option is there is required.

This path was also part of the Snowdon circular however the terrain from Cromlech down to Nant Peris was very poor and some investigation will be required to assess this more fully. There were also a number of landowners along that length.

CM asked if this was the original line that existed above the road.

PR stated that this was correct and had been on the OS map (pre-CRoW) for a very long time. There were still many old pre-CRoW routes on OS maps across the NP indicating these older routes.

They had also walked this in poor conditions (excessive rain) to determine conditions as many water culverts and run offs were ephemeral which added to the difficulties.

EN asked fi this was the only route available.

PR stated that unfortunately it was.

RP added that given the terrain he appreciated that there was little room for manoeuvre in the valley.

PR added that they would endeavour to improve the section and try to reduce the numbers walking on the road up and down to/from PyP and then in the future consider the lower section.

EN asked if this was a difficult line to walk up or down i.e. was it rocky and steep.

PR replied that although obviously a slope it was fairly easily to navigate and with the correctly positioned way markers it would also be far clearer. It was also safe

CM asked what the plan was.

PR replied that they would re way mark this, erect directional signs in Pen Y pass and Cromlech, replace one gate and also the gate at Cromlech. There was also a small clapper bridge¹ which may require some attention. In terms of making this more widely known via social media he may well come back to the LAF regarding this issue to determine whether it was necessary or not. This may be influenced by what would happen this season, but it would be monitored.

The gate signage will recommend that walkers stay off the roadway in a similar way to the Pen Y Gwryd sign in Pen Y Pass.

HD asked if it was possible, in the long term, to put a path in alongside the road if it could be widened.

PR replied that this was an interesting perspective that HD has proposed but given that the terrain is problematic on either side this would still mean people were walking alongside the roadway. This solution would also be complicated by the fact that the pass all the way down to Gwastadnant is part of the Eryri Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) (for their glacial remnants) and it was highly unlikely that any consents would be granted by the NRW or Highways to facilitate this.

CM mentioned that that this route is quite a good path but acknowledged that it was sometimes hard to follow, and signage was required but he thought that people may still walk on the road even if the path was highlighted.

PR commented that if there was a digital bus information system in place at PyP he thought this would give people more confidence to wait for the buses. Currently this facility isn't available, and is confusing, so people set off down the road. Officers at the NP were engaging with Transport for Wales and Gwynedd to enable this facility.

Another issue that compounds the `people on the road` issue that that if they park in Cromlech instead of Pen Y Pass then the bus is frequently full in peak season and goes past and they attempt to walk up.

DF agreed that this information system was crucial to encourage people to use the bus service. He added that if more people began using the Cromlech route then there is the possibility that this will suffer more wear and tear and require further work on the ground.

CM asked if this was a problem that may need to be addressed if this did happen for the long term.

¹ Pont syml wedi adeiladu gyda cerrig neu prên rhwng ategion cerrig- A simple bridge consisting of slabs of stone or planks laid across a natural stone abutment

DF added that it wasn't a problem if the NP had the funding to do this work if needed.

PR stated that these were two very valid points, and they would need to be prepared to address this in the long term if necessary. They would monitor this on the ground and prepare to future proof this.

JG asked if there were still people walking the stream route (north of the road).

PR stated that some walkers did follow this but became very difficult ground higher up towards PyP.

EN made the point that as CRow access land any 'hardening up' of a path would surely require landowners' consent.

PR confirmed that some discussions would be required but that it was preferable to have people follow one known line rather than create several ones.

6. Gwynedd Councils Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review – response to the questionnaire.

Following the draft document the three local LAF's (Arfon Dwyfor, Snowdonia north and south) had agreed to arrange a joint sub meeting in Plas Tan Y Bwlch to consider a formal response to the questionnaire within the document.

Following the meeting these had been agreed and sent to GC as their formal response. *The document had not been an easy one to respond to as the format was not user friendly.*

PR mentioned that during the discussions amongst the group there was consensus that Covid had certainly changed patterns of use in relation to PRow – particularly local patterns of use and that communities had rediscovered both community and local linkages and members thought that this should be reflected in any ROWIP in the future.

This in turn may affect the original exercise of the categorisation of paths within communities – where some have now become more significant. So the group had recommended that the categorisation was reviewed.

They had also recommended that their section for PRow on their website was made more widely known. PR commented that this site was an excellent resource but was not widely known to the public.

If members required a copy of this response he would gladly supply it.

EN asked what and how Gwynedd would respond to complaints from the public.

PR stated that this would be based on the category of path - if it was a category 1 or 2 then they would react fairly quickly but given their resources then Category 3-4 would be logged but it was likely that any action/reaction would be considerably slower.

EN commented that Community Councils could technically re grade all their footpaths as category 1's making them all a priority. He expected that communities would need to make a case by case for any changes they recommended.

PR stated that was a novel approach that EN had highlighted but it was unlikely that any community would designate them all as such but certainly post Covid some routes may have become more significant, and changes may be required. The ROWIP review and subsequent responses had highlighted this and there was a great deal of filtering to be undertaken.

EN added that potentially this could be a difficult task for Gwynedd Rights of Way team given their resources.

PR mentioned that the ROWIP review had mentioned multiusers. They had been pleased to see the statement mentioned walkers, cyclists, horse riders and people with limited mobility problems. The subgroup had welcomed this.

They had also recommended that the All-Wales Coastal Path was included in any review work undertaken.

CM asked what GC's timeline was for this review.

PR commented that this was a valid point and that he would inquire with GC as to what their next steps would be following this consultation. Conwy were slightly ahead of Gwynedd.

He stressed that during the original ROWIP process additional funding was made available to the local authorities by Welsh Government (administered by the NRW) to create their ROWIP's. This was followed by ROWIP grant monies for a work programme. LAF's across Wales had successfully lobbied WG for this additional funding and it became a very successful scheme. However, there are no indications that this is to be repeated and local authorities are therefore having to fund this review process and also any changes and improvements from within your own resources which are scarce.

DF mentioned that NRW had hinted at the LAF Chair meeting that some grant monies may be held back from local authorities had not concluded their ROWIP reviews.

7. Snowdonia National Park's Draft Recreational Strategy

PR explained that some months ago he had circulated a text copy of this draft document – this was the latest draft (on screen). The previous document was very much a `grey` Policy document. It was also important to remember that this document must be in close concert with the Eryri Management Plan. It was also important that we also adhere to the requirements of various legislation such as the Future Generations Act, the Equality Act amongst others.

He added that in terms of recreation it was not solely aimed at visitors *per se* but also encompassed local communities as well – who also enjoyed the outdoors in the area for their health and wellbeing.

He hoped that this was an up to date and honest approach to the various activities that occur across the NP. It was important to note that all activities were no longer grouped together but separated out – such as orienteering, fell running, Three Peaks, cycling and mountain biking, walking, climbing with each having an activity statement. It has been updated as far as possible to consider the effects of Covid and new trends in the outdoors – such as the use of e bikes.

Hopefully this final version will be submitted to Management Team for their perusal and the circulated more widely for consultation with stakeholders in the near future including the LAF`s.

EN asked if events organisers planned routes through CRoW access land – other than Rights of Way then landowners could refuse access. He also asked if it was the NP – as the CRoW access authority could grant this.

PR stated that within CRoW access land it was up to landowners to decide to grant use on their access land for any activities. Running for example was not cited as one of the activities allowable under the CRoW Act. However as a general rule and in his experience the larger events are far better organised and are used to the requirements that the NP stipulate such as consultation with all parties concerned, contact information, litter control, post event management such as signage removal. These were all crucial to good event management.

EN asked if it was the NP`s responsibility if this occurred on CRoW access land as the CRoW authority.

PR stated that this would still be private land and they could not interfere but certainly the NP could assist landowners if they required advice, as they have done in the past, to manage issues if necessary (other than Public Rights of Way). The NP under the CroW Act is the Authority but this only included issues such as Restrictions and Exclusions typically for public safety or have powers to insert access/egress points if required. They can also help landowners manage popular routes on access land by supplying furniture. They could not control other activities within private land.

DG added that it was difficult to stop people and how could that be done. His information was that organisers had to inform the NP, NRW, NT if on their land but not landowners.

PR stated that landowners should be the first port of call early in the process when they are preparing their races regardless of where they are. This was one the NP`s requirements. If organisers do their homework properly with adequate notice then that went a long way to help.

The NP`s advice is for them to stick to Public Rights of Way if possible – if there were short sections of access land then they would need to discuss this with the landowner. Most are relaxed about this, but it was important to avoid difficulties or interfere with land management such as sheep lambing outside, grazing animals, gathering, moving stock, or cropping etc. Many landowners had a good relationship with long established events but if problems occurred the NP can assist in resolving issues.

JH mentioned that over 15 years that out of the many he had only one organisation approach him. The commercial operators did not pay for any damage to land or gates. Some of the claims regarding the local economic benefit he thought were spurious. In his view they were growing in number and were not under control.

PR stated that in their experience across the NP in most cases organisers did approach landowners in good time and most were undertaken with few issues. He informed the members that there is now new registration system in place managed between GC and the NP. This generates a data base for all events in Llanberis (inc. Parc Padarn) or Snowdon and all are asked to register – this enables the NP and GC to know who is coming and when and importantly to avoid clashes or other difficulties. Apart from the winter months August has very few events and some now occurred in September and October to spread the season out.

There are few new events most have been established over a longer period. He would always prefer to deal with professional events organisers rather than a small badly led group who have no idea what they are facing in terms of logistics, weather, mountain safety and consultation.

JG mentioned the local economic factor and was this a reality.

PR cited one event using Snowdon Ranger – summit – Llanberis, this particular race has been run for several years with around 1300 competitors. Each stay at least 2 sometime 3 nights, and each have helpers or supporters who also stay. The overnight multiplier and average bed night numbers and make a significant economic contribution, regardless of the type of accommodation.

Referring back to the Recreation Strategy – the document also had references within it for cultural and historic sites which was new and was of interest to some. There were also references to the less known activities such as caving which surprisingly saw some 5000 - 6000 people year.

There was also new mainstream reference to disabled and less abled users and the NP commitment to the `Miles without stiles` philosophy (adopted by the UK`s NP`s) and also `least restrictive options` and our obligations under the Equality Act. They must now be core values. Gates would be replaced with gates where possible, and where the terrain was suitable. They also fully understood landowners concerns regarding boundary issues and each and every situation would require careful thinking.

DF asked how many Trampers the NP now had.

PR stated that there was now two – one in the north based at Beddgelert Forest Holidays site and also one in the south based in Dolgellau which was frequently used on the Mawddach Trail. They had also recently purchased a new Da Vinci four-wheeler which would appeal to the younger generation. There is no charge for these only a small fee applicable in Beddgelert to cover the charging costs. There was also a booking system for these vehicles. However, some advance notification was required².

² <https://eryri.llyw.cymru/ymweld/mynediad-i-bawb/llogi-tramper>
<https://snowdonia.gov.wales/visit/access-for-all/tramper-hire>

The well-being element was also an important consideration within the new document and featured largely especially following Covid.

There is also reference to the harder to reach groups – but it was important to acknowledge that not all are from inner cities, there are many who are locally and rurally based and this was a much harder task but they would continue to try.

Cycling was also mentioned and this had been split up given the range of activities – mountain biking, road cycling, family cycling and the advent of Ebikes. It was important to keep up with the trends.

In terms of access to water mention is made where legal rights occur but that the NP should be ready to react if there are legislative changes that may occur driven by WG.

JH asked if it was possible to licence Three Peaks groups. He was aware that they did not contribute to the local economy and simply dropped in and the out of the area. He appreciated that many were fundraising but could be problematic.

PR commented that some, but not all Three Peakers, could be problematic – in terms of disturbance, litter as everything was frequently left at PyP. It was not unusual across the season to find 200-300 people on the summit at 3am on any evening/early morning.

They were currently working with the Lake District NP (and the NT) and the Nevis Partnership to improve the Code of Conduct adopted by the Three peaks Partnership and hopefully this would have a positive effect.

He acknowledged that JH had made a good point. However, in terms of economy this wasn't clear cut – he was aware that there was some who stayed in the area once Yr Wyddfa- Snowdon was over – possibly that needed some research to establish the facts. The messaging from the Partnership was to spend locally, stay over, take litter home and share transport. Unfortunately it was the NT in the Lake District who gained little from this activity except for parking fees.

PR mentioned the Off roading element – the NP appreciated that this was problematic but given there were legal rights attached to Unclassified Roads they would work with the associations or good practice. But would not condone `off piste` activities and would support the Police, Highways and landowners to stop this.

EN mentioned that the downhill course in Blaenau on CRoW access land barring people from it. He queried if this was legal.

PR stated that he was aware of this and would ask the downhill company why this is and by what authority they were trying to exclude the public from exercising their rights over CRoW access land.

PR (through the Chair) showed 3 of the new disabled route videos they had recently commissioned. He thanked JG for his contribution to this and that it would inspire others to access the countryside.

8. Foel Lus – Penmaenmawr - Memorial stones/plaques

PR explained that there has been some complaints about the number of plaques and now benches that had appeared on the Jubilee Path in Penmaenmawr in recent years. The NP's perspective is that although well meant it did distract from the natural backdrop and wildness of the area and it is not the NP policy³ to support memorials and plaques anywhere – this is a frequent occurrence on Yr Wyddfa – Snowdon and all are removed. With this in mind they will ask Penmaenmawr Town Council for their opinion on this subject.

HD asked if this was the landowner's problem or someone else.

PR stated that technically it was the landowners' issue but it was contra to the NP thinking in terms of designated areas and wildness and this was problematic – although he appreciated the sensitivity but was keen to get Penmaenmawr Town Council's views on this issue. There were alternatives such as planting of trees which can be arranged through the NP or other organisations.

HD commented that if a landowner had given permission then there was nothing the NP could do.

PR stated that they couldn't prevent this but wouldn't condone it.

DF asked if this fell under the Planning regulations.

PR stated that this was depending on the size of any given sign or plaque.

9. Update on the Capel Curig – Crafnant bridleway

PR mentioned that the works on this bridleway – actually only undertaken from between the bridge near Clogwyn Mawr to Nant Y Geuallt was now complete. He showed some slides which featured the new surface and gates. Although there had been some consternation during its construction phase and there had been some misinformation about its scope (indeed some inadvertently by the NP).

This path had been in extremely poor condition and the work has improved its accessibility considerably and was undertaken in difficult and remote terrain. However, potential linkages particularly to the east and onwards to ByC remain to be explored with a view to improving those linkages.

The NP had think 30 years in advance and this was a bridleway and required upgrading and make allowances for disabled and less abled users wherever possible.

AD commented that he had recently waked this and is in much improved to what it was in the past and he wished to offer his congratulations and thanks to the team that accomplished this very difficult task.

³ <https://awdurdod.eryri.llyw.cymru/gwybodaeth/cofebau-a-gwasgaru-llwch>
<https://authority.snowdonia.gov.wales/information> /memorials-and-scattering-ashes

PR thanked AD and would pass this message on.

10. Recommended agenda items for next meeting

- i) Recreation Strategy
- ii) LAF re selection of members 2023 – 2026
- iii) Pen Pass – Cromlech update
- iv) Dates for next year
- v) LAF re-election process

11. Any Other Business – *This is to be kept as short as possible and entirely at the discretion of the Chair.*

- i) *AD mentioned that there were some gating issues within the NP`s woodlands at Coed Bryn Brethynau.*

PR thanked AD for that information and would pass this onto the Local Warden and ask him to look into this.

- ii) *EN mentioned that the next March meeting would be the last for the current membership and that they would have to re-apply if they wished to remain on the LAF.*

PR confirmed this and stated that they would circulate letters to all existing members explain this with an application form. Together with a list of next year`s dates.

12. Date of Next Meeting

(Post meeting decision through the Chair) March 6th, 2023