

**Minutes of the South Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting held on
Tuesday 20th June at 5.45 p.m
At Dragon Theatre, Barmouth**

Present – Members:

Mr Aled Thomas	Mr Eryl Jones Williams
Mrs Gaynor Davies	Mr Alun Edwards
Mr Huw Roberts	Mr Alun Evans
Mr David Coleman	Mr Delwyn Evans
Mr Geraint Rowlands	Mrs Janette Holmes
Mr Tim Faire	Cllr Dewi Owen
Cllr John Pughe Roberts	

Officers / Observers:

Peter Rutherford (SNPA)	David P Jones (SNPA)
Rhian P Williams (SNPA)	Adam Daniel (SNPA)
Will Sandison (NRW)	Rhodri Parry (NRW)

PR welcomed all this evening and announced that as this was the first of this LAF groups meeting he would Chair the meeting as required by the LAF Regulations. The election of Chair and Vice Chair would occur at the next meeting.

PR introduced some of the new members who were in attendance.

1. **Apologies**

Mr Hedd Pugh	Mr Emlyn Roberts
Mrs Lesley Amison	Mr David Evans

2. **Declaration of Interest**

None

3. **Previous Minutes**

p7 PR mentioned two words were missing from a paragraph on p7 concerning the OS river boundary changes in Tonfannau. This should read to include the word `tidal limit` to avoid confusion. I.e. the extent of the river boundary was now lower down the river and where it met the new tidal limit.

Approved

4. **Matters Arising**

i) **SNPA Draft Recreation Strategy – Update**

PR mentioned that he had been in discussion with some specialist groups on some aspects of the activity statements within the document so hopefully there would not be

too many difficulties during the consultation. This was due before the Performance and Resources Committee this week. Following their recommendations this would then go for a 6-week formal consultation including the LAF members (although LAF members had already seen a draft and he had informally received some interesting comments from some.

The old document required many changes and to enable it to reflect the objectives within the Eryri Management Plan. There were many changes in the types of activities had occurred in recent years and he thought this new document more wide ranging.

EJW asked when the LAF first discussed access to water.

PR stated that was 2015. Although by arrangement the issues on the upper Conwy (Ysbyty Ifan - Padog – Rhydlanfair) were addressed in 2013 and continue to work well. This model used known access and egress points, some small infrastructure improvement works such as egress steps, adequate water level gauges and appropriate signage. It was unfortunate that this issue generally had been put on hold by WG and was not satisfactory.

At the time the NP commissioned a project to identify the 10 best canoe (existing) access/egress points within the NP. 9 were in the south area with only 1 in the north. Given the lack of guidance and legislation from WG then these were still on the shelf, but he was hopeful that using the NP model then some could be actioned in the future, but this would require discussions with landowners and other stakeholders. To dispel some myths canoeists did require unfettered access to enter all rivers and streams in spate at any point along their banks, this would be impracticable and unreasonable – they required formal use of existing access and egress points of entry.

To assist with this process the NP Forums had already recommended (during past consultations), and to ease difficulties, that landowners be afforded reduced liability for water features i.e. rivers, streams, canals, leats, spillways, weirs, abutments, fencing and stock similar to those for natural features under CRow for access land. He believed this was workable if the liability issue could be addressed.

EJW asked what the Fishing Associations view was on access to water.

PR stated that as riparian rights owners many were generally opposed to this activity but if agreements were agreed then some favoured seasonal constraints and licencing. However, adequate water levels may negate the seasonal issue in his view. The canoeing fraternity were not minded returning to the voluntary agreements on rivers. It was unfortunate that unless there was definite legislation then we have reached an impasse.

ii) p5 Barmouth Viaduct

PR announced that he had recently received the latest information from Network Rail concerning the proposed closures. They have confirmed that the viaduct will close on the 31st of August until the 24th November and then until 3rd of December. The end of August –

beginning of September was earlier than last year and may lead to more local difficulties. Alternative bus services would be in place.

EJW confirmed this situation – although the group had asked for some access over the half term in October NR had stated that this was not possible. It was also tied into the project they were undertaking on a section in Aberdovey. There was also some indication that they may also require a closure next year but that is unconfirmed.

Network Rail statement is below:

“To keep everyone safe we will need to close the footpath across the viaduct from Thursday 31 August to Friday 24 November. and also between 25th November to 3rd of December”.

He realised that this would be a great inconvenience to all concerned but unfortunately given the extent of the repairs required it was unavoidable. He also cautioned that some dates could change (as they did last year) but they would monitor the situation and the NP Wardens would erect advisory signage along the Mawddach Trail for users.

ii) Gwernan Lake Path – Update

AD reported that unfortunately one section, which was not either a PRoW or access land, was not being made available by a new landowner which meant that the route could not be used in its entirety. He was hopeful that something could be agreed.

PR added that if no agreement could be reached then this may not be reinstated other than sections which carried other statutory rights.

5. Correspondence

- i)** NRW Access Reform Advice – Briefing to end of 2022-23
- ii)** Countryside Code & Responsible Recreation Update

Both papers to be discussed together.

PR informed the members that they had recently received this document from the NRW which was largely self-explanatory and included an additional Dog Walking Code.

He was not sure how effective this was going to be. There was consensus across the sector that consistent national promotion of the Countryside Code material would be more effective in getting these messages out to the public – similar to the older Aardvark adverts¹ which covered issues such as dogs and litter which were successful.

It was also unfortunate that in recent days the Westminster Government had pulled out of the proposed Animal Welfare Act at committee stage. One of the themes included dogs worrying livestock and dogs on leads. It is uncertain what will now follow. Rob Taylor from the original Rural Crimes Teams had given evidence to this Committee and PR would ask him if he could update the members at the next meeting in September. RT

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MLHrBtLMTI>

statistics revealed that 80% of the animals involved in sheep worrying incidents were escapees from their dwellings and 70% of those involved Huskies or similar breeds.

PR added that all of this was frustrating given all the efforts that went into the Access Reform Groups (ARAG) workshops and nothing of any great use had emerged.

AE questioned how many successful prosecutions of dog owners failing to have their dogs “under effective control” had been brought following incidents of stock worrying. This was the definition for dogs on Public Rights of Way (PRoW). Given the numbers of cases then clearly this was not effective as a deterrent.

PR for information stated that the two pieces of legislation differed on dogs. On PRoW all dogs had to be under effective control at all times and on CRoW access land dogs were required to be on leads between 1st March and 31st July – for the protection of ground nesting birds and youngstock. The two differing rules for dogs were confusing which added to the problem.

He added that whilst on the Llanberis path lately he had noted that as many as one in four people or groups were accompanied by a dog. This was significant when that route was used by over 220,000 walkers a year and all the issues that brought.

AE added that it was a fact that by today recreational activities occurred within farming `workspace` and as such and attempting to reconcile this was difficult.

6. LAF Membership arrangements 2023-2026

He asked that if any member was interested in becoming Chair and Vice Chair then he would gratefully receive their self-nominations. Following this he would send CV's out to members for their information and they can then indicate their preferences before the next meeting. A reminder email will be sent shortly after the southern LAF in two weeks.

It was useful that when LAF were asked to respond to various consultations there was a joint subgroup – made up of the Chair and one or two LAF members who sat with their counterparts from the southern LAF and the adjacent Arfon Dwyfor LAF to enable joint and consistent responses. This process had worked well in the past and hopefully it could continue.

7. Propose Animal Welfare Act – Update

It was unfortunate but Westminster Government had decided to abandon this proposed Bill although there had been several rounds of committee stages. This was disappointing as there were elements within the proposals specifically for dog worrying. He was unsure what the Westminster Governments next steps were.

He recommend that we ask Rob Taylor (Ex Rural Crimes) who had given evidence to that Committee for his views and update on this and invite him to next meeting if he is able to attend.

Cllr DO commented that the abandonment of this proposed Bill was very disappointing given all work that had been put into this by so many particularly given the issues the farming community was facing with dogs and stock worrying occurring almost on a weekly basis. This view was also that of the farming Unions.

AE added that one of his sheep had been attacked recently and he too was disappointed that the Westminster Government had decided to abandon this. He was aware that the NRW was working on codes but added that any work by NRW psychologists on this issue would not make any difference in educating the public. Remainder censored.

PR commented that apart from the farming community, professional Officers from various sectors of work in the countryside across Wales and England were disappointed that this had been allowed to fall away.

Cllr DO recommend that we write to Liz S. Roberts to express our views on this.

PR recommended that we hear RT's view firstly and then consider writing to the MP following that.

Agreed

He would inquire with RT over his availability. Either for the September or December meetings.

HJ added that it was a fact that some 10 persons had been killed by dogs in 2022 and 5 so far this year which was a shocking statistic and showed a growing trend in aggressiveness in some breeds. In his view the law relating to dogs needed to be more robust and that the Public needed to fully understand the responsibility of having a dog particularly when out in the countryside.

8. Update of Warden Section - South NP Works Programme.

DPJ introduced himself as the senior Warden for the south area of the NP.

He showed some slides. Examples of work include surfacing and gating works on the Llwybr Cynwch – Precipice Walk. The mountain path pitching work continues on Mynydd Moel (adjacent to Cader Idris) and they were expecting to fly in more stone for the next sections.

There has been changes to some staffing – Bryn Davies has been appointed Warden for the Mawddach and coast. Simon Jones had also been recently appointed as the Llyn Tegid area Warden. They had also appointed seasonal staff until the end of September. Robin McNaught – seasonal for Llyn Tegid and Mark Williams seasonal for the Dolgellau area.

There was also now a group of Voluntary Wardens who would be walking the popular routes on a shift pattern. Hopefully they would prove to be a very useful asset for the Wardening Service.

They are also working closely with Gwynedd Council (GC) on replacing old furniture and particularly replacing stiles with gates where practicable.

Llyn Tegid has again been busy, but litter is a particular problem in all popular areas.

PR mentioned that a large group of people and vehicles and congregated for some weeks in the Llyn Cynwch area and had caused some trepidation as they had also used the car park.

GR stated that they were on his land and were on site for a month. Having said this there was no litter or waste left and they had completely cleaned the site before they left. They were certainly different to many other types of visitors they had experienced (they were known as the Rainbow Family UK) and were respectful of the environment.

It was believed that they moved site every year so hopefully they would not return to Dolgellau.

PR thanked DPJ for his update

9. Traws Ranges – NRW proposed extension to the formal Crow Act Section 25 Restriction

PR gave members a brief background to this issue.

The area concerned is approximately 350Ha of NRW woodland property and is located above Bronaber in the Trawsfynydd area. This area known as `the old Traws ranges` and had been used since 1906 and still contains a great deal of buried old munitions - some of which occasionally rise to the surface and are potentially in a dangerous condition. The site is fenced out and signed for public safety.

This particular site was denoted (and mapped) by mistake by the then CCW as CRow access land and to ensure public safety the site is subject to a CRow access Restriction and Exclusion order which has to be renewed every 5 years and ratified by the LAF as part of the consultation process. A rolling exclusion is the only mechanism that can be applied as once land is denoted as access land that is in perpetuity. Hence the need to renew the application by the landowner in this case the NRW.

AE commented that if new legislation may be in the pipeline then surely it would be a good idea to include mechanisms to deal with areas such as the this. i.e. to enable them to be taken off the access land maps if they presented a persistent danger to the public.

PR replied that AE had raised a very valid point and this issue had been mentioned during various discussions with the NRW and during the ARAG² meetings but this may mean changes to primary legislation. It did make sense that when a parcel of access land was a persistent danger to the public (apart from natural features) and couldn't be

² ARAG – Access Reform Groups and subsequent discussions.
<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-11/access-reform-advisory-group-final-advice-report.pdf>

dealt with by other means then mechanisms should be available to enable an access authority to formally apply for its removal.

He showed the area map and introduced WS to take us through this NRW application.

WS introduced himself as one of the NRW's Team Leaders. He was the Officer responsible for bringing this renewed application for a CROW Act Restriction to the LAF for consultation and thanked the LAF for the invitation to attend this evening. The current closure was coming to an end in August – Made under Section 21 of the CROW Act (as a danger to the public) and they are though it prudent to present the application this evening.

He informed the members that as part of the consultation process letters have also been sent to all the required consultees.

The new period of exclusion would be in place until 2028.

This was a formal process and hopefully the LAF would support this application.

AT mentioned that (in his past role at the Forestry Commission) that he had been present when some munitions had been found and destroyed and that the site was a continual problem, and a formal restriction was the only way to deal with this. Albeit no-one has ever been injured.

He thought there was two options i) to make the area available then all the munitions would have to be removed as vast expense and it was never a guarantee that all had been removed or ii) that the area is removed from the map as outlined earlier.

He was in agreement with AE comments that the CROW Act regulations concerning such areas did need to be reviewed and alternative mechanism in place for any that were a persistent danger to the public rather than applicant having to go through this long-winded process ever 5 years.

WS commented that it was prudent for the NRW to take the precautionary principle for this site rather than have it opened up without restrictions and take on this potential liability. Estimated costs for complete site clearance were in the region of considerable millions.

PR added that some 10 years ago the NP in conjunction with the LAF had instigated another nearby closure in the Waun Hir area for similar reasons. This site was cleared on two occasions by the MoD and then the restriction was lifted, and signage removed.

HJ stated that the boundary of the old ranges may vary and not be accurate.

PR stated that at the time they had received a map from Defence Estates which showed all the recorded bombing and target areas going a long way back. This seemed to be accurate, but it was known that some unknown munitions were also buried on the site.

AE stated that we should support the NRW application and keep it closed for a further 5 years.

He reminded members that there was a book written about such places – “Islands of Abandonment” which highlighted how nature can return when left alone.

PR asked the members to support this proposal by AE and seconded by EJW.

Agreed by show of hands to support the NRW CRoW restriction for another 5-year period. PR would record this in the minutes.

EJW asked if it was illegal to enter the site and remove items.

WS stated that it was illegal, and one person from the Midlands had been prosecuted.

PR thanked WS for presenting this item this evening.

GL asked if the MoD continued to monitor the area.

PR stated that this they did from time to time but if anything was found then that should not be handled and should be reported to the Police – they would then liaise with the MoD and subsequently call in Bomb Disposal.

10. Changes to the disabled toilets at Morfa Mawddach

Following some inquiries from DE regarding this provision. PR showed some slides of the new refurbished toilet block in Morfa Mawddach including the improved disabled accessibility. This block was also now to be open over the whole year rather than on a seasonal basis.

DE expressed his thanks for this work and the fact that it would be open year-round would be a great advantage to disabled and less abled people who used the car park.

EJW asked if tis was rolling programme across the NP and would Benar be included.

PR would inquire with the relevant Officer at the NP.

11. Recommended Agenda Items for next meeting

- i) Rob Taylor – update on the Animal Welfare committee – if available.
- ii) Update on the coastal path GC
- iii) Recreation Strategy – update
- iv) NRW Traws Eryri route.
- v) Dark Skies update if possible

12. Any other business

i) Cllr DO mentioned that there may be additional provisions for access as part of the new Sustainable Farm Schemes in 2025 which was a worry to landowners. This may open up additional problems for the future if this was the case.

AE added that none of this was clear at the moment, but WG had indicated that some form of legislation may be forthcoming, He thought their timeframe for any schemes may need extending if this was to be the case.

PR added that over 66% of the NP was already available as access land and it was difficult to see how and why more should be added when this had worked so well since 2003.

ii) *Cllr DO asked if GC intended to install QR information points along the All-Wales Coastal Path as there had been several inquiries at the TIC and he was led to believe that this was the intention.*

PR stated that he was not sure what the situation was regarding this but would inquire with the GC Coastal Officer.

iii) PR responded to an inquiry by AE and the condition of the Tonfannau bridge. There was rust on the handrail sections and was not looking as it should. He was led to believe that GC were working to resolve this.

From a recent site visit it was also evident that several memorial plaques had appeared on the entrance railings leading to the bridge. He would forward those pictures to GC. Memorials were a problem across the NP.

iv) *JPR asked if GC had now officially opened limited parking for motorhomes in the south of the NP and would this require planning consent as some landowners had asked the question. And were there charging points in any NP car parks.*

PR stated that he was not aware what the position was but would inquire both with GC and the Properties Department within the NP.

v) *DE asked if there had been any movement on the horse use issue on the Mawddach Trail.*

PR stated that there had been no movement since the initial discussions with those residents near the gate close to George III. Some were not supportive, and the reasons were not clear.

This was disappointing given that the NRW were keen to see a bridle link from the Mawddach Trail to Coed Y Garth. The management would be based on seasonal time restrictions similar to those for mountain cycles on Yr Wyddfa – Snowdon but with free access from September to March when the user numbers dropped off significantly on the MT – as identified by the visitor monitoring data. The safety rail work identified by the consultant has all been completed. They would continue to pursue this.

Most riders have indicated that they only requiring use of the route in the winter months. But a claim for a PRow (i.e. bridleway) may be an option for some riders to pursue if they felt strongly enough on this issue. The Mawddach currently has no official status as a RoW even though it is part of National Cycle Route 8. It is simply in the ownership of the NP but importantly not quite all – the track in front of the 4 properties near George III are privately owned and this is the sticking point.

Managing this along voluntary lines may be a better solution to a formal bridleway where no conditions could be applied if users decided not to co-operate.

EJW asked what the relationship was between the NP and George III.

PR stated that they had an agreement in place with Robinsons Brewery and the relationship was very positive.

JH asked if there was any timetable for this.

PR stated that there was not, but they continued to explore the options but having certain workable conditions was a sensible compromise.

JPR asked if shared use was an issue.

PR stated that all bridleways are shared use by default and occurred across the network in Wales and England.

vi) HJ asked if the Bala Triathlon was still going ahead.

DPJ confirmed that this was still going ahead in September.

vii) PR announced that he had now a final copy of the 8 Dinas Mawddwy promoted routes created by Cwmni Nod Glas – with a significant contribution by both GC and the NP. If the next meeting could be arranged in Dinas Mawddwy then it may be an idea to begin slightly earlier to enable members to walk a part of one of the routes if they so wished.

The routes were designed to begin and finish in the village and one per day can be achieved – this was a significant attraction for walkers visiting the area.

Would the members support a link to our NP website for these.

Agreed

DPJ mentioned that the NP have been asked to monitor these routes and that this could be done by the voluntary Wardens.

JPR added that the intention was to have QR code information points along all routes which would make a visit more interesting for walkers and an opportunity for people to learn more about the area including its history, land management, language and culture and biodiversity.

viii) GR asked what the situation was regarding Tomen Y Mur in Trawsfynydd. It was apparent that the parking ground had been now blocked and access to the site was now difficult.

PR stated that there was currently no agreement in place for the site for various reasons and he could not comment further other than to say they and CADW were keen to see it reinstated.

13. Date of Next Meeting - 19th September 2023
Dinas Mawddwy.

PR thanked all for their attendance and contributions this evening.