

**Minutes of the South Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Tuesday 19th September at 5.45 p.m
At Red Lion, Dinas Mawddwy**

Present – Members:	Mr Aled Thomas	Clr Dewi Owen
	Mr Hedd Pugh	Cllr John Pughe Roberts
	Mr Huw Roberts	Mr Alun Evans
	Mr David Coleman	Mr Delwyn Evans
	Mrs Janette Holmes	Mrs Gaynor Davies
	Mr Tim Faire	Mr Rhodri P Jones

PR announced that this was the beginning of the new three-year term of office for this LAF membership. The Chair had been duly elected and this was Mr H Pugh, and he would now hand over proceedings to HP.

HP thanked the members for their continued support. He announced that a Vice Chair was required and asked if anyone wished to nominate themselves this evening.

HP added that previously they had always had a Vice Chair from the user group if the chair was from the landowner sector but that this helped to lend balance to the LAF. ON occasion the Vice Chair may be called upon to attend any meetings such as the annual LAF Chairs Conference or National Access Forum if the Chair was unable to attend.

Mr Delwyn Evans was elected as Vice Chair

HP asked for round table introductions.

Officers / Observers:	Peter Rutherford (SNPA)	David P Jones (SNPA)
	Rhian P Williams (SNPA)	

1. Apologies	Mr Emlyn Roberts	Mr Alun Edwards
	Mrs Lesley Amison	Mr Geraint Rowlands
	Cllr Eryl Jones Williams	

2. Declaration of Interest

None

3. Previous Minutes

- i) p5 DPJ mentioned that the Wardens names mentioned were incorrect they should read Robat Bryn Davies, Gwenno Williams and not Mark Williams.
PR apologised for that oversight and would amend the minutes accordingly*

Approved

4. Matters Arising

i) SNPA Draft Recreation Strategy – Update

PR stated that this final version was now going to Management Team with all the changes recommended by the Performance and Resources Committee and many other informal stakeholder discussions including LAF members informal feedback which had been very useful. Once this was approved it can then go out to the LAF members and other formal stakeholders for any observations and hopefully to launch in January 2024. Although closely aligned to the Management Plan the second half of the document contained separate activity statements rather than being filled with bland collective text.

Some of the more recent changes included the use of motorhomes as a form of passive recreation, wild camping and changes to some names and statistics following the 2022 figures. *Cader Idris in particular had seen a substantial increase in numbers and was now in the region of 75,000.* He had also been discussing the cycling content with Cycling UK.

TJ commented that he thought that the wild camping issue should be included in the Strategy then at least it would enable the NP to convey the right messages to those that do have consent and make the distinction between fly camping and the ethos of true wild camping. I.e. leave trace and low impact.

PR commented that the wild camping information on the NP website had been removed temporarily following Covid due to the problems that fly camping had caused. This information was now back on their website.

HP asked what was now in the document regarding wild camping.

PR added that following a discussion at the Authorities Performance & Resources Committee members had suggested that Wild Camping be inserted into the document and to the related to the Code of Conduct for this activity. This would include the fact that consent was required from landowners. This information had been removed from the NP website during Covid but had since been put back up. Most true practitioners understood the philosophy of true wild camping – leave no trace but unfortunately post Covid activities practised by some people was not wild camping but `fly camping` which had brought many difficulties such as littering, other waste, open fires and congested and overnight parking.

JPR commented that this was a specific issue alongside lakes and asked if this was still an issue.

DPJ replied that it was still an issue in some hot spots such as Llyn Tegid. And with many leaving tents, rubbish, and all manner of other things rather than take them away.

PR added that the committee had recommended that we insert Campervans and Motorhomes into the Recreation Strategy as they considered that this activity was `passive recreation`.

Once this was approved by Management Team he would be circulating this to members for additional comments as part of the consultation process.

ii) Letter to Leslie Griffiths AM – CroW Act Long term restriction

PR explained that this letter was sent following the situation that continues to arise with a rolling 5-year Exclusion and Restriction (under the CRoW Act) on NRW land within the Traws Ranges area.

The NRW as landowners were obliged to return to the LAF with a new application for these restrictions every five years for approval as the land in question remained a danger to the public due to the munitions that surfaced from time to time. Unfortunately there was no mechanisms within the CRoW Act which allowed the removal of any access land even when it was a danger to the public *ad infinitum* and this situation non sensical.

The reason for the letter to the Minister was to highlight this anomaly within the Act. It was understood that this would require changes to primary legislation but that the WG should consider this problem if the legislation was reviewed (if they were empowered to do so).

PR stated that at the time he didn't remember a response but would look at this again. If necessary we would write once more to highlight this issue. He would also consult the NRW on this.

iii) PR had asked if Rob Taylor could attend the SLAF to update them on the Animal Welfare Bill – which included aspects relating to dogs but was not available for the December meeting. He would try to arrange this for next March. It was unfortunate that this Bill has since been abandoned which was disappointing. However having RT giving his views on this would be enlightening for the LAF members.

TF announced that the original proposed Bill had been abandoned by Westminster Government but that another MP had sponsored this once again – Bet Lake Plaid Cymru had agreed to forward this especially the dogs and livestock issue.

PR would inquire further on this. He was unsure if Codes of Conduct for dogs currently under review by the NRW, were the way forward as they did not include legal sanction and possibly this was the only way to get these messages out to the public.

Cllr DO asked what the NP was doing to assist with managing this problem and get these messages out to the public. He thought that there was not enough signage out especially in access land where there is a considerable amount of people on land with stock grazing.

PR explained, for the benefit of new members, that in relation to dogs there were differences between the two pieces of legislation. Under the CRoW Act i.e. for open access land dogs were required to be on a 2m lead between 1st March and 31st July to protect ground nesting birds and young livestock such as lambs. On Public Rights of Way dogs were only required to be under close control at all times.

The NP view on this has always been that dogs should be at all times on a lead in the `vicinity of livestock` regardless of being on a PRow or within CRow access land. The Wardens service were active in giving landowner dog signs when requested and the NP`s social media platforms and website also carried this information. The phrase `in the vicinity of livestock` was now more widely used by others which was useful and was less confusing to the public.

Cllr DO added that some of these dogs were also dangerous to people given some recent news. He was not hopeful that the Bill would come back to Parliament in the near future so we could expect more issues unless there were improved legal sanctions to prevent this.

PR added that according to the statistics relating to dog attacks on stock – RT (based on 880 cases) indicated that some 80% of dogs had escaped from their homes and 70% of those breeds were Huskies. This left only 20% of the dogs attacking stock whilst out and about with their owners. These were interesting statistics.

HR added that the issue of dog waste was also problematic when people did not dispose of it properly.

5. Correspondence

None

6. CRow Access Land liability for events

For information this issue had been raised in the NLAF and PR thought that the SLAF members may wish to hear the results of those discussions.

A member had raised a very interesting question at the last meeting. Principally did landowners lose their rights and protection for natural features afforded under the CRow Act when charging people a fee for use of access land for activities outside of the scheduled list of allowable activities on access land. Since that time PR had some communication with the NRW Officers and their legal advisors. The opinion was that if landowners made a charge (i.e. a contract) then they would lose their protection afforded by the CRow Act. This would then fall back to their responsibility under Occupiers Liability.

It was important to make the distinction that use of any Rights of Way was by right and would remain unaffected this only applied to CRow access land.

HP mentioned the issue that AT has raised this some time ago for his own forest block.

AT mentioned that since that time it was his understanding that you were protected by the CRow Act (if denoted as access land or dedicated as such) for anything natural unless this had been modified. He was of the opinion that this would not be sure until tested through case law.

PR continued and stated that this issue had arisen as some landowners in the north had charged some events organisers a small fee for using their access land. The question was then did the landowners then lose their protection under the CRow Act for natural features. The NRW conclusion was that if charges were applied then a landowner would lose their protection and this fall back to their Occupiers liability.

Cllr JPR mentioned that the CRow Act specifically excluded any form of charging regime for access. But that events were not technically allowed without consent under the Act.

PR confirmed this.

AT asked where this had come from as he thought this could be a potentially a minefield.

PR mentioned that a landowner had approached him for advice.

RPJ asked what the position was regarding stiles and gates – was the landowner responsible.

PR confirmed that landowners were responsible for furniture and that should be kept in good order. He further explained that there was no longer a British Standard for ladder stiles and that given the Disabilities Discrimination Act (DDA) and the subsequent Equality Act (EA) it was not possible to justify a stile when a gate would suffice if the terrain was flat or slightly undulating.

This was also in keeping with the *Miles Without Stiles* philosophy and least restrictive options adopted by all UK National Parks which ensured continuity across all the designated areas of the UK. This was also the stance taken by many Highways Authorities including Gwynedd Council and they no longer supplied stiles only gates. He accepted that in some locations such as high mountains and poor terrain then a stile would be acceptable, but this was assessed on a case-by-case basis.

7. Update on All Wales Coastal Path

RR was unable to present this this evening due to a clash of meetings and had sent apologies.

PR reported that he was aware that some scheme was forthcoming to deal with the painting on the Tonfannau bridge.

He had also reported to Gwynedd the fact that memorial plaques had begun to appear on the bridge parapets. This was a problem across the NP and the stance was not to allow them. People should consider alternative s such as planting a tree or donate to a charitable organisation.

8. Update on South Wardens work programme

DPJ reported on the following work.

- i) Work continued on the pitching works on Mynydd Moel but there had been delays due to the lack of helicopter time and weather constraints.
- ii) They were working on a joint project with the NRW on the route through Bwlch Drws Ardudwy – Llwybr Crigle – this is to address some erosion issues.
- iii) Work is also planned on Bwch Tyddiad (between Rhinog Fawr a Chraig Wion)

Cllr JPR mentioned that he was aware that some damage was caused by tree felling in the area and the NRW should be responsible for this

DPJ confirmed that this was the case, but they will try to assist where they could.

- iv) There had been changes to some furniture in the area replacing stiles with gates wherever possible. Some stiles had been replaced like for like but only where there was no alternative, and the terrain was mountainous – typically with the Rhinogydd.
- v) In terms of visitors they had sensed that it had been slightly less busy this year, but the half term proved to be testing once again due to good weather especially Llyn Tegid.
- vi) Works had been completed on Waun Camddwr (under the SMS) project which involved a part boardwalk and some surfacing works.

HP mentioned that it was his understanding that some parts had recently been underwater.

DPJ commented that they would monitor this as this was an experiment using sheep's wool as a base.

HP declared an interest as this was on their property, but it was important that this solution worked.

- vii) *The voluntary Wardens had been occupied giving advice to walkers in areas such as Cader Idris and also bringing down litter and he appreciated all their efforts.*

Cllr DO asked if there was any news regarding the Unclassified Road (UCR) from Rhyd Yr Onnen to Cwrt. It was his understanding that GC had been served with a notice as they have a duty to maintain and will need to rectify its condition and that works were planned but that would be costly. Some 4 x 4 were still attempting to use this even though it was closed temporarily, and two vehicles had become stuck recently.

PR (though the Chair) mentioned that prior to Covid they had arranged a heli lift and materials with monies raised by the Off-Road Community (GLASS) for repairs to this section. Unfortunately this has not been carried out due to local difficulties and this was a cause of considerable consternation. Hence the current situation and this had now dragged on for 4 years. They had also negotiated with the off roaders a one-way system and signage running from Rhyd Yr Onnen to the Cwrt end which had helped in stopping groups trying to pass each other and widening an already badly damaged route. This was also advertised on their social media platforms; however, some users still chose to ignore what is a more responsible approach.

He would inquire with GC what the situation was thus far and report back.

AE mentioned that there were some now leaving the road to get past the difficulties and causing more damage alongside it. It is also difficult for landowners to access their land given its condition and had to use a quad then walk a long distance.

The improvements to the Llyn Barfog route had taken some users off this route which had helped but it still remained a serious issue.

Cllr DO mentioned that there may be an attempt to close this route.

PR stated that that would be far from easy as it was an Unclassified Road in law and would be subject a great deal of objection and no doubt would fail.

HR asked if PR could keep a watching brief on this and report back

9. Eryri Guide for campervan and motorhome users.

PR stated that that the Performance & Resources Committee has asked him to put this into the Recreation Strategy as it was deemed to be a form of `passive recreation`. He circulated the NP`s Motorhome and Campervan pamphlet. This contained contact information on available for sites across the NP with a map.

GD stated that there were some sites missing from this listing. And there were gaps in the provision such as Llanbedr or Tywyn.

DPJ added that he had sent some additional information to add to the list. The situation was not helped by the various social media sites which actively promoted roadside parking in some inappropriate places where no facilities exist.

PR commented that if people thought there were some missing then would they please let him know so that the information could be amended.

Cllr JPR added that the NP were reviewing this policy and certainly activities relating to Campervans and Motorhomes had expanded greatly in recent years and the older policies require updating.

RPJ asked who was responsible for any enforcement and did the NP have any powers to move people on.

PR stated that the NP had no powers for enforcement this is for GC as the Highways Authority to move people along if necessary. But they did convey as much information as possible relating to sites and that was important.

AE mentioned that it was his understanding that GC were considering some formal sites `Aires`.

PR stated that he thought they were considering about 5 sites across the county.

HP added that he thought that these were planned for Llanberis, Caernarfon, Porthmadog, Bangor and Pwllheli.

PR would ask GC what their plans were.

HP asked if the NP could do more to assist.

PR asked if the LAF would continue to support them in their dissemination of this information and the promotion of good practice.

10. Recommended Agenda Items for next meeting

- i) Taith Traws Eryri Way – Cycling UK – presentation
- ii) An update on RoW furniture from PR
- vi) Angela Jones – update on Aires etc
- vii) Organised events presentation

11. Any other business

i) Cllr DO mentioned that the new bridge was now open at Picnic Island – Aberdyfi therefore was it now possible to take another look at the roadside access between the Outward Bound and the bridge. The LAF have viewed this in the past.

PR stated that he would make inquiries with GC about this issue with a view to have a site visit in the spring. Network Rail did offer the land on the other side of the wall, but this consisted largely of drops and poor ground. But it was worth revisiting this.

ii) Cllr DO asked what the situation was regarding events in the NP as it appeared that on occasion some were not known about.

PR stated that whilst most professional organisers liaised with the NP (but were not duty bound to do so) there were some – usually smaller groups who did not. Most were well organised and understood what the NP and others expected. The information they required were dates, number of participants, routing, parking, signage, and post event management. A great deal of this information was contained within the NP's Events Guidelines. On occasion there were issues particularly left over signage which he always discussed with organisers if this was the case or if there had been other issues such as gates left open.

For the Llanberis and Snowdon area there was a joint data base they shared with GC where events were asked to register online This worked well but it was down to the organisations to ensure that they did not clash with others and worked together to resolve any issues well beforehand.

Cllr DO mentioned that there had been a cycling event that had taken place recently using the coastal path and there was potential for clashes with pedestrians

AE mentioned that the Llyn Barfog section of the coastal path was also used recently.

PR was unaware of that particular cycling event but would inquire thus it was important that we know about these things so as to get the messages out in advance. *This is very time-consuming exercise for him. Cycles are only allowed legally to use bridleways and not footpaths – little of the coastal path had bridleway status.*

HP added that possibly some events that occurred in the south of the NP and that some may not even realise they are in the NP.

PR would give a small presentation on events at the next meeting.

iii) Cllr JPR asked what the latest was for the Barmouth Viaduct closures.

PR stated that according to NR the bridge was closed from the 2nd Sept – 24th Nov. then afterward again. 25th – 3rd December. So there was two closures which were tied together which did not make sense to anyone. So this appeared to one long closure and not two. Last year was problematic as dates changed the information on the Mawddach had to be changed frequently. There is also the possibility of works in 2024.

iv)HJ stated that this year's Bala Triathlon had been successful and went well.

RPJ mentioned that there were some minor issues with parking in the Llangywer area otherwise it went well.

v) JH asked if there was any updates on equine access on the Mawddach.

PR announced that although this had stalled currently it was still on their agenda.

vi) HP announced that there would be a LAF Chairs meeting in Builth on the 4th October which he would try to attend..

12. Date of Next Meeting - 12th December 2023

HP thanked all for their attendance and contribution this evening.