

**Minutes of the Northern Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Monday 14th Octobert at 5.45p.m
at Pen y Pass Warden Centre, Llanberis**

Present - Members:

Mr Edwin Noble	Mr Dafydd Gwyndaf
Mr David Firth	Mr John Gladston
Mr Mark Jones	Mr Robin Parry
Mrs Fiona Davies	Mr Paul Williams
Mr Richard Williams	Mr Tim Jones
Mr Arthur Davies	Mr Dafydd P Jones

Officers / Speakers:

Peter Rutherford (ENPA)	Bethan W Jones (ENPA)
Adam Daniel (ENPA)	Rhian P Williams(ENPA)
Rhydian Roberts (ENPA)	Rhys G Roberts (CG)

EN welcomed all members and Officers/speakers to the meeting this evening.

1 Apologies – Maggie Barrie.

PR explained that we had lost two LAF members from within the user groups and asked if members had any recommendations for substitutes. It would be useful to get someone from the paddling/canoeing (and access to water) fraternity and someone from the Outdoor Partnership.

Members recommend Pete Catterall – canoeing and Ailish Roberts – Outdoor Partnership.

PR would contact them to ask if they would like to become members or they may recommend someone else from their sector. He explained that members could be co-opted if required. Any membership would need to be ratified by the Authority.

2. Previous Minutes

Approved

3. Matters arising

None

4. Correspondence

i) Letter received from local group based in Rhyd concerning access into the National Park's property at Plan Tan Y Bwlch. **See item 6**

5 Update of the All Wales Coastal Path (Gwynedd)

RR explained that he was the All Wales Coastal Path Officer and he was responsible for the Gwynedd section. The route runs from Chepstow to Flintshire. The whole path length is divided into 5 sections with the Gwynedd section being the longest at 180 miles (this is longer than Offa's Dyke National Trail). Within Gwynedd this stretched from Machynlleth to Aberdovey and up and around the coast round the LLyn Peninsula and onwards towards and ends in Llanfairfechan where it borders the next section running along the coast within Conwy.

AWCP works are financed by WG via Natural Resources Wales (NRW) who administer the budget allocation through approved work plans.

He had been the Coastal Path Officer since 2003 and they had faced many challenges since that time and they had been tasked by WG to complete this by 2012 to coincide with the Olympics and Golden Jubilee. Given the amount of work required this was challenging. Whilst most sections were complete there are still lengths that required reconciling as some were not strictly coastal in nature and this required dialogue with landowners. They were currently looking at the Dinas Dinlle to Trefor area as this section currently followed the A road which was not strictly coastal.

They had created 21 miles of new Public Rights of Way and also completed various upgrades and improvement to many miles of other existing Public Rights of Way.

The route also required constant maintenance and now at 2024 renewal of furniture such as gates, fencing or stiles was required and this was not an easy task.

He showed various examples of improvements where furniture had been upgraded to modern standards. Changing furniture always required discussion with landowners – typically when stiles were replaced with gates or kissing gates to make the route more amenable to less abled users. New sections of path were undertaken by using provisions of the Highways Act – Sect 25. In his experience most landowners were positive about the route. Discussions in the Port Penrhyn area had taken a great deal of discussion and substantial site work up to this year which saw its completion and the new section had recently opened for public use. This section also required additional work such additional screening to avoid disturbance to the high density of wintering bird populations on the adjacent Traeth Laffan site.

He showed slides of the installation of the new bridge at Tonfannau which was a significant development on the route west of Tywyn.

The project was facing some major threats such as coastal erosion and sea level rises. Winter storms always gave rise to the loss of paths where they had succumbed to collapsed cliffs and coastal erosion.

The whole route has also been 'Google trekked' and is available online similar to a 'street view' format.

In terms of finance for the 2024 -2025 budget is in the region of £90k with £52k allocated for basic cutting and strimming.

They were also piloting some additional biodiversity corridors and WG plan to expand this successful work.

In terms of marketing the team at the NRW is responsible for this aspect and were working closely with local businesses on this aspect. There were various estimates on how much this route contributed to the local and national economies.
ED asked if members had any questions.

MJ asked if there were plans to develop linear back and forth sustainable transport routes.

RR replied that there was some information about route planning and transport of the NRW website. However by its very nature and locations the route was frequently not available by public transport. There had been a phone a bus initiative in Pen Llyn but unfortunately this provision was very limited and people had to plan ahead to whenever possible.

PW commented that if the current budget is allocated from WG by the NRW then was there a danger that this may eventually fall to the Local Authorities. And was it the Local Authority who had statutory responsibilities for PRow.

RR stated that as it was this was ringfenced but it was difficult to foresee how this was to play out in the future especially if the NRW was under financial pressure to fund it directly from within their internal budget. It was correct that Local Authorities (in their case Gwynedd) have statutory responsibility for all PRow within their respective counties.

PR commented - through the Chair, that the budget issue had been raised by the LAFs at the onset of this project and that this would not only require a development budget but also a budget for its long term maintenance and that this should not be a burden on the local authorities or local ratepayers when this was a part of a national asset.

MJ asked how many miles were available for wheelchair use.

RR stated that given that much of the route was severely constrained by the terrain then by default only a limited lengths were available for disabled users but they were looking at some shorter sections and links where there may be potential to expand this provision.

PR commented that when the recent review had been commissioned by Hugh Iranca Davies AM part of the LAF members response (by the joint LAF subgroup) at the time and one of the suggestions was that provision for all ability sections should be explored.

RR further explained that they had also installed 12 counters along the route to give them a greater understanding of usage.

RP stated that if figures were substantial then surely adequate budget should follow.

RR commented that would be the ideal but as with all public finances this was not guaranteed. This was more difficult when a lot of its furniture was now at least 10 years old and required replacement. They were also facing a shortage of sheep to graze parts of the coastal path which was disappointing and subsequently then became more costly to maintain.

JG commented that it may be difficult for younger wheelchair users to use the new Penrhyn section.

RR stated that they have done the best job that they could under the circumstances and it did prove to be very difficult terrain but it would always be under review as any part of the path.

GJ asked if the sections of the AWCP across Wales had adopted the same standards in terms of furniture or was this down to the local authority to decide.

RR confirmed that the standards were consistently applied across Wales set by the NRW which were compliant with the latest British Standards.

EN thanked RR for his time and update on the AWCP.

6. Discussion regarding item4i - Access to the woodland and Llyn Mair near Plas Tany Bwlch

PR explained that the original sale of the NP property at Plan Tan Y Bwlch included Llyn Mair and the surrounding PTyB woodland. These areas were highly popular with both local users and visitors alike and those groups wished to express their concerns about the potential loss of public amenity if those areas, currently within NP ownership, may be lost under new ownership and they wished to bring the matter to the attention of the LAF members. They had also written to the Authority.

It was important to consider that the area had no Public Rights of Way and was not CRoW access land. Access had been allowed on a *de facto* basis. I.e. allowed through permission but not by any legal right.

PR further explained that since that time he had been asked to review the access provision and they were asked to explore the potential for dedicating parts of the woodland and lake to ensure public access.

TJ added some background to the issues at PTyB. The site is losing substantial amounts of money each year and also that questions were asked as to where PTyB sat within the NP's statutory purposes. And why this was still a part of our property portfolio.

After reviewing the various options the Authority had decided to place PTyB on the open market. Some estimates for upgrading and maintain the buildings were in the region of £3m. BUT there has been considerable interest in the site.

He acknowledged that this conversation is ongoing and will again be discussed by the November next and they will also discuss the access provisions within the woodland and lake and the group would then make recommendations to the Authority.

The Authority fully appreciates the concerns expressed by various groups and individuals and that these will be taken into account but at the end of the day this was a matter of public finances.

It was also mentioned that PTyB also played a major part in the regional slate industry which could not be ignored.

AD confirmed that plans for the sale went back to February but the Authority will consider what can be done in terms of access. He confirmed that the existing network was made up of many permissive routes and many extended beyond PTyB land holding and were (and had been) provided by a variety of landowners.

TJ added that here would be an opportunity for people to have their say on the access provisions in the coming weeks.

EN commented that it was PTyB that was losing monies and not the woodland or the lake per se.

MJ added that there were many people who were rightly concerned over this issue. Potentially losing this as a public resource would be highly unpopular.

TJ added that they were looking at all the options in terms of the access provision which may be a mixture of things – access land and some PRow.

DF commented that this land was vital access to all the local communities and this must not be lost. This stretches from Beddgelert to Trawsfynydd and Porthmadog. This site is also popular with walking tourists from the Ffestiniog Railway or by car.

It is disappointing that the original ethos of PTyB and its role in environmental education will be lost.

JG asked if Plas was originally a study centre.

TJ confirmed that this was its original role and he himself had attended PTyB, but markets had changed and way such educational resources were utilised. They had applied various models to Plas which unfortunately had not been successful which resulted in its gradual decline.

They would seeking wider views on the access provisions and they would ask for this online.

MJ commented that if this was online only many people would miss the opportunity to make their views know and advised that to get relevant input the Authority should consider a more direct method to engage with stakeholders.

TJ appreciate this point and they would liaise with the NP's engagement team as to how best to undertake this exercise

EN added that it may also be option for the LAF to write to the Authority to express their views regarding the PTyB access issues. Either by a subgroup or a general letter from both LAF Chairs.

TJ commented that the Authority was aware of the issues and that they would endeavour to keep as much public access as possible.

DF commented that it was important that the LAF members views were given on such an important access issue. Part of the LAF's role was to increase public access and they should, make their views known to the Authority and the risk that this posed to that provision.

EN asked if PR could draft a letter on their behalf.

Agreed

PR stated that he would do this and also that it was on the agenda for the southern LAF (if they agreed) as well so it could go from both LAF's to the Authority.

7 Presentation on Eryri's Tree and Woodland Strategy.

Rhydian Roberts introduced himself as the NP's Tree Officer and it was his responsibility to deliver this strategy. This also fell under the Eryri Management Plan.

The process had been long which began in 2022 and included consultation period with the farming unions, the National Trust, landowners, Natural Resources Wales, Crown Estates, commercial woodland managers and other stakeholders. Some work had already been done of the carbon bank element within the NP. Following various research it was found that some between 15% as woodland and up to 19.6% with hedgerows of the NP had tree cover which is significant. With 50% of that value being coniferous (plantations etc) and 50% being broadleaf.

The WG's Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) had complicated this process *which had not been received well and had since been postponed and may be modified*. He confirmed that there was no correlation between the WG SFS woodland proposals were and what they were trying to achieve in the NP's strategy.

This document was dynamic and would be reviewed on a regular basis. One relevant section of the Strategy is related to health and wellbeing and they recognise the value of woodlands as having an essential role to play as part of this agenda. This through the use of permissive or public access within woodlands – *including PTyB. They did recognise the importance of this woodland as a recreational resource and also in terms of its value as a carbon bank.*

PR conformed that one of the options put forward was to dedicate the woodland and lake as access land but may require other access provision as well. Once the next internal group met then they would discuss this detail. He had written an options paper for the group and Authority.

RR continued and stated that the Strategy would also affect how they responded to Planning issues in terms of trees. Apart from our own woodlands – which are few in number, Officers are also ready to assist landowners with any decisions that they chose to make in terms of tree management and tree planting.

The Strategy also included the management and targeting of grant aid towards dealing with invasive species such as Rhododendron Ponticum and others. He added that trees are not simply a rural issue there were many within urban environments which are equally important and of value to local communities. *PW commented that it was important to assess what we had within the NP in terms of tree cover however, he questioned i) why this exercise had been undertaken and ii) were hedgerows included within this equation.*

RR replied that they thought it important to have some form of base line assessment of the tree cover within the NP as this had not been done in the past and the surveys had revealed some interesting statistics. This was also important in terms of assessing its carbon storage capacity. He confirmed that this had included hedgerows in their assessment.

PW added that this raised the question as to who owned that carbon bank if those trees were on private land. To him it was clearly the landowner and if so how can that be used to offset someone else carbon emissions.

RR commented that he fully appreciated this but it was important to get an assessment on what the NP's capacity was regardless of ownership.

DG mentioned that if planting or natural regeneration of tree cover within ffriddoedd was an important issue. Ffriddoedd were important grazing areas and the reduction by tree planting of this type of land has the capacity to accelerate the depopulation of the agricultural communities and all that came with this i.e. loss of community, language and culture. Unfortunately, in his area this process had begun when the National Trust acquired more land and were planting more trees in areas which were no longer grazed.

RR replied that he fully appreciated DG's point but they were not advocating the complete planting of such areas but highlighting the fact that it was possible in some places to enhance existing woodland populations.

TJ commented that the Authority's position on our language and culture was clear and that these issues were always a material consideration in any of its deliberations and decision making.

DJ asked if there were any figures as to how many trees had been planted in recent years.

RR stated that they did not have this data but following the assessment they did conclude that within 25% of the area there was scope for more tree planting.

PW asked why a figure was required at all.

RR replied that a baseline of some sort was required as a starting point for discussion in the future. It would always be up to landowners and other stakeholders to decide what and where. The figures were a baseline that everyone would understand regardless of their position on trees.

DJ added that there was a danger that once this process started then it may snowball into something a great deal larger.

AD added that there was some discussion about the carbon element of grazing land.

PR asked what was within the document regarding access.

RR stated that they had highlighted the importance of woodlands for the health and well being agenda and many had Rights of Way within our own woodlands but it was a positive and not a negative.

EN thanked RR for his presentation

8. Warden Section update on the latest work programme. – Bethan W Jones

BWJ mentioned that the section had been very busy across the year with various works across the north – such as footpath work including the Conwy area of the NP, Lon Gwyrfai, and many upland paths.

The additional wall at Bwlch y Moch is also complete – the idea being that to access the Crib Coch route specifically walkers now had to make a conscious

decision to turn and navigate their way up and through the gap in the wall. And also curtail people following on behind others by mistake. This was an idea that was discussed by the LAF in recent years.

PR added that there may also be a need now to move the standing pillar (again) to suit the new arrangements to become clearer on their direction of travel up as well as down.

MJ asked if it was possible to get figures from the Mountain Rescue Teams to assess its impact in terms of call outs and accidents.

BWJ stated that this had only recently and it was too early to tell and that it would be difficult until the end of next season to out any values on this.

PR added that the current use of the route – which was fairly consistent, was in the region of 20,000 per annum according to their counter data.

BWJ reported that there had been a landslide on the Miners track which would have to be repaired which involved significant costs and that work was being planned but would require a heli lift.

The interpretation van had been out several times manned by staff and volunteers at different times. This was placed at various locations and there had been a great deal of interest from the public and feedback had been very positive.

Volunteer Wardens had also been involved with litter picks of their own as well as Caru Eryri volunteers with over 900kg collected which was a significant amount (again this was disappointing). This issue continued to frustrate the NP and the public and they continue to strive to get those messages out at every opportunity.

Other issues are dogs off leads, organic litter waste and fly camping.

MJ asked if the plastics free initiative was moving forward.

BWJ stated that this was now an item which will become a permanent fixture within our messaging. The COPA 1 event had been very successful.

PR mentioned that he and our Plastics Free Officer were already in dialogue with events organisers and had set a challenge to them in the future about events attempting to become plastic free.

BWJ mentioned that the section had now adopted a new CAMS system for the Rights of Way system within the NP. This was now a similar system to that used by Gwynedd Council so that data could be read and shared between organisations. There was also provision for a complaints portal which was useful albeit the old system had this facility – it may be easier for the public to report issues which we can now share with GC.

PR added that this CAMS system was one that was used by many local authorities across the UK but sharing data directly was an important element.

BWJ recommended that the LAF members may find it useful for the Officer managing this to give a short presentation at the next meeting to give members a better understanding on this.

PR stated that he would liaise with the Officer concerned and the Chair.

BWJ mentioned that the new fencing on the Rhyd Ddu zig zags had been vandalised recently and this was disappointing given how much work had been undertaken to complete this work. It was grossly irresponsible to interfere with a fence that was in place as a safety feature.

AD added this had only happened recently and that the fence was a new and simply to replace like for like. The strainer wire and stock fencing had been cut in various places. This was all the more disappointing as this had been a costly job in a difficult location where access and materials had to be flown.

MJ asked if some form of security measures could be considered if it happened again – there were stand-alone cameras available.

AD confirmed that they had discussed options with their North Wales Police – NP liaison Officer and they were considering options to monitor this.

He confirmed that the Bwlch y Moch issue was complete but that they may well consider another lower wall but they would look into this and return to the members.

PR added that they had experienced from time to time problems with vandalism on the path and in the Rhyd Ddu area generally and the authorities were aware of this.

EN thanked BWJ for her time and update this evening.

9. Coed Victoria – Llanberis ddiweddaraf – update

PR stated that he had been in dialogue with three landowners regarding these Public Rights of Way which run through the Coed Victoria woodland and are not easily accessible and are subject to complaints.

If they could reconcile these routes then they may have alternatives for nighttime walking and events to avoid difficulties in Victoria Terrace and they could use this route as an alternative and avoid Victoria Terrace. There were no plans to move anything other than to provide this alternative and it would still be people's choice. And the Llanberis route would always remain as the main route.

The NP, in conjunction with GC, had agreed that improvements to the existing route/s, which are situated across the road from the Victoria Hotel, should be made.

With assistance from the NP clear felling of the conifers had (inadvertently) made the site more accessible and had exposed the original route – based on the original PRow. However, part of the existing PRow needed to be moved slightly to create a better line underfoot but is workable. Although this may prove costly it would be worthwhile in the long term.

TJ asked if the access to the routes was convenient and safe.

PR replied that on the north side of the road – adjacent to the Victoria Hotel car park had a pavement and that there was a significant verge on the south side. If this was given the go ahead then they would discuss this aspect with GC.

Redirecting events to this area in particular would avoid significant disturbance from nighttime activities particularly from noise and lights.

RP commented that this would be very advantageous for the local community but would need to be advertised once completed.

PR stated that the NP would embark on some considerable information drive for events organisers once this was complete.

He would report back in the LAF members when a modified map was available and there was the potential for a site visit.

**10. Eitemau argymhellir ar gyfer y cyfarfod nesaf
Recommended Agenda items of next meeting**

- i) Public Rights of Way Management System CAMS
- ii) Coed Victoria Update
- iii) Introduction by the new Chief Executive – Jonathon Cawley
- iv) MJ suggested Coed Y Brenin Issue

11. Any Other business – This to be kept as short as possible and was at the discretion of the Chair.

- i) *DJ explained that Conwy Council were planning, as part of their budgetary cuts to close many rural toilets. This included the toilet block in the village which was situated near the river and was also used by many canoeists (including Outdoor Centres) as their access point to the Conwy river down to Rhydlanfair. This is a popular access to water route created and promoted by the NP in 2013.*

This facility was not only important to the village but was also an important part of recreational infrastructure within the NP. He asked if it was possible for the LAF members to consider this with a view to writing to CCBC to highlight this situation. Closure would result in difficulties for all including paddlers who use the toilets and car park.

EN asked if members had any views on this.

Following a discussion it was agreed that PR should write to CCBC to express their view that this was also an important resource and that this toilet block should remain open given the additional access to water dynamic..

PR would draft a letter for the Chair consider and send.

ii) Crib Y Ddysgl (PR)

PR mentioned that they had been in communication with the Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team and they had mentioned that there had been a number of incidents on a path which led from Bwlch Crib Coch to Crib Y Ddysgl. This was problematic as it led people to become disorientated

under the C y Dd and then in their dilemma attempt to track across back to the Pyg Track zig zags which was not recommended given its terrain and a number of incidents had occurred.

They had asked the NP if we had any potential solutions to this or some form of on site management that could be employed to get people to use CyDd proper routing rather than attempt to go *off piste* leading them into potentially serious difficulties.

Officers (including himself) had looked at this on site and concluded that whilst options were limited there may be scope to erect an additional pillar or sign at the entrant of this off piste route indicating the correct line. He showed a mock-up of a basic pillar – *based on the house style of the Wyddfa pillars* which they may recommend to the LLMRT as one option when they next met.

They had also concluded that additional information is also required on the NP website for Crib Coch but also that we should include CyDd . Until recent years this had been avoided so as not to be seen to promote what is Grade 1 scramble. Walkers who were unfamiliar with Crib Coch may also have underestimated the additional difficulty of CYDd.

JG added that the view from Yr Wyddfa towards CyDd on a clear day showed how many braided paths had appeared in recent years and this was a problem for the LLMRT.

PR concurred with JG view but it did seem that the main point of difficulty was the position he had indicated earlier where peoples indecisiveness was problematic then leading them into difficulties further along. – the task was to try to head off poor decisions at that point.

But it would be a point for discussion.

MJ asked if by putting in signage then would the NP become liable.

PR stated that in his view this was unlikely in that the NP had done the best thing under the circumstances and that this was also CRoW access land where there was no liability for landowners for natural features. However they would look at that aspect.

PR would report back when their meeting had taken place.

EN thanked PR for bringing this to the attention of the members.

- iii) *DF thanked the Officers and Wardens of the NP for their work but noted the continued absence of any Officer from the NRW going back a considerable period.*

PR commented that he had received a complaint about a minute item recently - going back three meetings.

12. Time and date of next meetings for 2025 **3rd February, 2nd June, 6th October:**

EN brought proceedings to a conclusion. He thanked members and Officers for their contributions throughout the year and wished all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New year.

13. Date of next meeting – 3rd February 2025

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