

**Minutes of the Northern Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Monday 7th June 2021 at 6.30p.m
Online Zoom Meeting**

Present - Members:

Mr Edwin Noble (Chair)	Mr Calum Muskett
Mr Richard Williams	Mr Goronwy Edwards
Mrs Hillary Davies	Mr Tim Jones
Cllr Jason Parry	Mr John Gladston
Mr Arthur Davies	Mr David Firth
Mr Mark Jones	Mr Robin Parry
Mr John Hardy	

Officers / Speakers:

Peter Rutherford (SNP)	Catrin Glyn (SNP)
Helen Pye (SNP)	

EN Chair – welcomed all to the meeting this evening.

1. **Apologies:**

Mrs Kate Worthington	Mr Tom Hutton
Mrs Molly Lovatt (NRW)	

2. **Election of Chair and Vice-chair**

PR asked that given so few of the new members knew one another and that consequently electing a Vice Chair was difficult he recommended that a nomination was put forward from within the users group. He would try to create a list of the names for that group to consider. Vice Chairs can on occasion stand in for the Chair either at meetings, subgroups, workshops, or the Access Forum Chairs Conference.

Agreed.

3. **Previous Minutes**

Approved.

4. **Matters Arising**

i) Extreme symbol for Crib Goch – (slide).

PR showed a slide of the symbol that they had in mind. He explained that although they used the other symbols (with the associated wording) frequently - especially on routes on the website the most extreme had never been used but was a candidate for Crib Coch.

MJ stated he favoured the sign given the location. Especially something that indicated there was a need for `hands and feet` for what is a Grade 1 scramble. He asked what the corresponding wording was.

PR stated that the wording was:

Extreme: Technical route/ Grade 1 Scramble

Suitable for: *Route for experienced and very fit mountaineers with good technical skills.*

Terrain: *Mountain terrain which will most likely require scrambling and potential use of ropes.*

Recommended footwear and clothing: *Full hill walking gear essential. Specialist equipment may be required under winter conditions [link to winter skills page]*

TJ asked (as his first meeting) where this idea had emanated from. He did see both pros and cons to this.

PR explained that there had been numerous discussions and debate in the past concerning Crib Coch going back several years. Given evidence from field staff over it was evident that less experienced walkers were `following on` behind other people from Bwlch Y Moch frequently thinking that they were accessing the summit only to find themselves in difficulties on Crib Coch when in fact they should be on the PyG Track.

Various signage had been tried in the past which had been removed by some individuals, but it was felt that something should be done to try to avoid this by placing signage lower down giving an indication as to its severity.

There was also a plan to extend the existing wall to create a double back to enable walkers to make a conscious decision about accessing Crib Coch rather than by accident. The existing pillar may also have to be moved again.

TJ stated that given the situation then he would be happy to support what was a sensible solution.

MJ asked if there was any information that could be gleaned from the Mountain Rescue statistics as ascertain what information they had on walkers being there either deliberately or inadvertently.

PR stated that the MRT did not collect this type of information and that their statistics were solely based on what and where. But there was significant information from SNP staff (including himself) who knew that this was a perennial problem and had been for many years. He felt that it was time to try to address this situation.

MJ acknowledged that this was a problem and added that he had himself advised many people that they were heading for Crib Coch and not the Snowdon summit.

PR would discuss a sign with the Warden Service

ii) Item 4.4 ROWIP –

PR stated that the Subgroup had met and that it had been an interesting debate on what is a review of the previous document. Wyn Williams (GC) has posed the question regarding the prioritisation of the network as most monies understandably went to Cat 1 & 2 routes. However, the advent of Covid had certainly changed mindsets and highlighted the fact that certain local routes had become more important during the lockdown so possibly the original categorisations may need to be reviewed and/or changed. This included local cycle and bridleways.

The response from the subgroups indicated that this was the approach that they would recommend to GC.

JG mentioned that the North Wales Regional Partnership board were looking at provision across north Wales and he asked if they were to be a part of the consultation.

PR stated that once WW had a public draft then he was sure he would consult widely – albeit in Gwynedd. He encouraged all LAF members to contribute to this informal consultation if they wished to raise specific points.

RW mentioned that if there was a review of the categorisations then that implied costs for Community Councils who were already struggling to maintain their respective Public Rights of Way so sufficient grant aid was required to do undertake this exercise if required.

PR agreed with that stance but added that changing some of the categorisations may not be as onerous in terms of cost but was a way to target monies at those routes which had become a great deal more popular during the pandemic.

JG mentioned that there were monies available through the Regional Partnership boards and under the Reforming Social Value Forum there was still considerable grant monies available as many projects had not come forward due to Covid.

PR thanked JG for that information and commented that he was sure that WW and the team at GC would apply for any grant monies that may be available to them. He added whilst grant monies were useful for capital projects in terms of Public Rights of Way they did not address the maintenance issue in the long term, and this is where many problems lie.

AD added that post Covid the Community Councils have a good idea what needs to be changed in terms of categorisation and that this was not a complex issue.

5. Correspondence

a) PR announced that he had received an e mail today from the NRW indicating that the NRW report following the deliberations of the Access Reform Groups

(ARAG) had now been forwarded to the WG Minister concerned. This was not yet available to the public.

Once this was publicly available then he would circulate this to members. He stressed that this could be a significant document that may shape the WG's thinking and any subsequent legislation in relation to access in the future.

6. Update on the SNPA parking provisions in Pen y Pass – Catrin Glyn

CG thanked the members for the opportunity to update them on this important development.

She introduced herself as the Snowdon Partnership Officer.

Pen Y Pass has long been a thorny issue in terms of the informal parking arrangements and this year they had introduced a pre booking system based on the pilot undertaken following the easing of the first Covid lockdown.

The latest development is meant to tie into the longer-term transport management scheme being developed.

On the ground the prebooking system was successful and had proven popular with users who had indicated that that guaranteed system of parking meant less stress and less driving around vying for a spot at PyP which was in itself a successful outcome.

SNP staff had also indicated that management PyP car park had proved to be considerably less problematic and was a far calmer environment than the free for all as it had been in the past.

She acknowledged that there had been teething problems, but these had been overcome. As people get used to this system these arrangements will become the new `norm` in the long term although they continue to monitor this. They were also planning to review the whole process in November

She explained that the parking website platform was provided by a commercial provider.

ED asked if it was only PyP where pre booking was required.

CG stated that this was only applicable to the PyP car park. They were looking at some sensor type vehicle monitoring systems that gave real time information about car park capacity for other sites, but this was still in its infancy.

AD asked how many cars parking spaces Pen Y Pass held and how much this cost to run.

CG replied that there were 68 in total, and that the SNP had received monies to cover the costs of those fees.

AD asked if due to the pre booking if the issue had been displaced to Ogwen.

CG acknowledged that this year had seen unprecedented numbers but added it was important to remember that the capacity at PyP has not changed due to prebooking and therefore had not added to any additional displacement other than what occurs normally, but they are monitoring this.

JG asked if this system was viable financially.

CG stated that it was viable and that they had increased prices this year which allows them to put monies towards the bus service.

PR commented that the displacement issue was not so much of an issue as people become familiar with the new arrangements and probably caused fewer people to try PyP so it may actually reduce the casual traffic generally. This may need some research to confirm this.

JG asked if there was still disabled parking at PyP.

CG stated that there was still free provision at PyP for disabled parking and that this was still on a first come basis and not part of the prebooking scheme.

RP asked if there was any displacement that may have caused additional numbers in places such as Llanberis.

CG stated that this was hard to estimate but given that the capacity at PyP was still the same with no additional displacement other than under normal conditions then it was unlikely that this had contributed to issues in Llanberis. This could possibly be attributed to the extraordinary numbers of visitors cross the area this year post lockdown.

RP added that it may also be likely that with less people car sharing private or using public transport due to Covid this may also be a significant contributing factor.

CG commented that this was a very important point that RP had made.

EN thanked CG for her very interesting presentation and looked forward to an update.

7. SNPA Draft Recreation Strategy – Peter Rutherford

PR explained that although he had begun to write this some 12 months ago but for obvious reasons this had been delayed. Although this was initially meant to be a review and update of the previous document written by the NP's old Policy Unit, it was felt that it required a complete overhaul and to encompass new trends and activities within the NP including those affected by Covid 19.

This latest document must be tied directly to the Management Plan outcomes and actions, but the activity statements were unique in that the NP has laid out its stance on various activities which have been split up rather than simply applying generic terminology typically example was `cycling` - where in fact this could mountain biking, road cycling, family cycling and/or E bikes.

He had given this to Management Team today and possibly they wish to move a few things around so this not yet available formally, but he thought it useful to show its basic content and layout today. He stressed that when available he would invite comments observations from the LAF members and also from our wider stakeholders at that time.

In recent months he had undertaken some dialogue with certain sector representatives who had each contributed in their areas of expertise and this had been most useful.

JG commented that the Health & Well being agenda may require more prominence rather than having a tourism perspective. He noted as a technical point that caving involved disused mines and quarries and not caves per se.

PR acknowledged JG comments and that the document had been written to encompass local communities and visitors alike and also that the statements for the disabilities sector were suitably addressed.

JG added that another important issue was connectivity and linkages especially from those communities on the periphery of the NP.

PR would consider that observation.

TJ mentioned that he had some thoughts on some aspects.

PR would liaise with him once we had permission to go out with this.

DG mentioned the dogs on leads issue. He thought that generally the messaging could be stronger given the (highly publicised) increase in dog attacks on stock in recent years.

AD agreed and felt that the stock issue may require additional wording to reinforce this message and more particularly for the lambing season.

RW added that even the re vamped Countryside Code was not sufficient to cater for the somewhat different type of visitors with dogs that we have seen post Covid Lockdown. So, it was important to get those fundamental messages out concerning stock.

EN added that it was evident that additional or enhanced wording may be beneficial in this section.

PR commented that he would consider this albeit we couldn't go against any existing legal rights – *unless any legislative changes occur*. The view of the NP has been over many years that people should put their dog on a lead `in the vicinity of livestock` and he thought that this was sensible approach that encompassed both pieces of legislation - PRow and CRow.

MJ commented that it was always sensible to go to the specific outdoor users' groups and land managers for their input into such a document.

PR replied that it had been difficult to write some aspects as things had moved on so much in recent years but with sufficient dialogue he was confident that they had got it largely right.

EN thanked PR for introducing this interesting paper to the members and looked forward to seeing it in full.

8. Tanygrisiau (Moelwyn) motorcycling off roading issue.

PR explained that he had been to the site to view this site once again and that he would enter a dialogue with the power company, but this was a hard one to confront but they would try.

He had also discussed this with the Rights of Way Officer for Meirionnydd who are also familiar with the problem.

Motorcycles still continue to access the upper slopes of the Moelwyn and there are no legal rights or Unclassified Roads in that area.

He would discuss this with the North Wales Police, but it is difficult to catch small groups or individuals and it is not a priority for them unless it generates sufficient incidents or results in injury. It was also apparent that the NRW had been having more problems in the Dovey area.

TJ mentioned that as landowners it was a little easier for the NRW to take positive action on their own property. There had been issues for many years in a number of places such as the Dovey block, with motorcyclists unfortunately coming from far and wide. But the NRW had been working with the north Wales Rural Crime Unit to seek to deter these activities and to also seek prosecution when possible. This was also a historical problem in Llandegla on the north of the Berwyn where the local authority and the Police have worked together to deter this type of activity by using helicopters. He appreciated that for private landowners this was more problematic.

PR added that the Moelwyn was attractive to a `local contingent` and that made it more difficult to get information.

DG added that he had come across riders in the Cwt Y Bugail area this year and he did contact the Rural Crimes Team (RCT) who did pay a visit to this local group. It may be useful for PR to liaise with them once again to deter this activity across the Moelwyn.

PR thanked DG for that information, and he would discuss this with the RCT. The Police have now purchased their own drone, and this may prove useful in situations like this.

GJ added that this was a recurring problem in many inappropriate places in Wales and a subject that they had discussed many times. He emphasised that the difficulty here that apart from the legally available Unclassified Roads (UCR's) there was no formal provision such as purpose-built trails for `sports type` of activity for off roading motorcycles.

PR commented that JG had made an important point. This was a displacement issue where only UCRs or Byways were legally available. It had been mentioned in past that the NRW, particularly as major landowners in Wales, have adequate land to allow for some limited activities albeit in a controlled manner as currently there were no sites but there may be an opportunity for a positive business case to be made here.

MJ added that the alternative provisions were poor or non-existent and possibly this needs to be raised again. There were certainly adequate old quarries and forested areas that would be suitable for these types of activities. The Blaenau example was typical where there are no legal alternatives. It may also be an idea to ask users if they would support those types of initiatives if they were available.

PR knew that a small project for local riders had been attempted in Nantlle in recent years, but he was unsure how far this had gone. He would inquire but suspected that overcoming Planning hurdles may be problematic.

He added that they could write to the NRW to ask their opinion on this.

TJ mentioned that a few years ago a small commercial site had been opened near the Horseshoe Pass by Jones Brothers but once opened they encountered many problems of mis use so they eventually closed it down as it became unmanageable.

It may be an option to write to the NRW with this suggestion but from a corporate perspective they would have to be risk averse and insist on legal protections for any candidate site as liability would be a major concern.

He added that any site would also have to fee paying and he was unsure what people would be willing to pay for.

PR would draft something for the Chair

9. Agenda items for next meeting

- i) Carneddau HLF Landscape Partnership update
- ii) Recreational Strategy

10. Any Other business

- a) PR mentioned the Slate Trail circular¹ (83miles). This had proved to be quite a successful route and is one where Gwynedd Council and the National Park had helped considerably to survey and map this route in its initial stages.

The group responsible were now minded requesting Ordnance Survey (OS) to put this route on the relevant OS maps (OL17) for the area.

¹ <https://www.snowdoniaslatetrail.org/trail-info/the-route.html>

There were others already on the OS map such as the North Wales Path, Pilgrims' Way, All Wales Coastal Path amongst others. Both Gwynedd and the National Park had considered this and did not have any objections. He was interested in LAF members views on this before his final confirmation.

EN commented that possibly there were too many routes on the OS maps already.

PR acknowledged this but in the main he thought this route, which was a simple circular, had more relevant in that the slate quarry/mines sites are shortly and hopefully to be awarded World Heritage status which would increase the routes profile as it links many of them together and therefore had more merit. It was already proving popular with walkers and also small events.

AD asked if the route was on Public Rights of Way (PRoW).

PR replied that almost all was on PRoW with the exception of a very short section of permissive in the north so there were no issues in terms of its availability.

AD commented that the route in Cwm Cynfal may be a little unclear.

PR added that this was on a Right of Way but admittedly was not an easy section to walk.

He added that Ramblers Cymru were also considering asking OS for the Cambrian Way to be added to the OS map. This was still under discussion, but this was also another important strategic route – running from south to north Wales.

TJ commented that he agreed with the notion of having this on the OS map given its additional importance in terms of the impending World Heritage status.

- b)** PR informed the members that following the conclusions of the Access Reform Groups a report had now been sent to the Minister from the NRW. This was not yet available to the public but was expected to be released soon. As soon as this became available then he would send a copy round to all members.
- c)** The ROWIP sub-group has meet and he would respond on behalf of the Park.

11. Date of next meeting – 6th September 2021

PR was uncertain as to what type of meeting they could have next time, but they would inform the members in good time.