

**Minutes of the South Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Tuesday 10th March 2020 at 5.45 pm
At The Ship Hotel – Dolgellau**

Present – Members:

Mr Hedd Pugh (Chair)	Mrs Swancott Pugh
Mrs Lesley Amison	David Coleman
Mr Alun Evans	Mr Alun Edwards
Mr Geraint Rowlands	Mr Delwyn Evans
Mr Eryl Jones Williams	Mr Andy Hall
Mr Aled Thomas	Mr Alan Norton

Mr John Pugh *Roberts*

**Officers / Observers/
Speakers**

Peter Rutherford (SNPA)	Rhian P Williams(SNPA)
Simon Roberts (SNPA)	Dani Robertson (SNPA)
Mr Tony Blackburn – Mountain Bothies Association UK	

HP welcomed everyone to this evenings meeting

1. Apologies

Mrs Lucinda Gibson	Mr Gareth Roberts
Mr Hugh Roberts	Mr Eifion Lewis.

HP announced that both EB, DR & LG had stood down from the LAF. He asked if PR could write to them on behalf of members to thank them for their service.

PR would do this on their behalf and the Authority.

2. Declaration of Interest

None

3. Previous Minutes

JP asked if he could be referred to as JP Roberts

AE was also in attendance at the last meeting.

PR apologised for those oversights and would amend the minutes accordingly.

Approved

4. Matters Arising

i) Parking and Transport Plan

PR explained that although this was predominantly a plan required for the north of the National Park (i.e. Snowdon and its periphery) many aspects would be pertinent to other areas of high use. A consultant had been commissioned by the Snowdon Partnership to look at this and hopefully a draft report would be available towards the end of July. They have since been consulting with the various stakeholders in the north of the NP and when the document becomes available he would pass this to members for their information. There will also be a website where interested parties could submit their comments or ideas. He would send a link to members once this was up and running¹.

DE commented that in terms of public services in the south of the NP the Cambrian Coast line railway gave an excellent service for all passengers including for walkers, cyclists and accommodating disabled persons.

EJW added that capacity issues were a problem at peak periods with only two carriages beyond Barmouth. This was still under discussion with the company.

ii) Events – spray painting –

PR informed the members that following complaints he had corresponded with the this particular event and they had since agreed to desist and agreed to use a flag system instead. Spray painting was not a control measure that was recommended under the SNP's Events Guidance. He would also monitor this for this coming year. There were event signposting issues last season on other areas and we had been in communication with various stakeholders to resolve these.

iii) Members question re educational Curriculum and Future Generations Act.

For information there was a member of staff who was feeding into the curriculum and also the Welsh Bacculaureate so hopefully that will grow in importance. He had also had some small input recently into the NVQ's for Countryside Management modules – via Llandrillo and subsequently LANTRA as the awarding body.

AE commented that it appeared that most changes would occur in the primary education sector and where those pupils could be taken out for more outdoor/countryside education and to enable pupils to engage with their environment. He asked if there was a principle Officer responsible for education with the SNP.

PR mentioned that there was still an Education Officer based in Plas Tan Y Bwlch (Hywyn Williams) who was responsible for this important aspect of the NP's work and worked with many educational groups at all levels. However, in the past there were two officers based at Plas but given the financial situation faced by the NP in

¹ <https://www.snowdonpartnership.co.uk/projects>

recent years this post had not be refilled. Hopefully the Authority may recognise this shortfall when things improved.

AE mentioned that many primary schools had some form of environmental education and this was an ideal area for them to experience this.

PR commented (via the Chair) that environmental education at all levels was fundamental to the well being of the environment for the future and as a subject it should be threaded throughout the curriculum.

He could ask the Educational Officer to come and update the LAF members about the activities that are undertaken by the SNP Educational Department.

AH added that the (North Wales) Outdoor Partnership was heavily involved in environmental education and worked with many local schools and educational establishments. This is funded via the Welsh Government.

iv) Off Roding Liaison Group update

PR reported that they had been another meeting in February where various issues had been discussed. One of the main issues was the Pennal – Pant Perthog section of Unclassified Road (UCR). He had been out on a site visit with the North Wales Police and found this to be in a reasonable condition. Although some damage had been caused by forestry operations over the season this was passable and a legal route.

However, it had been found that one vehicle had overturned and some oil had been lost. Given that some properties have private water supplies then he had asked the groups to be aware of this issue and recommend to their members that they carry oil spill kits on their outings as part of their code of conduct/good practice.

They had assured him that this was possible and some already had this within their guidance. He had found the group responsive to the dialogue which he was keen to see and develop a better understanding between all stakeholders.

JPR asked if they had made any financial contribution to repairs on these UCR's seeing as they were the main users.

PR commented that given that local authority funding (from Highways departments) for repairing UCR's were almost non existent many groups had made a substantial effort to repair some routes using their own resources. He was very grateful for the time and effort on their work so far - particularly on the poorer sections of the Pennal - Brynchrug route in the south of the NP. Although this required a lot more work given the condition it was in once again following such a wet winter.

v) Limited Equine access on the Mawddach Trail

PR informed the members that he had just received the independent consultants report on the proposed equine use which was favourable based on certain criteria that could be applied. This would now form a part of our internal discussion with Officers and the Management Team to see how we can move forward on this and he would update the members when things had progressed. The report had

highlighted some extra work and associated costs but this was not thought to be excessive. It was interesting that the figures for the Mawddach Trail consistently showed a sharp drop off of cyclists/visitors between August to April compared to other sites. This would reduce the potential for any conflicting use.

vi) AE asked what the situation was on the Llyn Barfog – Pennal link as this also required work on the Unclassified Road (UCR).

PR was aware that some of this section was a part of the All Wales Coastal Path and that they may fund some limited work but he would make inquiries with the Officer concerned. He was aware of some misdemeanours by some groups driving over gates in recent months. However, it was in need of some major repairs to improve it. He would also discuss this with GC Highways but they were acutely short of any funding for UCR's generally as understandably they are not a priority for the highways department.

EJW added that there were also foreign groups using these routes and getting the good practice messages over to them was difficult.

5. Correspondence

i) Snowdonia Partnership Plan Update – Item 6

6. National Park Plan – Update

PR explained that this was still out for consultation with the various stakeholders and also the public and many people had submitted ideas, observations and comments. The closing date for public exercise is the 13th March. If members had any observations or wished to make comments then they were welcome to do via the SNP website.

For him the layout of this document was important as the review of the Recreational Strategy (currently underway) would have to dovetail into the relevant sections. Lots of comments had been received from various quarters which would take some time to analyse.

SR added that within the plan the Warden Area Place Plans would also be included in the relevant sections. There would also be an opportunity for the LAF's to feed into these `place plans` at the time.

AE asked if there was a simpler or summary version.

DE added that there was an easy read version on the SNPA website²

7. Dark Skies presentation – Dani Robertson Dark Skies Partnership Project Officer

² <https://www.snowdonia.gov.wales/authority/working-in-partnership/cynlluneryri?name>

DR explained that the Dark Skies Partnership covered a large area including the National Park and surrounding Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB's) including parts of Pen Llyn, Anglesey and areas within the Clwydian Range.

The National Park was designated a Dark Skies area in 2015 and since then the project has been working to identify and establish the best sites.

One of the main reasons for their establishment was to protect the scientific, educational and cultural heritage and permanent enjoyment of our dark skies. within Snowdonia and pockets of the AONB's. These are designated due to their high quality night skies with less light pollution than many other areas.

Only 2% of Britain's population have access to a true dark sky environment with the remainder having excessive levels of light pollution where night skies are not visible in any detail.

She showed satellite imagery for Europe which showed significant areas with the high light pollution. An interesting `factoid` Brussels has 7 lamp posts per person.

In terms of Wales this is separated into differing areas with north east Wales and south Wales having the highest light pollution. Anglesey has some good areas for reduced light pollution but one factor that affects the island the light pollution from Dublin. One of the darkest areas in the area is Uwch Mynydd on the Llyn which is proving popular especially during meteor shower events.

Her role is to monitor this issue across the NP and she was working to address issues especially in the north. She is now working in conjunction with the local authorities such as Gwynedd, Conwy and Denbighshire to encourage dark skies thinking and is also working on light pollution mitigation measures mainly through new street lighting which do not throw light into the sky to cause `glow`. She is also working with some private landowners to encourage them to reduce their night glow.

She showed some innovative solutions in terms of reducing light pollution such as `teraflow` ground tiles or mixed with tarmac to glow in the dark and where street lamps technically be removed. There are some available for decking or steps/stairs. If anyone is interested in such solutions at home then please get in touch with her and she would try to assist.

Within the NP and to get our DS status core zones were established – with the Cadair Idris area being probably one of the darkest areas. She regularly checks various locations around the NP to measure decreases or increases in darkness.

She cited other benefits of reducing light pollution and the DS project generally: I.e. health and well being, the environment including direct benefits for wildlife that require dark areas, cultural heritage and the tourism economy.

She stressed that although a lot is known about other types of pollution not a great deal was known about the effects of light pollution. Before the invention of artificial light all species were prompted by natural circadian rhythms and artificial lighting was created this has affected not only us but also the natural environment – that is a great part of our biodiversity needs darkness. There is growing evidence that

artificial light may be the cause of issues in humans such as stress, insomnia, poor mental health and depression.

In terms of the sustainability many older lights are not efficient and waste a lot of energy especially where lights are not specifically designed for a purpose or are too bright. However, these issues are relatively easy to combat.

She described the guidance that people can follow. And that where possible shielded lighting is the best which has considerably less uplight leakage and many of older types of lights within the National Park have been changed. She stressed that the cheapest LED lights may not necessarily be the best so it's an important part of her role is to impart this knowledge to people.

In terms of biodiversity lighting is detrimental to wildlife as 60% of our biodiversity requires darkness to survive. Excessive light is bad for migratory birds - typically Ynys Enlli (Bardsey) when the lighthouse changed to an LED type lamp this resulted in many birds colliding with the lighthouse and being killed. They have now changed this to a new red light and this has solved the issue. Lighting also affects other ecosystems such as the bat and insect populations which in turn affects night time pollinators. There is also evidence that light pollution has moved spring forward by some weeks adversely affecting many other natural orders.

In terms of our cultural heritage the night sky is important for many myths and legends - many are associated with farming going back many centuries where the night sky would dictate the differing farming calendar.

The Glover Report 2019 acknowledged that it was important that the younger generation did not miss out on experiencing nature and that they should be encouraged to spend a night under the stars as part of their appreciation of the environment.

Astro tourism is now a growing phenomenon and this is a year round activity. And any celestial occurrences such as meteor showers are now creating more of an interest. As Dark Skies Officer runs events and as well as local people many travel some distance to attend with their telescopes and cameras which also has an economic benefit.

The project has also invested in a mobile observatory and should be delivered soon which hopefully will enable us to promote more interest in local communities. There is also an inflatable planetarium onto which they can project the night sky. There are also events on social media. They will also shortly be recruiting a Dark Skies Events Officer to assist with this aspect of their work.

JPR commented that this was a very interesting project and was it possible to run an event in the Bwlch Y Groes area as this was identified as one of the best sites in the NP.

DR stated that she was sure she could organise something to assist if required.

HP commented that in the winter months that road was frequently closed so there would be some H&S issues to consider at that location.

AH added that Tywyn School did have some activities related to dark skies.

DR stated that she was aware of this and they were fortunate in that they had qualified staff to teach this subject which was unusual. She believed there were only two in the whole of north Wales.

HP thanked DR for her time and a most interesting presentation

8. *Mountain Bothies Association – update on their progress in Snowdonia National Park – Mr Tony Blackburn MBA Area organiser Wales.*

TB thanked the members for the invitation to come once again to present them with the latest news from the MBA and their activities particularly those developments that had occurred within Snowdonia. It was some seven years ago when he last addressed the members.

He explained the background of the organisation

The MBA was established in 1965 as a charity registered in Scotland and the bulk of the bothies are in Scotland where bothies are a well established tradition. The MBA now have 105 spread across Scotland, England and there are now 9 in Wales (an increase in 2 since his last visit to the LAF). Membership currently stands at 4000 and most work is undertaken by volunteers and they achieve some 1000 volunteer days each year. Last year approximately £100,000 on bothy maintenance across the UK. Applying standard rate volunteer time this equates to another £100,000 in monetary value. The MBA has also been awarded the Queens Award for Voluntary Service.

Bothies are all different in design but most are all old buildings and at least several hours walk from any public road. They are unlocked and open to all users but they only offer very basic shelters with no `mod cons` such as running water or electricity. People are expected to leave them as they find them for the next visitors. They were also very keen to maintain any local characteristics and physical history of the buildings they use.

Within Snowdonia there are now 4 bothies.

Cwm Dulyn (east Carneddau), The Arenig Fawr bothy, Cae Amos – near Cwm Pennant and Penrhos Isaf in Coed Y Brenin near Ganllwyd.

He showed various slides of other buildings used across the UK and the work undertaken by volunteers.

Cae Amos is the latest addition to their Snowdonia bothies. This was previously a building used by the Leeds Mountaineering Club which they could no longer maintain and following discussions with the owner (who is hugely supportive) it was then decided that this would make an ideal addition to their bothies in Snowdonia. After considerable work this is now proving to be popular. *Unusually Cae Amos has a flushing loo rather than a long drop toilet.*

PR commented that he would like to see more of a relationship between the MBA and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards (DoE) scheme. These would be ideal particularly for DoE groups finding themselves in poor weather or at least camp nearby.

TB added that he was keen to see more young people enjoying the outdoors and they were potentially future bothy users.

HP thanked TB for the interesting update on their activities especially those within the NP.

SP asked if the Welsh translation of Buthynod Mynydd was the correct one as it may mean something else.

HP thought this an interesting question and asked PR if we could look at this again as it had come up in the past.

9. Update on the Welsh Government's Access Reform Advisory Group's business - known collectively as the ARAG groups.

PR reported that these groups had now been formed and members appointed. There were three of these:

i) Changes to *open access land working group* – to consider reforms to CRow access land – (*PR is a member of this particular group and has input from other NP Officers*). Of particular note was the fact that the status of the All Wales Coastal Path may be denoted, throughout its length, as CRow access land which was an interesting proposal which was still under discussion.

ii) This group - appointed as Technical Advisory Group for Public Rights of Way (PRoW) reform has met twice – that is to discuss and recommend changes to the various Acts that affect Public Rights of Way with a view to reduce the administrative, costs and bureaucratic processes involved and *matters that have been frequently discussed by the LAF in the past*). All the previous recommendations made for the Green and subsequent White papers will be included and they may also choose to add a couple more. These discussions will also look at how flexible the existing PRoW network could be in terms of users.

HP added that the LAFs had discussed various issues relating to changes to the PRoW legislation in the past and had various recommendations both at the time of the Green paper and subsequent White Paper.

iii) Communicating Access Rights. This group will inform and make recommendations for the promotion of these policies.

He stressed that the Access to Water discussion group was not a part of the aforementioned ARAG process. There were held under the auspices of the NRW and the National Access Forum (NAF) sub group. Two meetings had been held and the NP's were represented by two Officers.

The NRW will produce regular updates for all interested parties including the LAF's so information will be consistent.

AH asked where the access to water fitted into this series of meetings.

PR stated that the access to water issue was being discussed by a sub group of the National Access Forum (NAF) sub group. The initial discussions have been around access to water within CRoW access land and that may inform other wider discussions on this subject. He stressed that the Minister has said that they were not minded to legislate at this time. However, he was still of the opinion (and that submitted by the LAF's at the time) that access to water should be legislated for and include formalising the current access and egress points, reduce liability for landowners, agrees adequate water levels with appropriate level gauges and conduct environmental impact assessments. These were the criteria that had been applied to our upper Conwy model and this had proved that this can work well. Resurrecting voluntary agreements were not long term solutions and did not provide certainty.

AE asked what the legal position was in terms of river ownership.

PR understood this to be that the landowners owned the land (as the bed of the rivers) to the middle but not the water. But riparian rights owners have a major issue with this definition which is their main cause of dispute.

AN understood that the role of the LAFs was also under discussion and which group was looking at this.

PR stated that it would most likely be the first (CRoW access) Group 1 that would discuss this but they had not yet moved onto that. In the previous consultations the LAF's had agreed that a 5 year tenure of membership was superior to the current 3 as this was onerous to the LAF Secretariat and would ensure more continuity. The Chairs/Vice Chairs tenure should be decided by each LAF for themselves.

AN added that much of the RoW legislation was onerous and costly and hopefully the PRoW group would try to address these issues in those discussions and make suitable recommendations to steer future legislative changes.

PR commented that AN had made a important point but he was confident that something better would emerge to make managing PRoW easier, simpler and cheaper for the local authorities, landowners and users when changes to PRoW are necessary.

10. Snowdonia National Park Access Timeline An update on this mini web based project

PR explained that about six months ago he was attending a meeting with fellow NP Access Officers. The Peak District National Park revealed that they had, in time for their 70th Anniversary in 2021 and the founding of the first National Parks they had created a simple `access timeline`. Although this was interesting it was simply a list recording the history of access from the Mountains Act, Kinder Scout to the present day.

He thought that with some work we could create our own for the SNP. Initially he thought this a week's work but this proved to be a far lengthier exercise and after trawling thorough archive material and tracking down old staff. The result was an enhanced list but threaded through with interesting events and photographs of the history of access in the Park. This is now been made available to the public via their

website. It is also an invaluable source of information and reference point for SNP staff, members and LAF members but also the public at large. He thought the members would like to see this for themselves. Other NP's are also considering doing something similar in their own style.

We have also received some good feedback.

11. **Recommended Agenda items for next meeting**

- i) Draft Recreation Strategy
- ii) Warden Service Place Plans
- iii) Cambrian Way update on progress from Ramblers Cymru
- iv) Bala Lake Railway update
- v) *Introduction of new members & process of Election of Chair & Vice Chair.*

PR explained that as this was technically the current members last meeting the next one in June would be first for any new members as selected by the Authority sub group.

He was pleased that many members had chosen to re apply which was gratifying. The next meeting will be chaired by him and then the members could choose their Chair and Vice Chair. From previous experience it was best for nominees for Chairs and Vice Chair to advance a brief CV's to the Secretary at that meeting. He would then circulate these to members with a view to holding a vote at the next meeting in September or earlier if everyone responded by e mail possibly.

He stressed that they are short of some representation of users in particular the equine and canoeing sectors which should be addressed if possible.

It is also hoped to keep the membership down the 18 including the Chair and Vice Chair. This is a manageable number in terms of the administration and maintaining a quorum at any given time. So less the local authorities (3) and 1 representative for disabilities then that left 14 – 7 from users and 7 from the landowners (and if the Chair and Vice Chair are also equally from both sectors). This is something similar to what we have now.

It is interesting that under the current CRow Act review we have recommended that the tenure of membership is extended to 5 years instead of the current 3. This will reduce our burden of administration for re election and give us more consistency in membership. He appreciated that in terms of access there are steep learning curves as issues can be complex.

Four members had informed him that they would be standing down. GR, SP, DR & EB.

HP thanked the members for their contribution to the LAF over the last period and hoped that they would re apply. He also took the opportunity to thank the retiring members for their contribution - some over many years. He also thanked the SNP staff for their contribution and support of the LAF.

He stressed that the success of the LAF was due to the balance of the membership and their mutual respect and understanding that had developed between them.

PR added that there would be a small Authority committee that would consider the applications. He also took the opportunity to thank the members for their contribution which was valued by the Officers and Authority alike.

vi) ROWIP update – PR had heard little from GC over this but something should emerge this year.

12. Any Other Business

i) EJW asked if we could write to the retiring Gwynedd Council Rights Of Way Officer for the Meirionnydd area for all her work and support in the area.

HP asked if this post would be replaced.

DC stated that this would most likely go to someone internally at GC but this could not be confirmed as yet.

PR added that they it would be a cause of concern to the NP if this post was not replaced. But he was confident that GC would fill this post.

Members agreed that PR write to LH to express their thanks.

ii) *AT mentioned that as a landowner he did have some trees that were affected by the Ash Die Back disease – up to 30%. He asked what the position was in terms of CRoW access land and his responsibilities as landowner particularly given that the CRoW Act specifically indemnifies landowners from liability for natural features such as trees. He was aware that it may be unnecessary to fell some trees that may be affected if they were not detrimental to the public i.e. alongside PRow.*

HP commented that as landowners we should inspect our trees regularly and particularly where there were adjacent PRow as part of their duty of care. But AT had made a good point which required clear advice.

PR added that generally most woodlands denoted under the CRoW Act were coniferous woodlands with little broadleaf dedicated at the time. However, AT had a valid point and he offered to take up this up with the NRW CRoW Officer to get a definitive response.

iii) *DE asked who was responsible for the Mawddach Trail near the Marian Dolgellau as this was now in need of repair.*

SR commented that there had been various issues with surfacing along the Mawddach after the winter storms and rain to which they were attending.

PR added that he thought the Marian section was the responsibility of the Marian Trustees and not the SNP.

iv) *DE confirmed that the access group had viewed the new disabilities route in Dol Idris as proposed and was approved by them following a site visit with the Warden.*

PR thanked DE for this response.

13. Date for next meeting 9th June 2020 – Venue to be confirmed