

**Minutes of the South Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Tuesday 3rd December 2019 at 5.45 pm
At Community Centre, Abergynolwyn**

Present – Members:

Mr Hedd Pugh (Chair)	Mrs Swancott Pugh
Mr Eifion Lewis	Mrs Lesley Amison
Mr Geraint Rowlands	Mr David Coleman
Mr Alun Evans	

**Officers / Observers/
Speakers**

Peter Rutherford (SNPA)	Rhian P Williams(SNPA)
Simon Roberts (SNPA)	Molly Lovatt (NRW)
Rhydian Roberts (SNP)	

HP welcomed everyone to this evenings meeting

1. Apologies

Cllr. Eryl Jones Williams	Mr Aled Thomas
Mrs Lucinda Gibson	Mr Alun Edwards
Mr Andy Hall	Mr Gareth Roberts
Mr Alan Norton,	Mr Huw Roberts
Mr Delwyn Evans	Mr Edmund Bailey

HP announced that both EB and DR had stood down from the LAF

2. Declaration of Interest

None

3. Previous Minutes

Approved

4. Matters Arising

i) Dog Advice website update

PR explained that a LAF member had raised the point that there was no specific advice for sheep gathering on the website information on dogs. He had considered this and they would amend the advice accordingly. This was a good idea given the potential for disruption that can be caused during gathering.

ii) Taith Ardudwy signage

PR stated that some work had been done by the Local Area Warden but some remained to complete. He was unsure of how many signs were left or where they were as these had been given to the various members of the Taith Ardudwy group. He would inquire.

SR confirmed this but they were short of one Warden on the north end of it. However, once the area is covered they could do more to assist.

iii) Marian Mawr signage

SR stated that he thought the signage was available and the Local Warden was assisting the Marian Trustees over this. He would inquire with the RG to ascertain what the situation was currently.

iv) Bryn Llestairs. HP asked PR if there had been any news or progress on this. PR stated that disappointingly there was none and it was difficult to get any interest from any quarter to support this.

SP mentioned that although the current speed limit was 40mph it was still a dangerous road for pedestrians. Given the number of students at the Aberdovey Outward Bound Centre then this was far from safe.

PR agreed with this stance but it was difficult to see how this impasse could be overcome when the bridge was not part of a Public Right of Way and was going to cost a large sum if it was replaced especially given the standards required by Network Rail. He would continue to communicate with people over this issue.

ML asked where this was.

PR explained the situation and would pass on the details of the site to ML if she required it. *It would make a better line for the coastal path.* He offered to show her the site when they are next both in the area.

HP added that a speed limit was not going to solve the overall issue of the bridge crossing.

PR asked DC if it was possible for someone to claim a `right` over the bridge as a Public Right of Way under the 20 yr rule.

DC stated that this would be difficult as NR would appeal any claims and they would oppose this and would be protected by the Railways Act as it crosses the main line.

HP recommended that we write to Ld. DET informing him of the LAF's concerns.

Agreed. PR would draft something.

Agreed. PR would draft something.

HP asked if there was any update on the Mawddach Trail equine access pilot.

iv) Mawddach Trail – Equine access update.

PR informed the members that he had met and appointed a consultant to look at this. They had been given a brief and a full set of maps of the site although his site visits have been held up due to the poor weather recently. Based on the results of this exercise then various decisions can be made. The consultant will be drawing comparisons to other UK sections of bridleways on old railway lines and will be communicating with the British horse Society and others. He expected some news early in the New Year hopefully.

The Consultant did like our idea of the control `criteria` (loosely based on the Snowdon model for cycles).

There has also been a delay in the tree felling in Coed Y Garth (NRW) to allow equine access in that area.

5. Correspondence

Welsh Government Sustainable Farming and our land – LAF's joint response.

PR informed the members that this was done through directly via the LAF Chairs as unfortunately the timeframe for the response did not coincide with the LAF meetings. So they had got together to discuss this.

In terms of `access` the paper was poor and access generally was not addressed as a single topic. Given that it was difficult to respond to this it was decided that a number of points should be made generally.

This included the lack of importance attached to PRoW as public assets and the networks positive contribution to the outdoor recreation sector and the health agenda, the lack of any mention of CRoW access land, the lack of reference to the legal framework and processes required for any proposed changes in the PRoW network and users and landowners' responsibilities. The lack of reference to cross compliance and also the potential for improving the network across multiple land holdings. It also highlighted the potential advantage to landowners if PRoW were to be included within any future agri-environmental schemes and the positive role that the LAF's could play in deciding on changes to the network.

This response was then signed off by the LAF Chairs.

HP added that the WG were currently going through the responses and there may be another `white paper` following on from this in July 2020.

AE added that it was important that we are still involved in that process if another paper emerged.

6. Ash Dieback – a presentation by Rhydian Roberts SNP Forestry Officer

RR stated that this fungal infection (Latin name is *Hymenoscyphus Fraxineus*) is a serious issue in population of the Ash trees across the UK including Wales.

This affects us in many ways as trees are on farms and are alongside paths and roads. It is estimated that there are some 60 million ash trees in the UK. Within Wales Ash is the second highest component tree of any woodland and specialists now say that it has hit the population hard and is happening quickly and some trees taking between 2-5 years to die off.

It is thought that the disease is spread by fungal spores within the dead leaves but remains dormant in the winter.

A national strategy is required to deal with this issue between the Ministry specialist, all local authorities, the National Parks' and other major stakeholders such as NRW, the National Trust and the Woodland Trust and other private woodland owners.

By comparison the SNP owns little land compared to some but the effects for would still be significant within our woodlands such as Dol Idris, Abergwynant, and Farchynys in the south and Coed Hafod (west of Betws Y Coed) and Brynbrethynau (Capel Curig) in the north and Plas Tan Y Bwlch.

There is also a high risk and significant cost associated to this and currently there are no monies available to any landowners to deal with what is a crisis and this is worrying scenario. It is estimated that costs could be as high as £15b across the UK. With a single tree works costing upwards of £55/£60 each. On recent inspection he estimated that potentially at least 50% of the SNP property trees required attention.

Young trees are highly susceptible to this disease with older ones being overtaken more slowly. The risks of dealing with this are also higher given that the wood becomes more brittle and frequently is not possible to fell them conventionally.

It has been noticed that a small minority of trees remain unaffected and much research is ongoing to determine why and how this occurs and to see if resistant strains can be cultivated as potential replacements in the future. The genome (DNA) has already been isolated and has prompted other vectors of research.

HP asked if it was know what time of the year or how this is spread.

RR stated that it was thought that this was spread by dead leaves which contain the fungal spores. It is dormant in the winter but then starts to spread later on in the season and is simply not practical to try to control this.

Within the Conwy area of the NP it is estimated that alongside roads there are twenty two trees for each km stretch of road and in some places this is significantly higher so those alongside roads potentially pose a major threat.

The trees which have succumbed to the disease can then be affected by other secondary fungal (and natural) infections such as honey fungus, King Alfred's Cakes and Ash Anthracnose amongst a number of others. There are websites where this can be reported or people can seek advice on Ash Dieback identification.

He added that he was available to advise landowners if requested to do so. However, if private landowners need to carry out tree works then a felling licence will be required for anything more than 5³m of wood (each quarter running by calendar month beginning in January) but they should be aware that some trees within woodland may have Tree Preservation Orders or may be part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and may be important sites for bats or other important flora or fauna. If they are in any doubt then they should seek advice.

ML added that it was important to note that not all timber will need to be removed from site if it does not pose a safety risk. Dead wood standing is a valuable habitat in itself which attracts a whole host of species.

RR continued and stated that the NP's approach so far had been a 'softly softly' one but it was likely that they would have to become more proactive and added that he was more than happy for to go and meet and advise landowners if requested to do so.

ML added that any tree planting should be from local provenance seed stock rather than trees from outside the area.

RR confirmed that the SNP had a small tree nursery in Plan Tan Y Bwlch and some could be made available for a small cost.

AE asked if they were happy to advise them and could some information be made available to landowners.

RR stated that he was happy to do this and would discuss this with PR to get this information out to those that needed it.

PR asked if the SNP had any form of plan to inform and train local farmers how to deal with this.

RR stated that currently there was none

HP concurred with this and suggested that they form links to Glynllifon to enable this. Some landowners including him had already received some letters from the Council advising them of this issue and landowners could do with some assistance in dealing with what is a major issue.

AE added that it was important that trees were available as replacements and that landowners were aware of this.

RR stated that he would consider these views but it was unfortunate that many tree nurseries have gone out of business and there has been a lack of investment leading to a shortage in tree nursery stocks. Understandably, it was difficult for nursery business' to predict what the market required.

ML commented that possibly there was scope within the agricultural sector to grow more nursery trees for sale or for their own use using local stock.

HP thanked RR for his interesting and informative presentation. He would ask for an update next year.

AE added that it was important that people realise that local provenance stock were the best trees to plant.

7. Welsh Government Access Reform Advisory Group (ARAG) update

PR explained that the WG has now concluded the appointment process for the steering group and this was made up of specialists from the field. They will be asked to look at how more significant changes to access rights should or can be implemented and also to look at the simplification of the legal processes associated with managing PRoW and to reduce the bureaucracy and costs to local authorities.

This group will have some technical sub groups to discuss specific issues.

Many of current ideas were highlighted by the LAFs and others during the original Access & Outdoor Recreation Green Paper in 2014 and also in subsequent consultations since. In terms of the access legislation the All Wales Rights of Way Officers (ADEPT) group had also submitted a number of technical points (50) that required amendment and these had recently been discussed and resubmitted by the group.

PR would report back to the LAF's on how those deliberations were going as their conclusions could have significant affects in Wales in relation to the management of PRoW in the future.

The WG Officers had confirmed that they do have devolved powers in Wales to deal with these issues.

HP added that the application process had officially closed as of last Friday but that the farming unions were not happy that they had been excluded from this process. The Minister therefore had extended this to consider their views on the membership criteria for the membership application process.

PR confirmed that he had seen a copy of the letter sent by the unions. It was disappointing that they had been left out of this process.

i) Access to Inland Water Advisory group

PR informed the members that the WG had decided to allocate the discussion for access to inland water in Wales to the National Access Forum (NAF) sub group. It was disappointing that this issue had not been included in the main access reform discussions (above as item 1) and the group and timeframe were independent of those other deliberations.

However, there was a recognition that the current status quo – i.e. that no statutory rights exist for access to inland water in England & Wales for recreation was not working and also recognises that there is continual friction between the different stakeholder groups.

WG are looking for practical solutions and have indicated that for now they are not minded to initiate legislation but have not ruled this out if practical workable solutions cannot be found. The timeline for this is March 2021.

He was also on this panel along with the Access Officer from Brecon Beacons NP.

PR would report back to the LAFs as things progressed.

He added that the group was not tasked with finding a legislative approach to this just to recommend practical solutions. If there were no workable solutions then they have not ruled out legalisation and this was an important point.

Previous recommendations for access to water had recommended a number of main points – two of these included having adequate water levels at all times and conservation assessments. If the Glaslyn was a candidate at any time then these tests would have to be applied particularly as the lower estuary section was important for wintering bird populations. Any egress point on the river as an example would have to be higher up. It is not dissimilar to many other river/sea confluences.

The previous recommendations made by the LAF and the NP's had also highlighted the need for reduced liability for landowners for access to water in a similar way to CRoW reduced liability but for bridges, weirs, leats and spillways etc.

He would report back to the LAF when new information was available.

ii) Highways Act – section 31/25 proposals for improving the processes for modifications around farmyards.

PR mentioned that this short paper was one that he had originally submitted to the Rights of Way group and others in 2013 and that at the time this was only partially supported. However, this has now been included in the recommendations for the Access Reform technical group.

This paper recommends a process that can address issues around PRoW that run through busy farmyards when an alternative line can be made to avoid all the

inherent dangers of large machinery and stock. This is a simple mechanism that could provide alternatives for the future and assist land owners and users alike.

The current mechanisms are bureaucratic, prohibitively expensive and can be subject to legal (and sometimes spurious) challenge. Developing new mechanisms could be easier, far less expensive and would encourage landowners and others to come forward with ideas. However, he stressed that any changes must be 'mutually beneficial' to landowners and users and should not be exclusively beneficial to one party or another.

Another was that on proved successful after a trial period – for say 12 months then they could come to the LAF for formal approval and the Community Council then final process would be conclude where the legal line can be moved and the definitive map corrected to suit at minimal costs.

Agreed to support this paper.

8. Brynrcrug – Tywyn – Flood bank access improvement work.

PR explained (through slides) of the site that the route along the top of the flood embankment from Tywyn to Brynrcrug and was already a Public Right of Way (and was originally a part of the coastal path until the completion of the new bridge at Tonfannau). Having looked that this in some detail this route with some modest changes had the potential to be made into a 'Tramper' type trail between the two points. This would require a slightly widening of the existing gates and some modification of the access/egress in point in Brynrcrug.

This was not an expensive exercise and he thought that this would be significantly benefit disabled and less abled users as well pushchairs and the general public. He now needed to discuss this with GC Officers, Tywyn Council and Brynrcrug Community Council in the New Year to get their views and hopefully their support.

There was also the potential to return as a circuit along the existing cycle way between Brynrcrug and Tywyn. However, he had no funding for this at the moment.

PR also stated that they had also looked at a bird hide near the Broadwater end.

AE had already passed on the Tywyn Town Clerk contact details.

*HP was not sure which way around the route was in the translation T - B or B - T !!!
Ha.*

AE added that there were three other PRow linked to this section which may form useful linkages.

PR stated that he would look at those.

DC commented that the corner exist/access point in Brynchrug was a busy junction as was close to the road.

PR stated that he was aware of this but that it was possible to set back the entry point to make this a lot safer but he appreciated DC's observations.

9. Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan – review by Gwynedd Council.

WW at GC had indicated that a draft may appear hopefully early in the New Year. With this in mind PR would call the sub group together (a joint sub group made up of members of the Snowdonia LAF's and Arfon Dwyfor LAF) in Plas Tan Y Bwlch for a discussion once this paper had been made available to him. Members for this had been chosen previously.

10. Recommended items of next meeting

i) SNPA timeline

PR explained that this was an access timeline written originally by the Peak District National Park as a basic list of events relating to `access` from the Mountains Act & Kinder Scout and from 1951 onwards to the present day. PR thought this informative and interesting information so he had adapted this to create one for the SNP. Although this had taken longer than was first envisaged and required considerable research it had proved a worthwhile and interesting exercise.

This was now available on the SNP website for the public. It was also a useful tool for new staff particular those relating to access work and could also be useful and informative for LAF members to gain an insight into the origins of the access provisions within the SNP and how it has developed. He would bring this to the next meeting.

- ii) SNPA Recreation Strategy Review. Hopefully the draft could be brought to the March meeting.**
- iii) Bala Lake Railway update - if possible. PR would inquire.**
- iv) Warden Service restructure.**

11. Any Other business

a) Re-selection of new LAF members – timeframe and process.

PR explained that there was a formal paper going to the Authority on the 4th December. This was to begin the arrangements for a new round of LAF membership appointments. The application process would be advertised early in the New Year and a sub group of the Authority would go through the applications in March.

He hoped that many members would reapply as their experience and knowledge as

landowners, users and the disabilities representatives were important to the business of the LAF and the Authority. He would circulate the relevant application forms to the current members. Therefore next March's' meeting would be their last for this round of membership tenure. With any new members beginning in June next.

ML mentioned that she thought that possibly the advertising process required targeting towards a younger audience and should seek a better gender balance.

PR stated that the process did in the past and will again target those groups through social media as well as the more traditional vectors such as newspapers.

HP commented that it was important to note that that the LAF required a balanced membership between landowners and users and a representative from the disabilities sector but that it was up to the Authority panel to decide on the LAF membership.

b) Dates for next year's meetings

Agreed as:

10th March, 9th June, 15th September & 24th November.

c) LA mentioned that this years Barmouth Walking festival was now in its nineteenth year and that 2019 had gone well. There had been a big turnout with over two hundred people registering for the five hundred walks. With only three cancelled over the ten day period which was a great result. Next years dates were 19th – 29th of September.

HP thanked LA for this update and it was gratifying to know that this goes from strength to strength and had certainly put Barmouth on the walking map.

PR asked LA if he could pass on her details to a third party who were interested in arranging a walking type festival on the Welsh borders and they needed some advice.

LA stated that she had no objections to this. She added that next year they had received offers from the Celtic Rainforest and the Woodland Trust offering to lead walks as part of the programme which was encouraging.

ML added that if there were any coastal path section walks then the NRW may be able to assist with advertising this through their All Wales Coastal Path website.

LA commented that she would look at this aspect.

PR would pass on their details to ML

d) *EL asked if the SNP could look at the parking area in Cwm Orthin area in Ffestiniog.*

PR stated that he would look at this area but it was problematic and that there had been considerable antisocial and illegal off roading by motorcycles in the Cwm Orddin and the Moelwyn area for some time which was also difficult to manage. He would look into the car park issue.

12. Date for next meeting

10th March – venue to be advised.

HP took the opportunity to thank all members and officers for their contribution and support over the year and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

