Meeting note

Title of meeting:	National Access Forum for Wales Meeting No 80
Date of meeting:	4 March 2025
Time of meeting:	10:30-12:30
Present: (*= deputising for named representative)	**Members and named representatives:** Geraint Davies (NRW Chair), Ruth Rourke (IPROW) Deputy Chair, Carys Drew, NRW Secretary, Rosie Plummer NRW, Lesley Jones, NRW, Beverley Penney, OSS, Jont Bulbeck, NRW, Bill Purvis, NRW, Chris Mills Afonydd Cymru, John O'Connor Angling Cymru, Charles de Winton, CLA, Barry Andrews, Disabled Ramblers, Jen Newman, Dŵr Cymru, David Evans, Elan Valley, Teleri Fielden, FUW, Ian Mabberley LAFs, Rebecca Brough, Ramblers Cymru, Sarah Smith, WG, Fiona Clay-Poole, WLGA, Scott Ashworth, Defence Estates, Jonathan Hughes, NT, Phil Stone, Canoe Wales, Adrian Walls, CSS Wales, Dave Waterman, LARA, Anthony Richards, Wales National Parks, Simon Patton, Mountain Training Cymru, Eben Muse, BMC, Pam Bell, WoW, **Observers:** Kate Ashbrook, OSS, Angela Charlton, Ramblers Cymru, Matt Cloud, Pembrokeshire CC, Eifion Jones, Ceredigion CC, Gruff Owen, NRW, Rachel Parry, NRW, Ian Hughes, NRW, Michael Smith, NRW, *other observers attended but names are not recorded (on GDPR advice)* **Speakers:** Natalie Small, WG, Olivia Ragone, NT, Roz Owen, NRW
Apologies:	Helen Donnan (British Horse Society), Rachel Lewis-Davies (NFU), Steve Rayner (Wales Adventure Tourism Association),

1. Welcome and apologies.

Geraint Davies Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, apologies were noted.

Chair noted that this was his last meeting as his term as NRW Board member and Chair was coming to an end and he welcomed Lesley Jones, NRW Board to the meeting as the incoming Chair. Rosie Plummer, NRW Board is also coming to the end of her term and he thanked her for her contributions to the Forum.

Teleri Fielding was welcomed as a new representative for FUW.

2. Digital Map of Public Rights of Way

Natalie Small, Geographic analysist in Data and Geography Division, WG. The team is product owner for DataMapWales. The team is working closely with the Designated Landscapes and Countryside Access team in WG who are leading this project.

Natalie set out the background and timeline for how the work had developed since the initial WG proposal in 2015. In 2024 a Digital Map Working Group (DMWG) was formed to start investigating this, the first step was to gather existing PROW data, to begin producing a digital working copy of the PROW across Wales.

DMWG has been working with various stakeholders including DataMapWales, LAs and NPAs to begin unifying PROW data on DataMapWales.

DataMapWales is a recognised geospatial data source for public sector data in Wales. The platform enables Welsh public authorities to collaborate and share data with each other and the public. Natalie demonstrated how to navigate the main components of DataMapWales.

She explained that it is the licensing that governs what can be seen, so on the public facing part of DataMapWales, all Open Government license data can be viewed without requiring a sign in. There is also restricted license data, which is available to public authorities and requires a user login. Sharing and use of restricted data is facilitated by permission groups on the platform.

For the digital map of public rights of way, she noted that the aim is to have a digital working copy of PROW for Wales on DataMapWales. This is in the first stage of the work and is exploratory. A proof of concept is being developed from the data received from the snap shots of local authorities data. In these early stages, the work will develop iteratively, in collaboration with the local authorities and National Parks. Later on this will include engagement with wider stakeholders. The ongoing collaboration has been really beneficial and important to the project.

The layer will be based on a simple schema, PROW classification of footpath, bridleway, restricted byway and byway open to all traffic. As this has been developed it will be shared with the local authorities and other parts of the public sector.

Currently working through the first stage of the project which involves bringing in the data from all the different authorities so far, and creating a proof of concept, to test and develop in collaboration. This involves collecting the data, to date received 22 out of 25 datasets. A mixture of different spatial data formats are being worked with. Once data has been received, this is followed up with a set of initial questions about the dataset, involving understanding more about the viewing scale, style, how it has been digitised and whether converted to Ordnance Survey positional accuracy improvement programme, and other information including what disclaimers should be included and licencing questions. All the data collected helped identify points to discuss with local authorities and national parks which were considered at the recent stakeholder events.

Having received the data, there's a need to process the data; start to identify the status and type categories for PROW and capture these into an index table or look up. The plan is to use this later on to standardise the variations in the terms, perform geometry validation and to feedback, transform to a different format so that it can be added into DataMapWales.

Lastly, presenting the data, when the data has been added to develop the proof of concept. As the status and type terminology varies between datasets, creating and testing a lookup table, this is still in progress. The initial proof of concept was demonstrated to local authorities and national parks at the stakeholder events, and contains 18 of the datasets. This generated a lot of discussion and this is being used to plan next steps.

The demonstration was given using a colour definition style and this received a lot of feedback so this is being changed. Since the event 4 more datasets have been provided and will be added when the project reconvenes at the end of March.

Natalie shared the proof of concept which had been stitched together to show the coverage of PROW across Wales showing the different categories. There will be also be standardisation of the attribution that sits behind the map to have consistent categories.

The next steps for the next 6months will be to add remaining data and plan the activities from the workshop feedback, further development and testing on the proof of concept layer, particularly focussing on the standardising of the attributes. The unified layer will be made available to planning authorities and this is planned for Easter. Planning authorities can then start looking at the layer on DataMapWales, view it and following a period of review the project aims to gather more feedback and engagement from them on this. Depending on the success of that, the project will then test update methods, so that the data can be updated, with the intention of working on this in the autumn. From autumn the project is then hoping to engage with wider stakeholders.

Discussion points:

- Question about whether data collection includes information about structures on PROW for the public to see? Noted that it is frustrating not to know where is accessible for mobility scooters.
- Natalie noted that at this stage, the data being collected doesn't include information about structures on PROW but that this could be considered further down the line.

- Question about whether there is any ambition to create a single digital highways record? Noted that at the moment there are several different highway records; definitive map and statement, List of Streets (record of highways maintainable at public expense, which should include PROW but doesn't always), the national and local street gazetteer. There are not only anomalies within Definitive map and statement but also between various records, which creates issues like not knowing where there are public rights. Suggested that there is a strong case to say that there is a need for a single record so that the record would include both PROW on the Definitive Map and Statement and other highways. Is there any ambition for WG to do that eventually?
- Sarah Smith, WG responded that there is no intention as yet, and any change to create one map will require legislative change, and that that this is some way off. Sarah clarified that the digital map is not the definitive map. Authorities do not have definitive map in finalised state as yet. This is the very first stage in what will be a very long project.
- It would be helpful for people to know the status of routes and surface, perhaps this could be included as a different layer.
- Comment to warmly welcome the work done, noting there are lots of opportunities for accessibly and surface etc. Question about plan for stakeholder consultations in the autumn and what sort of stakeholder groups, would the NAFW be involved in that? Suggesting that getting wide user type perspective would be really useful.
- Bill Somerfield, WG is leading the project but Sarah believed the intention is to have wider stakeholder engagement e.g. sharing with NAFW and consulting with user groups but dates for these would need to be confirmed.
- Noted that in the past NAFW has been a great resource. Noted that NAFW secretary also sits on the Digital Map Working Group and would continue to encourage engagement with the project.
- Suggestion that what is mapped, could this then link to the responsibilities and rights that the public have got for specific routes?
- Natalie responded that this could potentially be included further down the line, assuming the data exists and can be included, could feed this back to the group to consider.
- Question about gaps in the data and whether the authorities that have yet to provide can be encouraged to do so?
- Understand that for one NP area they have coverage from highways authorities and two authorities are engaging but it is a case of getting out of their systems and some concerns about sharing data relating to quality so working with those authorities to be able to include. Won't release the data until all authorities are happy with what is being shared on DataMapWales so are actively engaging with them to overcome that.

3. National Trust Paths & Trails Mapping Project

Olivia Ragone, GIS Data Officer (Paths), National Trust (NT) introduced the Paths and Trails Programme, with a vision to clearly map and provide a quality network of paths and trails that provide public benefit and inspire more users to access NT network and get active at NT properties. The idea is that operational teams will be able to confidently build

and maintain the network to meet expectations of visitors and be supported by clear guidance that is consistent across all properties. Consistency is a challenge across proprieties and different nations.

The Programme has been split into 4 separate workstreams:

- Create and maintain: Providing advice and support for consistent trail creation and maintenance at NT properties
- Understanding the asset: Gathering data about paths and trails network. Targeting where paths and trails are, how they are looked after and right level of investment needed. It will help provide correct asset allocation and support sustainable practices for nature and climate goals
- Waymarking and navigation: to give users confidence and a sense of safety in the outdoors, navigating wider onto countryside estate
- Digital: also want to give information about the network to enable users to make more informed decisions about what is suitable for them e.g. pushchair users, people with disabilities to give people information to enable them to make decisions themselves about their visits

Olivia noted that the challenge, in terms of understanding the asset, was that NT had no one central place for visitors to look at the path network and in looking at council data it was noted that permissive paths weren't included. NT wanted to improve the digital information offer and to improve consistency to be able to filter trails in accordance with user needs and help with route navigation. NT are seeking to enhance reputation as an outdoors provider, and to get an understanding of the quantity, quality and opportunities for connectivity and maintenance and to support property teams to make evidence based decisions.

Data capture started in 2022, and took 6 months and that was done in OpenStreetMap, this captured location and access permissions (foot, bike, horse and motor vehicle) for all paths on all properties. OpenStreetMap is publicly available, this means the public can amend the NT dataset. Whilst this presents challenges it was used because it gave a huge head start in terms of the mapping process. A monitoring tool was set up to enable rangers to verify any changes that were made to path network in their area. They also have an inspections App for ranger teams to do checks and look at maintenance needs.

After the initial round of data capture, some analysis was carried out and Olivia shared some top line results. There were found to be some 13,000km of paths on NT land. Looking at how this was split on properties, East Wales has one of the largest lengths (248km) but across regions it was otherwise quiet low in terms of offer so there are opportunities to expand. The ratio of definitive : permissive paths was 1:1.02 with some variation. This was quite different to initial estimates (3:1, definitive: permissive), but noted that this estimate was pre-covid and that members of the public were mapping the permissive paths out walking during this period so it was suggested that this had impacted results.

Analysis looked at how NT is serving different communities, availability to different transport and across all regions this was 70% on foot, 16% bicycle and 14% horses. Olivia

then shared a breakdown for regions. Analysis had also looked at sensitivity of sites that paths go through e.g. paths intersecting World Heritage Sites or Scheduled Monuments and whether routes were permissive or definitive and considerations around management. 34% were permissive and quite easy to move, should there be concern about foot erosion from archaeologists.

Olivia reviewed key stages to date and set out next steps including pilot testing and to develop data for other work streams and programmes. Pilot testing was carried out in 2024 and she shared detail of this which sought to understand the scale, scope, time, approach and resources required to capture physical attributes of trails and remove barriers to access. Engaging with rangers and with Open Data Institute with ambition to provide data in format that is 'grabbable' by other organisations so that can then be used in other Apps. This testing concluded that they would use Vespucci, an App to edit OpenStreetMap, to add physical trail attributes, also decided to train NT property teams to edit data themselves once the original data capture is complete, they can maintain it in future and upskill staff in GIS. Want to establish a governance process at properties, having trail owner in order to standardise arrangements.

Propose not to delete anything on OpenStreetMap that is verifiable on the ground and to want to establish a process for data sharing e.g. interactive maps and route navigation.

The project is focussing on easy walking trails and ones that are already being actively promoted, consideration for cyclists and equestrians (multi use trails) will be considered in future, if it avoids additional work. There will be additional rounds of data capture that will target cycling and equestrian use if possible. Want to include basic facilities information to complement other information already available such as Access Able Guides for toilet facilities.

Olivia then demonstrated on OpenStreetMap sharing what is intended to be included in the next round of data capture in terms of trail attributes and facilities that will be provided on their website, including bilingual information in Wales.

Next steps are to carry out a further 10 months of data capture to understand the assets, focussed on promoted walking trails. Looking to improve navigation and waymarking on site. Speaking to digital suppliers for the interactive maps on the NT website and have developed guidance, information and support to staff to create and maintain path data.

Discussion points:

- Welcome the ability to share with others including DataMapWales
- In relation to tenant farmers within the NT, layers of data that might help them be on board with NT aims. Olivia confirmed that data is openly available.
- Olivia confirmed that walking and mobility aids were considered for the walking trails and information such as narrowest widths and information about infrastructure would be included to inform users.
- Olivia confirmed that routes along tenanted land would be included in promotion. Point made in response that tenant should be made aware of that.

- Point welcoming the project and data being shared, question about whether lessons learnt from project can be shared with others e.g. protected landscapes also value for estate teams for charities that own land or visitor sites useful for asset maintenance. Olivia confirmed that NT are talking to national landscapes and have a steering group around data schema. OpenStreetMap is mapped in accordance to what's agreed by the community, there are some attributes which NT don't like the way they are included and are seeking to change. NT would like to interact with other organisations about the project.
- Comment that the work of NT on access works in wider context, e.g. National Trails, WCP, Local authority routes and NT contribute to these but don't always represent this information in on site interpretation, is this type of information included? Olivia noted that this wider network information is intended to be included in the maps that are provided on website, and need to develop understanding of this with property teams.
- Comment that NT is putting creative and thorough thinking into this area. How comprehensively will PROW be covered on NT estate? E.g. information for local communities to enjoy wider NT estate outside the pay barrier. Olivia confirmed that all PROW will be included, OpenStreetMap includes what is on the ground, including those that haven't necessarily been claimed.

4. People and Nature Survey: Headline results for access and recreation

Roz Owen, Team Leader Social Science and Policy Integration, Integrated Evidence Group, NRW

Presenting headline outdoor recreation and access evidence from the People and Nature Survey for Wales (PaNSW).

The PaNSW is a population level survey run in conjunction with Natural England and the People and Nature Survey for England, with a respondent base of 6,000 adults, making it representative of the adult population of Wales. It runs every two years (first year 2021-2022), the information being presented. The 2023-24 survey will be published in September 2025. The survey is very broad and includes far more than recreation and access. It is about how people in Wales use and understand the natural environment, how often they visit and what they do, how being in and using the natural environment can influence our health and wellbeing, it tracks changes over time and use of the natural environment for key population groups at a variety of scales. It also encompasses people's environmental attitudes and behaviours and the actions people take to protect the environment.

Noted that the 2021-22 survey period spans some of the lockdown and restriction periods set by UK and Welsh Government during the Covid-19 pandemic. As this is the baseline survey, don't yet know how much of an effect this has had on some of the answers people were giving. Roz noted that direct comparisons can't be made with previous surveys in Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey (finished in 2016) recreation module within the national survey of Wales (ended 2020) because of the changes in methods and questions.

The finding show that people in Wales enjoy spending time outdoors, overall, throughout the year, 247million visits were made to green and natural spaces in 2021/22 and over last year 74% people visited green and natural spaces at least once a week.

Roz then shared data results from 2021/22 survey which were for the visits taken in the preceding 14 days to the day people were questions.

14% of people are frequent visitors (10+ visits within 2 weeks), 51% are infrequent visitors, 21% hadn't visited at all in last 2 weeks.

Roz shared a closer look at the type of people that were visiting the outdoors and what influences the likelihood to visit. The people that were significantly more likely to make visits were people aged 40 and over, those with a car, those with a dog, those with children and those with an income over £40k, whilst people that self-identified as non-white, those without a university degree, those with an illness and those not in work were less likely to visit in the preceding 2 weeks.

The survey asked all respondents to think about their life since the covid-19 restrictions had begun in Wales, and Roz shared key findings about the types of people who found green spaces more important since the restrictions had begun for their wellbeing, who visited most often and for longer periods of time and also looked at some of the reported barriers.

Roz shared information about where people go within different types of green and natural space (e.g. urban parks and gardens, beaches, hill, mountain and moorland, inland water). Also found that visiting green and natural spaces is social thing to do with 38% of people visit with friends and family, 37% also have a dog(s), 2% part of organised group 26% solo visits. It is important to understand who people go with, because this should help think about how and who we communicate with.

Looking at how people are getting outside, 44% of people travelled less than a mile, overall 91% had travelled 10miles or less, having a car made no difference to distance travelled unless it was further than 10miles. Noted that this would be interesting to track over time as this may have been influenced by covid restrictions.

In terms of activity, people are likely to do more than one activity, but one of these will be considered their main activity. People's activity may drive their motivation to visit and will guide their perceptions of quality of experience. Roz shared a breakdown of the different activities. Then went on to share the things that had motivated them to go outdoors.

The survey also asked people that hadn't visited what their concerns were, and Roz shared these including 30% had no real overarching concern, 25% were concerned about lack of facilities, 21% were concerned about visiting after dark. 21% were concerned about catching covid. It is possible to address people's concerns e.g. tailoring facilities, campaigns etc.

Roz shared key messages coming out of the survey:

- **Importance of Green Spaces:** Green and natural spaces are highly valued in Wales for their contribution to physical health, mental wellbeing, and connection to nature**.**
- **Inequalities in Access:** Significant disparities exist in who uses and benefits from these spaces, with factors such as age, income, ethnicity, health and employment status playing a role**.**
- **Impact of Covid:** While the pandemic increased awareness of the importance of outdoor spaces, it also highlighted pre-existing barriers and created new ones, such as concerns about overcrowding.
- **Need for Improvement:** There is a need to improve facilities, safety, access, and address issues like litter and anti-social behaviour. It is important to create local green spaces that align with public expectations and can encourage more frequent use across demographics.
- **Targeted Messaging:** Understanding who uses green and natural spaces and who with helps the targeting of messages and information to encourage climate and nature positive behaviours**.**
- **Future Monitoring:** The PaNSW provides a crucial baseline, and future iterations will be vital for tracking trends and evaluating the impact of interventions**.**

The survey is run biennially, it is run as official statistics in development, working with Office of National Statistics and the official statistical regulator. This means there is a publication date at end of September, data will be available on NRW's website and link will be circulated.

Discussion points

- In terms of evaluating the impact of interventions and what the data might be used for, Roz responded that on a national scale she would hope this informs behaviour change programmes, help understand what facilities might be needed where and help open communication channels with users. Will also help targeting non-users, in order to encourage more people to use the outdoor more frequently. This is currently nationally representative scale, over time, the survey will become more useful at more local and smaller spatial scale.

Interest from members to see the slides and links to further information. This will be circulated to members.

5. Written contributions

Written contributions had been circulated and contributors were thanked and invited to highlight any points from their updates. Email contacts for contributors were included to enable members to follow up with any queries.

Sarah Smith, WG highlighted the update in relation to the 2026 cut-off date and the position set out in the written contribution. Also the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) optional access element where public access sits (number 17 access and engagement with the natural environment), the team has been developing work with the SFS team, this will be taken to the officials group and would like to come back to the NAFW with further details on this. Would like to consider setting up a further session for interested members.

Jonathan Hughes, NT Cymru, Olivia's team's work is part of the National Trust's new strategy, ending unequal access to places is one of the key themes, noting that there are disparities between those that enjoy the outdoors. There is also a drive to inspire people about nature. Wanted to share the strategy and members are welcome to come back to him with any queries.

Beverley Penney asked for an update on NRW changes as people would be interested to understand the changes and how they will affect the Access Team. She expressed compassion for those involved in difficult process, and can see from today the importance of the area of work to Wales across range of sectors. Hope that impacts of changes can be shared with NAFW and in due course that the team can be built up again.

Bill Purvis responded that this change programme is still in progress so hadn't been included as an update. The revised outdoor access and recreation element has been resolved, the team was affected by the change with a reduction in the advisor posts with two posts being removed. Currently looking at transitioning work, this reduction will have an impact on the service provided and it will be made clear the work that will need to be prioritised or stopped as a result of this reduction to comply with the steer from the organisation.

Rosie Plummer, added from the Board perspective, that the access team is valued and in the amount and span it achieves for a small team. It is a process ongoing, it is the challenge that many in public sector are faced with and NRW having to look hard at what key focus and strategic priorities need to be. Seeking to be innovative and energetic with constrained or reduced resources, look at ways to integrate better and innovate and use technology and skills of staff. Forum support and collaboration is valued and helps.

Charles de Winton advised that this would be his last meeting of NAFW, representing CLBA. Thanked secretariat for support. He had sat on the group for many years, and thanked members for their friendship and support..

Anthony Richards, Welsh National Parks also advised that he would be retiring and this would be his last meeting. He noted that NAFW is a great Forum, connecting members with NRW and WG.

The Chair thanked Charles and Anthony for their valued input, time and commitment to the NAFW over many years.

Lesley Jones, NRW Board and incoming Chair, joined NRW Board 18months ago. Look forward to working with the Forum. Added appreciation to the team, and widely across NRW, having been through difficult time with case for change.

Ruth Rourke, welcomed Lesley and look forward to working in her. In her role as Deputy Chair on behalf of members and secretariat she thanked Geraint for being a wonderful Chairman and Rosie as Board Representative for her contributions. Grateful for NRW's continued support for the Forum.

Rebecca Brough raised an example that highlighted the importance of access reform to streamline PROW processes, and asked whether there was any update on whether the reform work in this area is being progressed?

Sarah Smith, advised that as this requires primary legislation, it will fall to the next Senedd Government. WG officials will put requests in but nothing has been put forward by Ministers for legislation in next Senedd term as yet.

6. Closing remarks – Chair

Geraint as outgoing Chair, thanked all members, he has really enjoyed Chairing the Forum and getting to know members, there has been a really balanced approach and discussions. Presentations and information shared make it an interesting Forum, there is always a wealth of experience and developing thinking through it. He encouraged members to keep working to have their voices heard for their organisations.

Thanked the team supporting the Forum and all others involved really valued members of NRW, he thanked Ruth as Deputy for her time and stepping in to Chair meetings, and supporting throughout his term as Chair, and thanked Rosie for her contributions as Board representative.

Date of next meeting 1 July 2025 online.