

Meeting note

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| Title of meeting | National Access Forum for Wales meeting 68 | |
| Date of meeting | 16 March 2021 | |
| Time of meeting | 10:30 – 13:00 | |
| Present: | Howard Davies (NRW Chair), Chris Mills (Afonydd Cymru), Ian Doyle (Angling Trust), Mark Weston (BHS), Elfyn Jones (BMC/WEL), David Morgan (Canal and Rivers Trust), Phil Stone (CW), Charles de Winton (CLA), Dr Ken Addison (CPRW), Adrian Walls (CSS Wales – PROW), Rachel Evans (CA), Gwenda Owen (Cycling UK), Scott Ashworth (Defence Estates), Arthur Lee (Disabled Ramblers), David Evans (Elan Valley Trust), Bernard Griffiths (FUW), Ruth Rourke (IPROW Deputy Chair), John Morgan (LAFs), Dave Waterman (LARA), Jonathan Hughes (NT), Rachel Lewis-Davies (NFU), Beverley Penney (OSS), Rebecca Brough (Ramblers Cymru), Gerwyn Owen (RYA), Steve Rayner (WATO), Peter Rutherford (Welsh National Parks), Matthew Williams (WSA), Simon Pickering (WG), Alison Roberts (NRW) Joe Roberts (NRW) Ruth Jenkins (NRW) Helen Pye (SNPA – presenter), Carys Drew & Jayne Carter (NRW Secretariat), Ann Llwyd (Translator), | |
| Apologies | Neil Buffery (British Driving Society), Stuart France (CCC), Mark Davies (Dwr Cymru), Steven Morgan (Sports Wales), Eni Hansen-Magnusson (Sustrans), Kerry Thatcher (Visit Wales), Ben Sears (WLGA) | |
| Observers | Graham Taylor (Powys LAF Chair), Ian Mabberley (BBNPA LAF) Juliet Michael (NRW), Jont Bulbeck (NRW), Dave MacCallum (NRW) | |
| Item number | Item | Action |

Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 68th NAFW meeting, and set out arrangements for managing the online meeting.

At the last meeting it had been agreed that this meeting would focus on the impact of the covid pandemic, what this has meant for access, from users, providers and managers. The Chair set out the planned agenda which had been structured to take that forward.

1. The Chair introduced and welcomed Helen Pye who is Head of Engagement at Snowdonia National Park Authority, a Board member of Europarc Atlantic Isles, a beef farmer and previously a warden at Brecon Beacons National Park Authority who had been invited to share her perspective on the pandemic.

The Chair welcomed new representative for LARA Dave Waterman, and observers to the meeting. The attendance list had been circulated in advance and would be updated in the meeting note.

Carys set out and tested simultaneous translation provision.

Actions and Matters Arising

The following actions from the last meeting were confirmed as completed:

2. Action 67.1 Chair/Secretariat to include covid- 19 pandemic lessons and opportunities as substantive item on next agenda.

Action 67.2 Agreed that due to limited time, questions not answered during the meeting would be responded to after the event and responses circulated. Carys to action

Action 67.3 Carys Drew to advise RYA of successful application and update membership list.

Covid 19: Lessons Learnt on Visitor Management in Snowdonia

Helen Pye, Head of Engagement, Snowdonia National Park Authority

Helen said that it had been useful to reflect on the last year, and whilst we are still in pandemic and heading out of it there is a big opportunity to learn from experiences in the process, she shared the perspective from Snowdonia national park and recognised that this was not necessarily everyone's perspective.

Reflecting on the timeline and when things started; the weekend of March 20th last year now referred to as 'Snowdon-gate' was the busiest weekend they had ever seen, and in the context of covid was really concerning for local communities, and had the impact of real fear on people living locally.

3. That weekend was critical in shaping what happened in next few weeks in Snowdonia and wider afield. With 23 March and lockdown, moving a pace in Snowdonia, closure of access land implemented 27th March. This was in response to the public and local communities that something needed to be done in response to the pandemic and concern about how the virus spread. People were genuinely scared and started to see people taking matters into their own hands which she noted is what happens when communities feel that something needs to be done but the authorities aren't doing it.

Helen considered that the response in Wales in terms of access land was the right thing at the time as it sent a very strong message across the UK that for the time being the countryside was closed. A real challenge in that decision was the impact of closing access land on the doorstep for people living in the national park. In the end, the conclusion was to close the honey pot sites using visitor monitoring data to identify which areas would potentially be busiest, and therefore susceptible to transferring covid.

To bring the closure into effect, 200 signs were printed overnight and wardens putting these on site. The UK attention to those closures was intrinsic in making clear people shouldn't be travelling. Helen noted that In hindsight it is important to reflect and consider what would have been done differently and important to acknowledge.

In terms of making decisions, it is important to make them quickly but be able prepare to adapt them quickly too. Whilst only 11% of access in the national park was closed, some closures created challenges and frustration for some local communities. Although it wasn't the intention, it therefore felt like the message was that national park was closed for those local people too. If it would have been possible to adapt quicker and adapt those boundaries that would have been great.

When things started opening up, there was a clear intention to make sure that people felt welcome back but there were real challenges with ongoing concern in local communities about people coming back.

Another lesson from access closures really highlighted people value access to the outdoors and countryside is incredibly important, more important now than ever before also highlighted value people living in the national park place on being able to access open spaces.

Concern and fear that closure of access was part of wider idea of restricting people's freedoms, but noted that from NPA perspective this was always temporary to send a clear message following the weekend events.

Problems on steroids: Helen noted that all issues seen had been seen before, but were significantly multiplied in the context of covid e.g. fly camping, capacity of communities.

Capacity and volume of visitors was immense once the national park and other areas opened again and that it had never seen a busier time. This prompts the need to think into the future, about what is too much capacity and too many visitors and how to manage that. Considering over capacity issues, long-term there is a need to consider how to how Wales does sustainable tourism.

Important to consider that more visitors cost more money and there is a need to manage the impact of those visitors. If we work to encourage more visitors to enjoy the countryside, this needs to be matched with funding. This raises questions around if more funding is needed and how much is needed and how is it funded? Tourism tax, is used widely in Europe, logical in the more visitors the more money goes into the local area goes to invest in infrastructure to should be at forefront of thinking in Wales.

Wales, as a small country, has the ability to make changes overnight and is well connected. If we want something to

happen it can happen, Wales could lead the way in approach to sustainable tourism.

Decision making: Going through decision making processes through the pandemic has also provided lessons and ways to improve. In public sector, there can be a struggle to make decisions because of fear of failure, don't implement things or take too long taking about things or make things too big to happen. Lessons around the ability to make a decision, implement it and adapt it if it doesn't work so suggestions that there is merit in piloting and trying things out and adapting rather than trying to get things perfect before implementing. Helen shared the example of parking and traffic problems at Pen y Pass example that had been considered previously as part of transport review and was put able to be put in place quickly and adapted to resolve the problem during the pandemic. parking problems in one of main car parks, problems for traffic.

Power of consistent messaging – approach to communication North Wales has forced everyone to pull together and say same thing. Helen noted that it is incredibly powerful when this happens and has huge impact.

When messages are different, it makes things incredibly challenging e.g. expected to have differences between Wales and England in rules coming into Easter which will present the national park with big challenges in managing those messages and not coming across as anti-visitor.

Not just what you do but what you say. The national park are putting equal amount of resource into what happens on the ground as to how they communicate. Communication has a huge impact and she shared the picture of the digital signs on the A55 when access was closed.

Public sentiment Helen said that it is worth considering public sentiment in communicating what we want people to do. How people respond now to messages relating to covid are different now to how they responded in April last year. She felt that the initial support for following the rules has changed or eroded gradually since November (supportive of following the rules) and that anything to do with rules, is now often responded to negatively. There's a need to consider a different way of doing things. Sentiment of public is important in framing what we do and how we do it to influence behaviour.

Important for public sector to be responsive to public sentiment and show this responsiveness.

A positive to come through covid is the volume of people volunteering to help collect litter, showing their love of the national park, protected landscapes and the countryside and want to help.

Advantages of virtual world: a positive to have to work online was that to some degree they were more accessible, getting greater engagement through virtual ways of doing things. Traditional means of consultation can't reach everyone and there was ability to put things in place quickly.

Chair apologised that translation system didn't work, and noted that despite efforts behind scenes to get this working weren't able to run presentation in way intended.

Question and Answer:

Question: Do NPA have emergency plans in place for closures that were appropriate for covid?

Answer: National park authority had disaster recovery plans in place which were used as basis for managing processes through the pandemic. These plans were specific to a pandemic. A lot of learning as things progressed to what worked and didn't, swiftly switched to getting system of getting office-based staff had to get working remotely. Having spent the winter season preparing for spring they will reflect further on learning on these plans.

Question: Concern that language has been negative towards visitors, needing to protect park from people and problems everywhere. Noted that it is positive and healthy for people to be coming to the countryside. There is a need for proper investment in infrastructure rather than putting blame on visitors to want to enjoy, there should be an emphasis to enjoy sustainably and safely.

Answer: There is a fine balance in use of language in messages and the national park has received comments from both sides with some people considering messages are too negative towards visitors or not strong enough.

There is a change in sentiment and what works this season, with messaging focussed on planning ahead. Reviewing the issues that caused problems last year, a lot of these were a result of people not planning e.g. fly

camping and a result of lack of knowledge and lack of planning ahead. All NPAs will be pushing messages of planning ahead and more positive and a change of tone to reflect that people tired of being told what to do.

Last year highlighted that tourism should be tourism by consent and there need to think about the communities that live in national parks. Rather than something that is forced upon communities, and think about the communities as a whole. The gap in visitors over the summer increased feelings that there is too much tourism and whilst infrastructure investment is needed it will never be enough if the volume of tourism is 'too much'.

Question: Did people think the park authority were exploiting when things were closed? How did the park manage its iconic status and hot spots compared with the rest of the national park?

Answer: Trying to get the balance right is a challenge, important that community is on board and answering their challenges. For NPA it was about dealing with the challenges that were there rather than a hidden agenda

Hot spot management is complex. Important not to think the simple solution is to divert people elsewhere away from hotspots. If infrastructure and paths aren't as robust elsewhere this leads to issues (erosion, parking) elsewhere. Opportunities to discover what makes areas special where communities that would like to see more visitors.

Question: With a busy summer expected, what decisions do we need to make now that will support people managing the countryside and those visiting the countryside?

Answer: Probably the decisions that need to be made in advance have been made over last few months. Next few months will be dealing with challenges that additional pressures put on the countryside. A real challenge that Wales needs to think about, and relates to legislation, is fly camping (differentiated from wild camping). With a new audience being seen, last year saw a 350% increase in 18-24 group coming to the countryside, a lot not on high income so look at camping for accommodation. It is expected that fly camping will be a real challenge this year and Wales needs to think about and how this is approached in the mid and long-term.

Chair thanked Helen on behalf of the Forum for her insight and experience highlighting the detail and challenges.

Simon Pickering noted that the Visit Wales' upcoming campaigns will be based around '[Addo](#)' pledge which seeks to combine positive images of people enjoying countryside with messages about respecting countryside.

Further questions answered in the chat function after the item:

Question: Do we understand enough about this new sector of the population who have been motivated by the covid restrictions/lifting to enjoy the outdoors - this is new activity for many so do they know how to plan ahead? Where to find out about where they can go? What they can do? Does the sector need to develop new ways to reach them, help them make good choices for themselves, local communities and the environment?

Answer: Quite a bit of research been carried out by National Parks and AONB's last year which we've been sharing with each other. Our comms this year is planned around this, so in the shaping messaging but also how we engage with these audience i.e. lots of younger audiences are on Instagram/TikTok etc so that's where we need to be engaging with them, and a way that's interesting to them.

Visit Wales has arranged regular collaborative messaging meetings with countryside manager communicators across Wales - these were incredibly useful last year and are sure to be so this year as well. It will allow us to adapt and learn as we go on.

Question: Can you please also include respect for landowners, and emphasise the countryside code... so litter is picked up and gates shut, dogs under control etc.

Answer: that's certainly something that we're weaving into our messaging (in an engaging way!) and is also part of the Addo campaign.

Question: how does the park intend to capitalise on the lessons learnt going forward?

Answer: Huge amount of work being going on behind the scenes over the winter, from communications campaigns to volunteering and working more closely with Local Authorities on talking things like Fly Camping and Parking, with huge support from Welsh Government teams. We're

sending an update out next week on this via our e-newsletter (which you can sign up to on our website)

Question: A question for Simon Pickering re Access Reform: when will the interim documents be published? We were led to expect them in February but they haven't yet appeared on the gov.wales website. Specifically, the wider user stakeholder community still hasn't seen the Expert Group 1 Option Selection Report.

Answer: Documents/reports are being translated and formatted for accessibility at the moment. Should be on the WG website shortly.

Members shared experiences – based on covid 19 written contributions

The Chair thanked members for the written contributions to date and noted that there had been some response from members in written contributions. He invited members to have open discussion based on these and particularly welcomed feedback and insight into landowning community and thoughts from those representing farmers and landowners who hadn't submitted written contributions.

Discussion

Rachel Lewis-Davies started by saying that through experience of covid public access and recreation was one of the key issues that came to farming union as membership organisations. Linking to some of the issues identified in presentation, members witnessed increase levels of use, concern about distances that some people appeared to be travelling to get to public access. High levels of anxiety particularly in farming families where family members were vulnerable at risk to covid and concerns where PROW go through farmyard. Early in first lockdown, farming unions were relaying concerns to WG and NRW, and providing weekly briefings to members and signage.

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It has focussed people's minds on what they enjoy, and access to the countryside. What has become clear those people becoming access users for the first time may not be aware of the rights and responsibilities that go along with that which leads to issues e.g. litter, fly camping. Overall it has demonstrated lack of flexibility in current system and a key question for future how lessons from covid can be reflected on work underway with the access reform group, keen to see lessons learnt are properly reflected in future proposals.

Chair noted that part of discussion will be how we take this forward, what we do as an access forum, gather information and hold it one place and put it to good use and would discuss in the next item.

Alison Roberts was invited to highlight points from her written contribution on Countryside Code refresh, predominantly led initially by NE. NRW had collaborated with NE to ensure wording correct and relevant for the type of use of the countryside expected going forward. Currently going through level of sign off, no real significant changes

to short code, additions and any changes highlighted in yellow in written contribution, there were more changes in the long code around positivity of language and make clearer and less wordy and easier to use. Anticipated launch of revised code is 22nd March, once signed off NRW plans to make additional updates to its own countryside code resources, focussing on own website etc, and to ensure links are shared widely so partners have sight of new messaging in time for lifting of restrictions and also in step with partners in England, and to also ensure bilingual updates in time. Alison is working closely with communications unit who are exploring options for sharing design work with NE. The code and information will be shared through the Forum and members.

Simon Pickering was invited to comment on access reform and lessons, WG recognise and appreciate the pressure and hard work. Main focus of the access reform work has been the access reform advisory group, as independent groups putting together thoughts and expertise in potential areas of future report. NRW is coordinating the final report due in to Minister shortly. Covid experience has shaped the process already. Most obviously through the cross-cutting theme work, whilst this was always intention that there would be cross cutting themes coming out and responsible recreation, this has developed on back of process through covid. In a few months time there will be a new Government will have to wait and see what comes out of that. Connections have started to be made and likely to be picked up going forward.

Simon highlighted the Addo campaign, overarching visit Wales campaign for all their promotion is around respecting sustainable tourism and messages that tie very closely to countryside code and deals with urban areas as well. About to launch Addo campaign element about positive engagement in the countryside with positive messages around respect and responsibility. That will start to come out in next week or so.

Break

During the break phone line for translation service was changed and confirmed as working. Returning from the break members were encouraged to speak in Welsh or English.

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5. Members shared experiences – based on Covid 19 based written contribution

Chair reminded members that a compilation of written contributions is a valuable resource and encouraged further written contributions. An additional two weeks were provided for a final deadline for members to share best thinking on impacts of covid.

Action 68.1 Members to provide written contributions by 30 March

All

Chair explained that the purpose of this item is to follow on from impact discussions, and to look ahead based on what we can do as a Forum.

Reflecting on his experience of working in England as well as Wales, the Chair noted that the situation in Wales and having the NAFW is special. Whilst there are always potential tensions in bringing a large group of people together with an interest in a subject which may be contradictory, he considered that the NAFW brings together a really good group of people around the table.

Bearing in mind Helen's presentation, experience elsewhere and that we are now coming out of lockdown,

The Chair posed the questions:

- If we were to look back on this time and agree that the Forum responded in exactly the right way and did exactly the right thing – what would that actually look like?
- Do we have a greater role in responding to the pressures that have arisen as a result of this pandemic in relation to access. Do we need to put something down on paper or do something more concrete?
- Is there anything more that the Forum should do?

Helen Pye had set scene for agility and pilots and we know that the access reform programme is ongoing. Chair then invited thoughts on next steps and what we might do as a forum.

Discussion

Rebecca Brough said that what was missing during initial stages of pandemic that the Forum didn't come together to touch base about what was going on but was aware that there was NE led forum to keep people on board that brought stakeholders together. A lot of tensions might have

helped to come together. Felt that this resulted in stakeholders going into own corners rather than working together. She shared an example of negative publicity after misleading publication of group of rambles taken at different time of year and was widely publicised. A lot of tensions arose and would have been good to get access sector together to calm these.

A suggested solution to have a more flexible way to discuss outside of meetings and have stakeholder engagement rather than formal structured meetings every 3 months which is a long time between meetings. Possibly a more regular informal meeting.

Comment in chat: There's the potential for the NAFW to meet on an ad hoc basis -such as arose with covid. Members can propose that such a meeting where they feel a situation is important and the Forum needs to discuss it.

Adrian Walls suggested that through covid the interface had been weak between stakeholder user community. Through the process rights of way staff have heard a lot from local residents and have been drawn in to deal with pressures. NAFW can provide a useful role in trying to pull together combination of aspiration of user community and landowning community.

Peter Rutherford suggested NAFW should be champions of good practice and sustainable practices in terms of access management in Wales. Should be supporting countryside code messages and respect for the environment. Ideal people to do this at the national level, whilst discussed in LAFs NAFW has a wider remit. A lot of people rediscovered their networks and CROW access land and value this greatly. It is important for the health and wellbeing agenda and there's a need to build on what followed locked down.

Solutions to consider how we would effectively share good practice, have a more joined up pro network across boundaries, fill missing links which is currently hard with bureaucracy to tie links together. Hopefully ARAG will help and have necessary legislation, also need to consider all-accessible routes.

John Morgan when it comes to local issues, authorities should have their LAF which many local authorities rely on for bounce back information and suggested reappointment of LAF.

Charles de Winton said the important themes were raised themes around respect for people's property and pleased to hear that WG are taking this on board with publicity campaign. Careful management and messaging is important. Role of NAFW, doing things slightly differently in Wales with ARAG process, issue in messaging clearly demonstrated rules in Wales may be different to England issue in unlevel unlocking, rules may change but may not be familiar with people not living in Wales. Messages need to be clear to people visiting Wales and the system needs to be in place to publicise the new rules further afield than Wales. Also clear that members that live on urban fringe where they can go is a new experience have just discovered important, getting message over that there are behaviours expected and important to use social media to promote messaging.

Chair: What is NRW leadership role, how are we working across border with NE and other tourism agencies.

Ruth Jenkins said that it is clear NRW has a role, benefits that come from people accessing outdoors and being close to nature has wider benefits for NRW in delivering as part of sustainable natural resource management of which sustainable tourism and visitor management is part. The more value placed on enjoyment of the outdoors people better understand the opportunities that they have in contributing to a more sustainable Wales.

NRW and the Forum have roles to support the cultural and behavioural aspects to support new visitors to the outdoors to increase awareness and understanding of acceptable behaviour in the outdoors.

NRW has a number of roles including to support Forum, manages a lot of land in Wales including the access on that land, during the past year have come together with other managers to support decision making and provide a national perspective and help others to collectively make decisions about access managed through heat of the pandemic.

With other agencies there is a big role in collaboration and key principles in communications around managing access. There is an opportunity to support the Forum if there is a wider ambition of what the Forum could do going forward through into recovery and managing future access issues.

Joe Roberts reflected that there is a unique situation with communication now, the Visit Wales Addo campaign represents a change in relationship work they are now doing to integrate with responsible recreation messages with countryside code is exceptionally good and far reaching. VW are bringing to bear their skills to communicate to communities outside of Wales, in a way not be able to before done before so these are really positive developments.

Some good communication through the process, Leadership Team Dominic Driver working on land management has kept communication with land manager bodies. Already flagged wider communication going from all representatives would be really positive. When we talk about responsible recreation messages, there is a tendency to clump them together and the code covers broad range of issues. For the Forum it would be good draw out some issues, if we have a way to prioritise our key messages, then use behavioural insights and use that to focus on areas where we have most issue, that collaboration and collective work could take things further to enable strategic focus on areas most needed to be addressed.

Chair noted that he had seen changes in NRW bringing in social scientists in order to help with discussion to help with cultural and behavioural sides of access that are worth focusing on.

Chair summarised some of the points starting to form how the forum could take things forward:

- Leadership and championing
- Join up around agencies working across England and Wales, e.g. countryside code
- External communications
- Internal comms as a network to be fleet of foot (without necessity for formal NAFW meeting) Suggest being fleet of foot and less cumbersome mechanism for working as a Forum.
- Emphasis on without behavioural and cultural aspects and change,
- Priority key messages

Chair invited Steve Rayner following his written contribution to share thoughts on impact of covid on business, particularly adventure tourism businesses, and how they have survived over last year and what the future looks like for them.

Steve Rayner noted that the last year had been a disaster for activity providers with everything shutting down last March, opened up briefly in July at end of season, at that time providing support for different clientele - lots of small family groups - which was a lifeline for 2-3 months that kept some going. Winter season very quiet, some of the outdoor education centres in Wales have closed throughout the last year. Won't know full impact of how many of the smaller providers will have survived when they start operating again, current frustration is not having a clear roadmap for getting these businesses going again, lack of planning and forecast. Individual members of staff not getting out as much and as such there may be skill-fade of staff unable to go in the outdoors, throughput of trainers not happening, he said that 2021 will be a tough year for providers.

There have been lots of knock on impact on commercial sector that perhaps aren't taken into account in terms of commercial use. Closures in BBNPA were affecting providers not being able to access the outdoors whilst WG travel restrictions were lifted.

Role for Forum was to keep the sector in people's minds, important part of the jigsaw of everyone making decisions recognise public health has to come first but note the knock on effect on certain sectors.

Elfyn Jones noted that BBNPA had now lifted access land closures and update is on their website. Key message with outdoor centres, a lot of the issues talked about is around behaviours, massive influx from urban background or outlook. People coming into countryside will get their first experience at outdoor centres and they had been supportive of save outdoor centre campaign. Important role of these centres in educating young people before they go to countryside on their own to give them behaviour skills not only activity skills, these closures are not a new problem but massive underfunding with centres closing over last 5-10 years which shows the problem of education and behaviour.

Chair noted not just provision of countryside for people coming from urban areas but also role in providing green space within urban areas.

Adrian Walls suggested some trends across the country in terms of illegal off-road motorised use as set out in his written update. West coast of Wales seems to have seen a dissipation of use, east side of Wales increased use. Motorbikes can't travel to mid Wales, explosion of activity

in some areas. Have seen an increase in illegal motorised use some of this may be local illegal use seems to also be influx from England.

Gwenda Owen noted that unintended consequences of closure of trail centres and restrictions on travel, had seen an increase in trail building and increased use of mountain biking seen in south east Wales. More damage seen to bridleway network due to wet weather through the winter.

Peter R some tracks built on private property without landowner consent, under occupiers liability they might end up being responsible.

Action 68.1: Members to submit written contributions.

Chair noted the points to considering the way forward for the Forum and to keep mindful of keeping sector alive in terms of green recovery, this will probably get more challenging over course of next year as fewer people travel abroad and more people stay in UK.

Further comments in chat function:

- How do we capture, collate and learn from the lessons of last year and those that will emerge this year - is NAFW the body to oversee development of a national understanding that will help ensure outdoor recreation and tourism is fit for purpose into the future?
- There's the potential for the NAFW to meet on an ad hoc basis -such as arose with Covid. Members can propose that such a meeting where they feel a situation is important and the Forum needs to discuss it.
- It is clear going forward that hopefully those who have found the benefits of accessing the great outdoors will continue to do so and it would be good if some of the extra pressures that this puts on landowners could be addressed by the successor of the CAP scheme
- How we are linking as a forum with the Green Recovery work being taken forward by different part of Welsh Government.
- Benefits of Great Outdoors / NAFW's role: how do we join-up at national / government level the topic of recreation which is currently addressed in various forums e.g. Access, Tourism, Sport and no doubt many others -where does NAFW fit?
- It was hoped by many of us that there would be solid options in the CAP successor for access opportunities for public good. The White Paper doesn't show anything with regard to access and public good.

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- Disappointingly, the Agriculture white paper shows no intent to make access part of the National Minimum standards - still no cross compliance to help deal with access problems on private land
 - Consultation on Agriculture (Wales) Bill is open until 26/3/21. Would encourage all to submit their views. See: <https://gov.wales/agriculture-wales-bill>
 - Importance of consistent messages and signage that can be branded for local use but with consistent messages when dealing with a national crisis such as covid.
 - While reflecting back on decisions taken and actions taken during last year are important – it is clear now that we have more information and knowledge about this pandemic and its method of spread. People need to be outdoors and risk of transmission of virus outdoors is negligible. A lot of the fears of local communities of contracting covid from countryside users were overplayed by politicians and led to unnecessary conflict between countryside users and landowners and local communities. The issue of greater numbers using the countryside and the need to accommodate, manage and support this is a massive issue that needs to be supported by education at least as much as by enforcement
 - When investment in access is mentioned, people think instinctively about infrastructure. We need investment in people to manage access e.g. wardens as the access problems encountered on private land are very different to those in National Parks
 - There is another part of this Covid picture which is also about the quality of the outdoors in more urban and peri-urban areas. As well as Rural Wales, nature based solutions in urban areas can bring the same multiple benefits for people. The pandemic has demonstrated the lack of equality in some places and we need to understand more about the lack of open green space on these communities. Quality urban/peri-urban greenspace can provide urban populations with alternative to travelling further afield
 - How is Wales capturing evidence being gathered within separate organisations/sectors to build the national understanding?
 - As Helen Pye said, increased numbers of people engaged in a wider range of activities in more places need resources to protect recreation opportunities for health and well-being, outdoor tourism and the environment - is this being recognised? Is there the evidence to build the case for resources ?
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- Last summer Breacon Beacons NPA worked with NRW providing 'access ambassadors' in the Waterfall area, posts taken up by out-of-work outdoor providers, feedback was that their local knowledge and people skills averted many potential issues
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Written Contributions

Mark Weston: Shared some BHS initiatives that have just happened to share with members. Noted the horse incidents app just issued, equestrians to log details of incidents, shared information about the accidents reported as part of Deadslow campaign. Making representations in relation to Active Travel schemes to ensure horseriders aren't excluded or have effect of creating a barrier.

2026 would be useful if WG could give some confirmation that cut-off date will not be implemented in Wales, researchers are continuing to carryout research and submit applications although intention has been given by WG that it will not be implemented, but it remains on the statue books.

Ride out campaign – hope that covid restrictions will enable rides which raises valuable funds to plough back into route improvements.

6. Adrian Walls noted that a number of local authorities have seen increase in path order applications, work burden on authorities. Impact of covid in terms of map order notices and 3 housing estates on hold as diversion orders on hold. Funding has become available, but authorities don't have staff levels needed to go out and deliver work.

Simon Pickering made the Forum aware of funding that is now available following budget approval. Capital Funding is available under the Access Improvement Grant (AIG). Funding to the Wales Coast Path will increase by around 10% next year to keep pace with increased costs and improvement efforts, to fund work around biodiversity improvements and there is also larger funding pot for National Trails.

Rebecca Brough Welcome infrastructure funding but also hear local authorities issues around need for revenue funding, is there a way to have green jobs and upskill.

Gwenda Owen: Not just this sector but everywhere, LAs struggle to deliver because they don't have the funding. Bringing departments together, query whether we fund less

Comments in chat function:

Adrian Walls: I would particularly like to thank the WG for the AIG it has been a life-line to all authorities to deliver improvements

Ruth Jenkins: Staff resource to manage short term available money is always an issue for NRW too, but it is possible to capitalise staff time for spending capital Funding.

Simon Pickering noted that obtaining revenue funding is more challenging, easier to access capital, continue to make the case for funding. G have been relatively successful working with national parks and have additional funding in recognition of extra work that needs to be done to respond to immediate issues and sustainable tourism more generally. Working with NRW in relation to green recovery, access projects have featured well. Undoubtedly more that can be done.

Chair noted that regardless of funding, access to those people making the decisions is easier in Wales.

Forward Look & dates of next meetings

7. Proposed date of next meeting 6th July 2021
- Members to advise if there are any issues
-