

Meeting note

Title of meeting: National Access Forum for Wales meeting 71

Date of meeting: 15th March 2022

Time of meeting: 10:30 – 13:00

Present:

Geraint Davies (Chair), Ruth Rourke (IPROW, Deputy Chair), Rosie Plummer (NRW Board member), Elfyn Jones (BMC/WEL), Mark Weston (BHS), John Cuthbertson (Disabled Ramblers), Rachel Lewis-Davies (NFU), Kate Ashbrook (OSS), Phil Stone (CW), Charles de Winton (CLA), Rachel Evans (CA), Gwenda Owen (Cycling UK), Ian Mabberley (LAFs), David Evans (Elan Valley Trust), Bernard Griffiths (FUW), James Nevitt (Defence Estates), Rebecca Brough (Ramblers Cymru), , Anthony Richards & Peter Rutherford (Welsh National Parks), Steve Rayner (WATO), Sarah Smith (WG), Carys Drew & Naomi Williams (NRW Secretariat), Russell De'ath (NRW), Craig Grimes (Experience Community) Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Bill Purvis (NRW), Juliet Michael (NRW), Jont Bulbeck (NRW), Hefin (Translator),

Apologies:

Chris Mills (Afonydd Cymru), Neil Buffery (British Driving Society), Jonathan Hughes (National Trust), Eni Hansen-Magnusson (Sustrans)

Observers

Helen Donnan (BHS), Eben Muse (BMC), Kieran Foster (Cycling UK), Paula Brunt (Disabled Ramblers), David Medcalf (Arfon Dwyfor LAF), Beverley Penney (OSS), George Allingham (Pembrokeshire LAF), Rachel Parry (NRW), Eifion Jones (Ceredigion Council), Corby Elford, Alison Roberts (NRW), Quentin Grimley (NRW), Sarah Tindal (NRW), Aled Davies (NRW), , Dave Maccallum (NRW), Owen Gruffudd (NRW)

**Item
No:**

Item

Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 71st meeting. Apologies were noted.

1. Two organisations advised of changes in representative. Eben Muse will be the new representative for British Mountaineering Council, whilst Elfyn Jones was retiring. The Chair thanked Elfyn for his contributions over many years and welcomed Eben. Elfyn noted that he had enjoyed the discussions and that the existence of NAFW was important and helped resolve problems that would otherwise exist and thanked those he'd worked with. Helen Donnan would be taking over as main representative for the British Horse Society and Chair welcomed Helen and thanked Mark Weston for all his contributions to the Forum.

Attendees were reminded of the online meeting arrangements for participating with the meeting, simultaneous translation was set up through separate audio conference. Observers were welcomed and reminded to observe rather than participate in the meeting. The meeting was being recorded for the purpose of the meeting summary and would then be deleted. The record of the meeting is a summary note rather than a verbatim minute.

Actions and Matters Arising

The notes of the previous meeting were signed off by email. Updates on the actions from previous meetings were given in the meeting:

Action 69.6: An invite to the Minister to join the forum at an appropriate time in future.

Lee Waters MS, Deputy Minister for Climate Change offered a virtual meeting with Chair, this is arranged for 23rd March 2022. *Post meeting note: due to unforeseen circumstances the Deputy Minister had to cancel this meeting and his diary secretary will rearrange.*

2. **Action 70.1: To request further detail about the work of WG water branch on designation of inland waters for recreation.**

The main policy driver to designate waters for recreation has been clarified. The key Ministerial objective is to improve water quality, the reason the commitment is closely linked to improving water quality monitoring as well. The aim is to encourage local communities taking an interest in the health of Wales' rivers and gain public support to address the various sources of water pollution. Additional benefits, such as wellbeing goals and increased tourism are regarded as a bonus, although also important.

Discussion points:

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- That there is a need for further clarity about the Minister’s intentions with regard to access to water and the benefits sought and whether there is a link between the work of the Water Branch and access.
 - The Chair responded that this is something that he would be able to discuss in meeting the Deputy Minister and that he would report back to the Forum by email before April.

Action 70.2: Keith Watts to confirm status of access legislation with regard to National Minimum Standards in Wales

Response received from Keith Watt’s team: National Minimum Standards (NMS) will be initially based on cross compliance verifiable standards supported by domestic legislation. The position of access legislation has been noted and is an area that will need to be considered, particularly how access may be included within NMS in the future. The regulatory reform team will be holding discussions with policy areas regarding the NMS proposals and its scope which will be subject to consultation.

Nature and Us: National conversation about the future of the Welsh natural environment

Russell De’ath, NRW shared information about the Nature and Us “national conversation” on the future of the natural environment that is currently running to get as many people engaged and involved and to ensure that there is ongoing focus on the nature emergency.

The campaign and website are already live, and the views gathered from different sectors and communities will be used to develop a vision for the people of Wales, involving different people in co-drafting and developing a joint Vision for 2030 and 2050 and the actions that we need to take as a society to get there. Russell emphasised that whilst NRW is facilitating with support from Welsh Government this would be a vision for Wales not NRW’s vision.

3.

The www.natureandus.wales webpage was shared to show the range of opportunities for people to get involved, including a survey, creative opportunities, including poets in residence, and registration for webinar events and focus groups. Response so far has been encouraging.

Russell asked forum members for their assistance in reaching out to as many people as possible. To make it as easy as possible, there are lots of ways for people to get involved including outreach work since covid restrictions are being lifted. There are lots of resources on the Stakeholder Toolkit including presentations and discussion guides.

NRW wants to involve others in reviewing the views gathered. This will happen through a number of events and stakeholder groups, following this the results will be analysed, a citizen’s panel type approach is being considered, to develop a shared vision for Wales and a report to document learning of the

approach taken will also be produced. Russell considered that this will be a useful tool for future policy making and holding NRW to account.

It was suggested that if members have groups meeting or activities planned over the next few weeks to consider whether there are opportunities to share this conversation and include as part of analysis. Richard Parks is an ambassador working with NRW who is keen to talk to communities and there may be opportunities for him to speak to groups.

Discussion points (incorporating Team's chat):

- Noted that it would be interesting to see what change in views there's been since the work to develop Area Statements and also the impact of the pandemic
 - Noted that poets in residence is a different approach and that the campaign was working with Joe Roberts around the role of culture and the arts in policy making. This is one of many approaches being taken, noting that many people have an emotional approach to nature and the environment
 - Trying to get as many people involved as possible and as diverse a group as possible. Looking at qualitative as well as quantitative information
 - Recognising the challenge and importance of ensuring seldom heard groups are heard, Russell explained that he was working and testing approaches with a small selection of groups (Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and others who have connections with seldom heard groups and communities) as well as trying to target through social media influencers who are more likely to reach out to groups and networks. There is ongoing work with WCVA to share discussion tools to provide an easier way for people to community groups to engage with the exercise. He acknowledged that this was still a learning curve and there are ongoing efforts to make other connections and also now able to have face to face conversations
 - Suggestion that there is a need to look at how the campaign engages with business
 - The two-phase approach to the campaign (initial gathering of views, then sifting and analysing results) will provide opportunity to ensure different sectors have opportunity to engage
 - Suggested that people appreciate nature more if they can access it, this is one of the things that has come up in early responses but will still keep an open mind about what the feedback will be
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- Noted that it is not a particularly good time of year to engage with the farming community and noted that older members are less likely to engage with social media.
 - Noted that it is important not to make assumptions about seldom heard groups, and the different challenges that groups have
 - Russell acknowledged that there are limitations, different mechanisms are being used to mitigate for this, and he welcomed the support in sharing the information
 - In relation to how to develop a vision that is grounded in reality. NRW is following [government Future's Toolkit](#), based on where we are now and how we get to a particular point. It is not a conversation between NRW and groups, but between groups also, and it will need to include shared values and issues as well as identifying contentious or unrealistic issues
 - NRW is working closely with Welsh Government and looking at how Nature and Us can help lay foundations for future policy, including the National Resources Policy and net zero behaviour change work currently happening. The more that other organisations are involved to develop shared vision, the more people are likely to commit and sign-up to it. NRW's corporate plan next year will be NRW's response to the Vision. It will be important that it isn't a document but a process to understand the challenges. It is seen as a longer-term exercise to keep learning collectively around nature and climate emergency.
 - Not yet clear whether the Vision will be a document (it could be a visualisation or webpage), it is a dynamic and interactive process involving people and likely to have consultation alongside that. It will be up to WG and other organisations how they adopt it.
 - Noting the challenges for people in seldom heard groups, have multiple barriers to engaging but there is a huge challenge, for people to believe that what they say will have an impact on their futures. NAFW organisations have a role to play in bridging that gap.
 - Noted that economic status is increasingly recognised as a barrier to many opportunities.
 - Need to be clearer about people benefit in their immediate lives as people are motivated by things that impact them, the conversation would happen at local level to capture these views and would need to be ongoing.
 - Noted that Mosaic Outdoors is an organisation speaking up for equality in the outdoors.
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- Suggestions that 2050 might put some people off, the date of 2030 is included to help people think about what more immediate action is needed.
 - A key issues paper which summarises the result of the first round of involvement will be completed in July, and a report documenting the process and learning together with the draft vision is intended to be produced around December.
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NRW/Experience Community collaborative projects:

Craig Grimes, Experience Community has been working with NRW over the last few years on improving inclusive access.

Most recently working on Wales Coast Path (WCP) pilot projects looking at 5 diverse sections of WCP. Initially developing criteria for assessment of suitability, assessing the 5 pilot stretches for suitability against the agreed criteria, advising, in line with the criteria, of any on or off route changes that would be needed in order to make the pilot sections suitable and finally developing criteria for provision of effective information provision and marketing of those pilot stretches which meet the identification criteria.

[By All Reasonable Means \(BARM\): Least restrictive access](#) document was used to develop assessment criteria suitable for a 'walk through' audit so that information gathered can inform which sections of the WCP could be improved and effectively promoted for disabled people.

4. Craig shared the grading system used by Experience Community to grade routes (1-5) covering surfacing, climbing, and descending gradient and over all elevation and potential barriers.

Craig explained how this audit was applied on site and considerations of whether improvements e.g., to surface are possible, Craig emphasised that landscape and conservation factors need to be considered and that not all disabled users want to have a smooth and sanitised surface but want a challenge, like anyone else. In terms of gradients, considerations are whether they can be improved or avoided, whether there are alternatives, and options to have both an easier or more challenging route. In terms of barriers, if steps or stiles is can be avoided, removed, or replaced, if not then it will limit the number of people that can use that route and who the route can be promoted to. Whether gates, cattle grids can be removed or can the route avoid them.

Following the on-site assessment, a more complicated assessment is carried out considering whether routes can be improved based on BARM appendix 1.

Some case studies of sites in the pilot were then shared to show how the approach was applied, the issues and considerations and that had arisen and the types of recommendations that had been made.

In addition to the WCP study also looked at other sites, a number of films about routes at different NRW sites had been made prior to lockdown and are available on [NRW website](#). In looking at different ways of promoting sites, they had found that face to camera films had been effective in providing detailed information about what visitors can expect. A further 6 trails have had the audit applied to them and will be reported back to NRW on these. He noted that whilst people are encouraged to use public transport, it may not reach sites and he highlighted that there are barriers to disabled users accessing public transport and getting mobility equipment onto it, so car parking provision is important and an issue to address for some sites. Next steps included discussion about possible changes on site and changes in pre-visit information such as providing Phototrails information and short films about routes, subject to future budgets.

Discussion points (incorporating Team's chat):

- Discussion about the provision of Changing Places Facilities for people with multiple complex needs who require facilities when out and about. Lack of such facilities is a big barrier for some people getting out, there is a lot that could be done at flagship sites. [Access For All UK – improving accessibility improving lives](#) are working to improve this provision.
 - In considering cost benefit analysis and prioritisation of routes to improve, Craig noted that in the current project they are trying to look at what facilities could be installed to make sites even more suitable for more people, trying to look at how much it will cost, length of route and how many people will access but this is a complicated process. Hope with the pilots is that there will be a simplified audit process for others to use so that other organisations will be able to generate a better picture about the suitable routes.
 - For future improvements it is not just about choosing the easiest, quickest, or cheapest route to improve but there should be a geographic spread, not just in National Parks but access in right places, it is also about human resource and provision of equipment for people that don't have it themselves. It is a complicated, ongoing process to tackle in a multitude of different way.
 - Discussion (in Teams chat) about the approach needed in relation to barriers and the importance of liaison with landowner in considering whether such infrasture is still needed at particular site or whether it can be removed or replaced with more accessible structures where appropriate.
 - Water-based activities, Canoe Wales received a WG grant to improve pontoons to get disabled users, this is something that Experience Community has started to consider and are working with Plas y Brenin and would welcome further discussion.
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- The BHS and Experience Community produced a great video to aid people's enjoyment of multi user routes, giving information as to how to pass each other on routes
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=wmtdtkZOngM>
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Written Contributions

Written contributions had been circulated and members were reminded that they provide a good opportunity to share their organisation's work with other members. This slot enables contributors to highlight any points and to take questions on their items. Any further updates could be submitted to Carys by 18th March for inclusion in the final published version.

Discussion

- 5.
- Sarah Smith, WG noted that the Access Reform Advisory Group's report was submitted to the Deputy Minister for Climate Change in May 2021. Some further work has been commenced on these, including initial legal advice on the recommendations made. Further work is still required to better understand the cost, resources, and other implications of the various options. Unfortunately, staff resource pressures have slowed progress in these areas. A PhD placement student is due to start in April and will be undertaking a project focusing on ARAG Reform 3A (Communicating Access Rights), particularly around digital mapping.
 - Jont Bulbeck confirmed that NRW Access Reform advice being provided to WG this year, would be shared with stakeholders but would not be open for further comment.
 - Mark Weston, BHS noted that updated accident statistics for the last year would be available shortly and circulated. BHS welcomed the updates to the Highway Code. A question raised about whether permissive routes in the National Trust update were available to horse riders would be forwarded to Jonathan Hughes who had sent apologies.
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Review of the Wales Coast Path

- 6.
- Huw Irranca-Davies MS said that WG are setting up small challenge groups, one such group has been set up to carry out a time limited piece of work to consider the Wales Coast Path as it approaches the 5th of May 2022 which will mark ten years since its launch as the world's first coast path to cover an entire country.

The Deputy Minister for Climate Change has asked Huw Irranca-Davies MS to lead this review, looking back at the successes and lessons of the last ten years and looking forward to the potential for the next ten. He will be reporting back to the Minister by the end of April.

A small group have come together from academia and the public, private and voluntary sectors to create a vision for the future of the Wales Coast Path and

develop some practical recommendations for the Welsh Government on the forward strategic approach. They would not be reinventing Welsh Government policy but do intend to put forward suggestion of where we can go from now.

Huw Irranca-Davies MS shared some of the challenges and questions that have arisen as part of the review. Big question of what needs to happen to realise the full potential of the WCP 10 years on? Some conversations have reflected on what the aims were when the WCP was first set up and what has and hasn't been achieved. Whether there were other considerations around wellbeing, wider community buy in and involvement and nature, particularly the nature and climate emergencies. He noted that it is helpful in Wales that we have the Wellbeing of Future Generations legislation and principles. Considerations about the relationship of the WCP with the wider network of National Trails, circular routes, and the rights of way network. There are also fundamental questions around sustainable partnerships in terms of funding. Questions around Active Travel within the WCP zone connecting communities, to drive initiatives in relation to tourism and local use and whether there are things that can be done in terms of modal shift.

There are questions around education and the curriculum to encourage use of the WCP and outdoor learning and celebrating the wider trails network. Whether more can be done with digital platforms to inform people about sections of the path. Whether there are digital platforms that can enhance visitor and tourism experience, what the best practice is and whether more can be done.

Also, around the partnership and management structures to bring people together to run manage and maintain, if reimagined in terms of health and wellbeing, education, and climate change and whether we need new structures. There are also questions around whether there is more to do with data and evidence and also groups that don't use the path and look at barriers to use.

The intention is to bring forward some proposals to government which will be informed by people's feedback. A short survey had been shared by email and NAFW members were encouraged to respond to this as soon as possible, he encouraged people to submit creative ideas.

Discussion points:

- How we adapt the WCP with climate change affecting use of WCP and communities on low-lying parts on the coastline.
 - Exciting opportunity to feed in. Involvement in curriculum real and virtual opportunities, research, and opportunity for citizen science.
 - Would like to see more people able to use the route, suitable stretches that are accessible to horse riders and development of circular routes for other users.
 - An example of previous work looking at innovative ideas was shared [GeoVation tackles a coastal challenge - Geovation](#)
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- The group would like to put bold ideas to government, and it will raise questions about resources for priorities.
 - The WCP needs to be on the best possible route e.g., not along roads.
 - Suggestion that the WCP should be a National Trail connecting with Offa's Dyke Path National Trail and other long distance routes.
 - Notice of opportunity to join a virtual conference will be shared, during this more detail of some of the areas of ideas will be shared to get feedback and identify things that might have been missed
 - The group looking at the review isn't a representative group but includes membership from academia (behavioural science and social community focus), digital background, NRW, access perspective, existing stakeholder from national park and tourism promotion and public health.
 - Noting that some footpaths go across agricultural land, respect for people's workplace, there is a need to educate people about going to the outdoors.
 - Request for the survey to be circulated to Local Access Forums.

Forward look & dates of next meeting

Next meeting dates are the 5th July and 22nd November.

7. It is hoped that the next meeting would be in person and Carys will email further details about this and whether it will be possible for it to be a hybrid meeting (to allow some people to join online).

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to an interesting meeting.
