

Meeting note

Title of meeting: National Access Forum for Wales meeting 72

Date of meeting: 5th July 2022

Time of meeting: 10:30 – 13:00

Present: Geraint Davies (Chair), Ruth Rourke (IPROW, Deputy Chair), Rosie Plummer (NRW Board member), Eben Muse (BMC) (online), Adrian Walls (CSS Wales)(online), John Cuthbertson (Disabled Ramblers), Dave Waterman (LARA), Rachel Lewis-Davies (NFU), Kate Ashbrook (OSS)*(online), Phil Stone (CW), Charles de Winton (CLA), Kieran Foster (Cycling UK) (online)*, Ian Maberley (LAFs), David Evans (Elan Valley Trust)(online), Scott Ashworth (Defence Estates)(online), Chris Munro (RYA Cymru) (online), Anthony Richards (Welsh National Parks)(online), Steve Rayner (WATO), Mathew Williams (WSA)(online), Sarah Smith (WG), Simon Pickering (WG) (online), Carys Drew (NRW Secretariat), Dave Liddy (NRW), Jont Bulbeck (NRW), Iola Llwyd (Translator),

*deputising for usual representative

Apologies: Helen Donnan (BHS), Rachel Evans (CA), Gwenda Owen (Cycling UK), Bernard Griffiths (FUW), Jonathan Hughes (NT) Beverley Penney (OSS), Rebecca Brough (Ramblers Cymru), Andy Rowe (Sustrans), Kerry Thatcher (Visit Wales)

Observers Tony Rooney (Deputy National Representative Welsh LAFs), Paula Brunt (Disabled Ramblers), Eifion Jones (Ceredigion CC), Sophie Birchall-Rogerson (Conwy CC), Hannah Arndt (Denbighshire CC), Peter White (Ceredigion LAF Chair), Alison Roberts (NRW), Dave MacCallum (NRW), Quentin Grimley (NRW), Michael Smtih (NRW)

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Welcome and Apologies

1. The Chair welcomed attendees in person and online. Apologies and housekeeping matters were noted. 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

2. **Meeting with the Deputy Minister**

The Chair advised that the Deputy Minister had cancelled the meeting planned for 15th June – this will be rescheduled (as noted the WG written update).

The future directions and trends for off road e-bike use and impact in Great Britain: sharing report insights

Dave Liddy, Specialist Advisor Recreation Safety, noted that he has a long association with Forestry Commission England and Forestry Land Scotland and that the organisations had identified similar issues, all contributed to shared piece of research. He noted that there were some complications due to different access legislation, access codes and terminology. The research was carried out by Edinburgh Napier University with British Cycling heading the consortium of partners (Forestry and Land Scotland, Forestry England, Nature Scot and NRW). The work has also been shared with the Scottish Access Forum for their thoughts and comments.

The commissioning organisations will need to decide how to respond to this work going forward. Dave would welcome comments from the Forum and is happy to share the detailed report.

3. The research included comprehensive literative review and focus groups to find out what the sector thought to guide the research. Extensive research was carried out into the topic and an online survey, Dave noted that Wales was well represented in the response.

Dave shared some of the key findings from the survey results relating to:

- user demographics,
 - e-bike market (1 in 20 bikes sold is an ebike – this is a growing sector that has exceeded market forecast)
 - barriers to entry
 - findings related to health (users have half the health problems of cycling population), behaviour (affected by battery anxiety – tend to do more laps of same circuit), and risk (not the main driver for activity)
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- insights into behaviours of e-bikers and attitudes to the environment
 - how the sector find their information – to identify how best to share information and influence behaviour to improve responsible access
 - implications for management in relation to how e-mountain bikers ride and the facilities they want
 - e-bikes and the law and access rights (sharp contrast between greater knowledge of access rights in Scotland compared to England and Wales) – Dave noted that there may be a role for National Access Forum here in helping to share knowledge and education about where they can go

Discussion points:

- E-bikes are heavier than other mountain bikes – report recommends finding out more about potential damage and for sensitive environments e.g. when used in wet conditions
 - Cycling UK are looking at difference in the way that trails are ridden rather than the weight of the bike. There is discussion about removing the current 250W limit so there may be issues there
 - Issues around tampering with e-bike chip to enable greater power - noted that this is breaking the law and risks loss of car driver's licence
 - There is no desire for charge points at trail centres as ability to plug in for a few minutes makes no impact on the battery charge – rather it is more important to have these facilities at campsites and B&Bs
 - [DIRTT](#) project trail design is developing mountain biking with links in Europe
 - Concern about interaction with other users, e.g. horseriders. Noted that the need for responsible use remains whether e-bike or analogue
 - In relation to education and code of conduct – Cycling UK started to develop a code of conduct in conjunction with industry – this was put on hold with the revamp of Countryside Code. Suggested that Natural England did have an intent to deliver some activity specific codes, Cycling UK have been waiting to hear how that will be taken forward. Would like to see code taken forward potentially working with other partners.
 - Statistics about accidents were not included in this research.
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Wales Coast Path Visitor Survey: Summary of key findings for discussion

Jont Bulbeck, Outdoor Access and Recreation Team Leader, presented the results from the Wales Coast Path Visitor Survey: Summary of key findings for discussion. Quentin Grimley, lead on the work (joined online to support discussion in Q&A)

WCP is celebrating it's 10th Anniversary this year, to get to this point takes a lot of management, bringing together lots of partners and stakeholders. This work needs to be monitored and evaluated so that it can be managed in the best ways. To do this, a condition survey of the path is undertaken as well as evaluation of publicity, another vital element is how people use the path and their experience. This is the third user survey of WCP. This study was carried out by Beaufort Research on behalf of NRW during 2019-2021. Jont shared national level highlights; the full detailed report is available and includes regional analysis. He noted that the survey was interrupted by the covid pandemic but this enabled some data to be collected about the impact of covid on use of WCP.

The presentation covered the survey overview (background, objectives & methodology) and highlights from the research about:

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 - Who is using the Wales Coast Path - (where they come from, who they are visiting with, age and gender, and visitor profile)
 - The proportion of users that are staying overnight in Wales and the accommodation they use
 - What motivates people to use the Coast Path and how they use it
 - Visitor spend
 - Levels of user satisfaction with various aspects of the Coast Path, which, alongside the condition survey, provides insights for path management) and information provision
 - The impact of Covid-19 – comparing equivalent months from previous surveys

There is a range of information used to monitor and evaluate, condition surveys feed into regional management plans, this survey will help inform those and shift results into practical action.

Discussion points:

- Whether or not shorter distance use is typical of all long distance routes such as National Trails – indicatively this is the case but a similar survey is not carried out on National Trails, have identified the need to do so
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- Spend per head seemed relatively low, information availability seems to be an area for improvement – sources of information e.g. economic marriage to have badged ‘information hub’ in different areas
 - Provision of information is more complicated to influence with ‘word of mouth’ and cultural and family influences is key to people finding
 - The research report and other background information was provided to the independent [Review Wales Coast Path](#) led by Huw Irranca-Davies MS. That review will be considered with WCP managers and taken into account in future management.
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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 item enables contributors to highlight any points and to take questions on their items. Any further updates could be submitted to Carys by 8th July for inclusion in the final published version.

Discussion points:

- 5.
- Noting the update from Welsh Government, the meeting was disappointed that the planned meeting with Deputy Minister had again been cancelled. Suggestion that as time had gone on, the stakeholders who are impacted by the considerations would like to be in the meeting when it is rescheduled, to contribute their knowledge to discussion. Whilst the Chair noted the risk of meeting getting too big, he was happy to accommodate this request. It was understood that fishing organisations had met with the Minister earlier this year. Sub-group members felt that a lot had been achieved in their work and parties were keen to find a mechanism to make progress as the issues have not gone away.
 - Jont Bulbeck noted that separate to meeting the Deputy Minister, from NRW point of view of servicing, working and governance of subgroup, it is not something that NRW could manage through the Forum in the way that it was done before and would be looking for another mechanism to take it forward.
 - **Action:** Carys to email Forum members to make arrangements for other representatives to attend the meeting with the Deputy Minister and liaise with Sarah Smith.
 - Ian Maberley raised matters that had been recently raised in BBNPA LAF that are national issues:
 - **Advice for dog walkers:** Suggested that there is lack of awareness and confusion about recommendations for walking dogs in areas of livestock, ‘on a lead’ or ‘close control’ and other terminology used in ARAG
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reports. He understood that where there are cows with calves suggestion that you should let go of the dog to avoid being trampled but had not found this in published advice and signage.

- Noted that the Countryside Code includes advice about dogs including in the event of feeling threatened by livestock or horses [Natural Resources Wales / The Countryside Code: advice for countryside visitors](#) further detailed information is in the [Natural Resources Wales / The Dog Walking Code](#)
 - Important to note that ARAG reports are advice to WG about access reform proposals and not advice for the public
 - May be helpful to expand advice. Examples of on site signage that include this advice e.g NFU.
 - The advice is there, but there is concern about lack of awareness. There is a role for the Forum take these messages back to ensure people are aware. Possible area for further consideration by the Forum
 - **Tree planting:** issue of increase in tree planting and impact on open ground - apparently without control
 - Noted that tree planting is regulated. A number of concerns were noted by members in relation to this about:
 - Planting on Open Country and the impact this will have on access
 - Common land is one type of access land – for any fencing this needs consent from Ministers. On other open access land, it is likely that it would be removed in the 10-year review
 - Concern from farming organisations that there is a need for broader decision making process that considers economic, social and cultural aspects
 - That schemes being undertaken by large corporations for the purpose of carbon sequestration could result in access being lost
 - NRW Outdoor Access and Recreation team have contributed advice about Open Access, PRoW, least restrictive access to NRW advice to WG in relation to funded woodland creation schemes
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Managing Motor Vehicle Use in the Countryside: A Good Practice Guide to Traffic Management on Unsealed Public Roads.

6. Dave Waterman, for LARA, introduced himself and explained his background having previously worked in Defra for many years in rights of way policy and legislation, wider access to countryside and National Parks policy. Most recently he had been undertaking some work for LARA including work on this publication.
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He explained that LARA (the motoring organisations Land Access and Recreation Association) is a Forum that brings together the leading national associations in motorsport and recreation that:

- promotes and advocates responsible and sustainable motorsport and recreation and offers advice and training on land use
- has been at forefront of effort on the ground to counter unlawful and irresponsible use of motor vehicles in the natural environment
- is an umbrella organisation (rather than body in own right) pooling of knowledge, expertise and experience and the website is repository for useful guidance and reference documents

Dave referenced the recently published guidance

https://laragb.org/pdf/LARA_20220613_ManagingMotorVehicleUse.pdf

and went on to talk about the context around production of the guidance, which completes the refresh of a suite of four guidance documents to cover key aspects managing unsurfaced roads. The guidance documents cover England and Wales and will be updated as needed, he noted that they are best read alongside and refer to Defra guidance.

LARA embarked on refresh following suspension of activity on Natural England's Motoring Stakeholder Working Group in order to pool, and share expertise and knowledge. LARA members care about green roads and with the threat of having motor vehicle access removed – the aim with the guidance is to encourage better management rather than closure.

Recreational motoring on unsurfaced routes can be an emotive and contentious issue. He touched on some of the reasons for this. He noted that other users have bigger access networks than recreational motorists who also want the mental and physical benefits of access to the countryside. Given natural environment resources are limited, there is a need for degree of sharing and tolerance of others.

He went on to explain:

- what is traffic management is and how it relates to the other duties and powers of authorities – making the point that management and maintenance costs are accepted for other PRoW, and is standard practice to realise the benefits, often the response for vehicular rights is closure – guidance gives lots of ideas for effectively tackling problems
- Balancing benefits and dis-benefits – just as with other public highways
- Inclusive countryside access – he referenced guidance from GLASS [InclusiveCountrysideAccess.pdf \(glass-uk.org\)](#) that includes interesting case studies on disability
- Why management is a better solution than closure

He summarised that the guidance is intended to provide a range of ideas for how to manage green roads constructively, to get the best outcome for all users. He noted that all powers are in place, if resources are not there to

resolve a problem, simply closing isn't going to provide a better solution and said that whilst collaborating with responsible users will not eliminate all problems it will be a better outcome than a ban.

Discussion points:

- There was a Wales Offroad Motorcycle Steering Group which had been trying to make progress in this area in Wales but had not met in a number of years
- Problem in sensitive environment in Powys and Ceredigion, inability for authorities to deal with the problem. View that when a ban is in place it enables enforcement to be taken
- LARA note that in some cases restrictions or bans are necessary, where there is a rational reason and plan for how to deal with problem rather than a blanket approach which is not satisfactory
- Interesting to see structured guidance and to see particular levels of enforcement are necessary but there are adaptations. Very helpful to bring information together
- Welcome the guidance, considered this to be clear and useful information with good overview of legal mechanisms
- Noted that it can be difficult for authorities to contact local LARA representatives. Authorities would welcome engagement with representatives
- Dave noted that the best way to make initial contact is through email admin@laragb.org

Forward look & dates of next meeting

Dates of next meetings:

- 22nd November 2022 and 14th March 2023

7.

Carys will email to invite feedback from attendees about this meeting to inform how future meetings are held expect some of these to be online.

Carys has started to develop a forward look document to help planning for future meetings and would like encourage members to present future items about their work to share with other members.

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