

Meeting note

Title of meeting:	National Access Forum for Wales Meeting No 84
Date of meeting:	7 July 2026
Time of meeting:	10:30-14:30
Location:	Hybrid – In person National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth/Online through Teams
Present: (* = deputising for named representative)	Present: Helen Donnan, BHS, Gareth Ludkin, Campaign for National Parks, Sue Mabbett, Caving Wales, Adrian Walls, CSS Wales, Rachel Evans, Countryside Alliance, Gwenda Owen, Cycling UK, Scott Ashworth, Defence Estates, Paula Brunt, Disabled Ramblers, David Evans, Elan Valley Trust, Ian Mabblerley, LAFs Wales, Sam Dodgshon – LARA, Jonathan Hughes, National Trust, Simon Patton, MTC, Phil Stone, Paddle Cymru, Jonathan Hughes, National Trust, Kate Ashbrook, OSS, Beverly Penney, OSS, Matthew Williams, Rebecca Brough, Ramblers Cymru, Pam Bell, Waters of Wales, Emma Edwards-Jones, WATO, Peter Rutherford, Welsh National Parks, Smith, Sarah, WG, (LGHRRS - Landscapes, Nature & Forestry) William Somerfield, WG, (LGHRRS - Landscapes, Nature & Forestry), Andrew Howard and Steven Williams, WSA Outdoor Pursuits Group, Angela Wetherall BHS Presentations: Neil Jones, Keep Wales Tidy, Helen Pye and Susan Jones, National Trust, Eben Muse, BMC, Heather Martin and Rebecca Brough, Ramblers Cymru, Helen Donnan, BHS Presentations from NRW: Pete Frost, Fran Rolfe with Dr Ben Reynolds, Urban Foundry, BCorp NRW Secretariat and Chair: Lesley Jones, Chair, Gruff Owen, Rachel Parry, Jont Bulbeck Trywydd – Translator: Heledd Davies
Apologies:	Chris Mills, Afonydd Cymru, James Nevitt, Defence Estates, Teleri Elias, FUW, Dr Catrin Jones, One Voice Wales, Steve Rayner WATO, Matthew Teasdale, YHA

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed members, speakers and observers to the meeting, noting that this was the Forum's in-person meeting for the year and that members were also joining online through Teams. The Chair referred to the value of meeting in person and noted that feedback could be sought on the timing and location of future face-to-face meetings.

The Chair noted that it had been agreed at the previous meeting to hold a themed meeting, with suggested themes including local / urban greenspace and its role in connecting people with nature.

2. Connecting People with Nature

Owen Derbyshire CEO/Neil Jones, Project Manager, Local Places for Nature, Keep Wales Tidy

Neil Jones introduced the Local Places for Nature programme, a Welsh Government-funded programme that has been running since 2020 and works with communities to restore and enhance nature close to where people live. The programme focuses particularly on areas of higher deprivation, urban and built-up areas, and rural towns where access to nature may also be limited.

Members heard that Keep Wales Tidy is one of the scheme managers, alongside local authorities, Local Nature Partnerships and One Voice Wales. The programme supports a wide range of community organisations, including schools, hospitals, charities, sports clubs, places of worship, emergency services and other local groups.

The presentation outlined the community garden package model, including food gardens, wildlife gardens, mini gardens, supersize gardens and orchard packages. Neil explained that the application process is designed to be simple, with support including site visits, garden plans, procurement, delivery and project officer input to help groups get started.

The programme was described as a catalyst for wider community activity. Members heard that gardens often begin with a small volunteer group but can grow wider community involvement, support green prescribing, link with Green Flag and Eco-Schools activity, and lead to further funding or additional projects.

Neil reported that since 2020 the programme had supported thousands of groups, with around 2,000 gardens created and 1,000 orchards planted.

The main challenges identified were the capital-only nature of much of the funding, uncertainty around annual funding cycles, limits on project officer capacity, availability of land, and limited options for groups requiring bespoke designs outside the standard package model.

Members discussed the importance of ongoing support, training and community buy-in to ensure that gardens remain successful after installation. The issue of school garden maintenance during holiday periods was noted, with wider community involvement identified as important.

Neil also referred to Breaking Barriers, a programme working with underrepresented groups to understand barriers to accessing nature or nature funding and to co-create appropriate solutions.

Points noted:

- Local greenspace can provide accessible opportunities for communities to connect with nature close to home.
- Physical infrastructure alone is not sufficient; skills, confidence, maintenance and community stewardship are also important.
- Access to suitable land is a significant barrier for some groups.
- Forum members with knowledge of potential land opportunities were encouraged to speak to Keep Wales Tidy.

Having an officer in each LA was noted as a positive step.

3. National Trust's work in urban communities and plans for the future

Helen Pye, Director, Access & Inspire directorate and Susan Jones, Community and Volunteering Manager, National Trust Cymru

Helen Pye outlined National Trust Cymru's strategic focus on ending unequal access to nature and heritage. She explained that the National Trust had recently reorganised its work around strategic priorities, including a strand focused on improving access to nature, heritage and places of beauty for underrepresented audiences.

The presentation identified four priority audiences: people on low incomes, people of the global majority, children and young people, and disabled people.

Helen explained that the National Trust's ambition in Wales is to reach 650,000 people over the next 10 years, as part of a wider organisational ambition to support 10 million more people to access nature and heritage.

Helen described three areas of work: access at National Trust places, place-based partnerships, and systemic change. She referred to opportunities to influence policy, funding, transport and partnership activity, and identified the South Wales Valleys as an early priority for place-based partnership work.

Susan Jones then shared practical examples from community work in North East Wales. She emphasised an asset-based approach, sharing power, and working with communities rather than designing activity for them.

Examples included Mindful Meadows at Chirk and Erddig, which provide free-to-access spaces for rest, reflection and local community use. Susan also described Camp at the Castle, a partnership between the National Trust, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Home-Start Wrexham, providing supported outdoor holiday experiences for families.

Susan also explained the Wellbeing Access Pass, which was developed with groups that use it. The pass was designed to avoid a transactional “free entry” approach and instead provide a valid, valued and flexible way for wellbeing groups to access National Trust places.

The presentation highlighted how small adjustments, such as anonymised pass details or access to private facilities, can make spaces significantly more accessible and welcoming for people with particular needs.

Points noted:

- Improving access to nature and heritage requires both practical local activity and wider systemic change.
- Partnership working is central to reaching underrepresented audiences.
- Designing access around belonging and dignity can be more effective than simply offering free or discounted access.
- There may be opportunities for collaboration between National Trust Cymru, National Parks and other Forum members.

A member from Eryri National Park noted existing wellbeing activity in the National Park and suggested opportunities for collaboration, including possible links with dark skies activity.

4. Accessible Urban Greenspace Policy and Practice

Introduction to Urban Greenspace Policy: Pete Frost, Urban Green Infrastructure Advisor, NRW

Accessible Urban Greenspace in Practice – Swansea, Fran Rolfe, Senior Officer, Environment Team SW, NRW and Dr Ben Reynolds, Founder and Director, Urban Foundry BCorp

Pete Frost introduced the policy context for accessible urban greenspace and urban green infrastructure. He noted that during the pandemic demand for local greenspace increased, while also highlighting inequalities in access to gardens, high-quality parks and national landscapes.

Pete reported that there were 72 million visits to urban greenspaces in 2021–22, but that use of local greenspaces had declined since the pandemic. He explained that almost 70% of households in Wales are within the recommended 300 metres of greenspace, meaning that nearly one-third are not within easy walking distance of greenspace.

Using Swansea as an example, Pete highlighted gaps in access to quality-assured greenspace, particularly in more deprived areas. He referred to Green Flag Awards and Green Flag Community Awards as standards for greenspace quality, while noting concerns about local authority funding pressures and reduced independent quality assessment where authorities withdraw from the scheme.

Pete then discussed sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), noting that SuDS have been mandatory on new developments in Wales since January 2019. He explained that while this has helped integrate greenery into new developments, retrofitting urban greening and sustainable drainage into existing streets and neighbourhoods remains a major challenge.

Pete also referred to the Green Space Toolkit and NRW's work with Welsh Government and Ordnance Survey to produce an automatically updating green infrastructure dataset that is consistent across Wales and available to view on Data Map Wales.

Fran Rolfe and Dr Ben Reynolds presented examples from Swansea showing how urban greening, sustainable drainage, regeneration, community involvement and placemaking have been brought together. They described the five principles used in Swansea's green infrastructure work: multifunctional, adapted to climate change, healthy, biodiverse, and smart / sustainable.

The presenters emphasised the difference between consultation and genuine community involvement. They argued that communities should be treated as partners and that engagement should not be value-engineered out of projects, because early engagement can reduce longer-term costs and increase stewardship.

Examples included rain gardens, pocket parks, permeable paving, rooftop gardens, green walls, green roofs and urban greening linked to active travel, regeneration and water-quality objectives. The presenters highlighted the importance of joining funding streams and objectives so that schemes appear coherent to communities.

Practical constraints included skills and knowledge gaps, design and construction issues, maintenance requirements, the need for contractor toolbox talks, and the importance of not treating volunteers as free maintenance labour.

The presentation also highlighted the climate resilience benefits of urban greening, including examples where thermal imaging showed significant temperature differences between hard urban surfaces and greened areas.

The presenters noted forthcoming monitoring work and a Wales Urban Green Infrastructure Conference planned for February at Swansea Arena.

Points noted:

- Access to greenspace depends on quality, proximity, usability and maintenance, not only on the presence of greenspace. Underpinning guidance is provided by TAN 16 WG guidance on recreation and open space.
- Urban greening can contribute to health, wellbeing, biodiversity, water management, regeneration and climate adaptation.
- Community involvement, skills, maintenance and cross-sector working are critical to long-term success.

Swansea provides examples of aligning regeneration, highways, active travel, water management and community objectives.

5. Wild Camping; Social value and management approaches

Eben Muse, Policy and Campaigns Officer, Wales, BMC

Eben Muse presented on the British Mountaineering Council's work on wild camping, including the social value of wild camping and approaches to responsible management.

Eben explained that the BMC seeks to represent wild campers in a way that balances rights and freedoms with responsibility, stewardship, and reduced impacts on the natural world and rural livelihoods.

The presentation referred to BMC support for the Dartmoor wild camping campaign and subsequent work to highlight the value of wild camping. This included a bursary for young people to share stories, songs and videos, a wildfire ranger post in the Peak District, online coordination of mountain clean-ups, and resources on responsible wild camping.

Eben also described a survey of more than 700 wild campers and a forthcoming report exploring how people camp, their experiences, the social value of wild camping, and the relationship between access, responsibility and stewardship. Themes from the research included connection to nature, wellbeing and restoration, adventure, self-reliance, relationships and shared experiences.

The presentation highlighted concerns about inconsistent national park guidance and argued that current policy and practice can be misaligned. Eben suggested that current approaches may create barriers to outdoor education and responsible information-sharing, while not necessarily preventing irresponsible behaviour such as fly camping.

Discussion focused on whether the Countryside Code should provide clearer guidance on wild camping, or whether another approach such as that in Scotland would be more

appropriate. Members discussed the relationship between rights, permissions, Dartmoor, Scotland, England and Wales, and the legal context for wild camping.

The Chair noted that the focus should be on what the Forum wanted to achieve in practical terms: where wild camping is taking place, how responsible behaviour can be encouraged and how environmental damage can be avoided.

Points noted:

- Wild camping can provide social, wellbeing and nature-connection benefits when undertaken responsibly.
- Irresponsible fly camping and abandoned equipment cause environmental and land-management impacts.
- Clearer and more consistent public information may help support responsible behaviour.
- The relationship between rights, permissions and responsible guidance is complex and may need further discussion.
- BMC indicated willingness to engage in future discussions on responsible wild camping guidance and Countryside Code developments.
- The NT have a kit donation project

6. Connecting people to local spaces - Ramblers Cymru

Heather Martin, Community Development Officer, Wales/Rebecca Brough, Policy and Advocacy Manager. Ramblers Cymru

Heather Martin presented an overview of two Ramblers Cymru community projects: the Carmarthenshire Pathways partnership and the Walks for Women project in North Wales.

The Carmarthenshire Pathways project aimed to train volunteers to survey lower-priority paths and provide Carmarthenshire County Council with baseline network data. Members heard that 149 volunteers were trained, more than 80 volunteers carried out at least one survey, around 920 kilometres of paths were surveyed, 149 issues were resolved, and 35 stiles were replaced with gates.

Heather explained that the project had moved into a third year focused on an “adopt a path” model, with targets including 20 path adoptions, engagement with 50 new volunteers, monthly “snipping strolls”, ranger days and volunteer thank-you events.

The presentation then covered the Walks for Women project, initially funded through an Active North Wales Innovation Grant and aimed at increasing activity among young women aged 18 to 25 in Holyhead, Rhyl and Wrexham.

Heather explained that the project had learned that partnership working was more effective than general advertising to individuals. The project had worked particularly well with the Barod project and had now been extended to September 2027.

In its second phase, the project remains women-only but has widened the age range to women aged 18 and over. The strongest current partnership is with the North Wales Women's Centre in Rhyl, where 40 women had engaged since March and a regular weekly group had developed.

The project is considering sustainability, including walk leader training, and is continuing to explore opportunities in Wrexham and Holyhead.

Members asked about the Barod project, which was described as a programme supporting young people who are not yet ready for work and helping them build confidence and useful skills.

There was also discussion about whether improved routes in Carmarthenshire would be promoted online or through route resources, with reference to walking route resources in Scotland. It was noted that public-facing route promotion was understood to be work in progress.

Points noted:

- Volunteer surveying can provide valuable baseline data for local authorities.
- Path improvement work can support community access where it is linked to route promotion and accessibility improvements.
- Women-only walking provision can help address barriers to participation.
- Partnership with trusted organisations can be more effective than general recruitment.

Confidence, transport, cost, familiarity and social barriers all affect participation.

7. Working to connect local communities with greenspace

Helen Donnan, BHS Access Field Officer Wales, British Horse Society

Helen Donnan presented on the British Horse Society's work to support equestrian access and connect communities to the equestrian network.

The presentation highlighted the work of BHS volunteers and affiliated equestrian access groups in improving bridleways, supporting safe riding opportunities and working with local authorities. Helen explained that many horse riders keep their horses close to home, often

on the fringes of urban areas, and may need to use roads to reach bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to all Traffic.

Members heard that while horse riders are legitimate road users, many prefer safe off-road riding where possible. Helen noted that former industrial sites, disused tramways and disused railway routes can provide important opportunities for safe off-road equestrian access.

A central example was the development of a horse corral at Barry Sidings Country Park near Pontypridd. The facility was delivered through partnership working between BHS volunteers, an affiliated access group and Rhondda Cynon Taf Council.

Helen explained that the corral provides a safe place for riders to stop while visiting the country park, rather than tying horses to trees or other unsuitable features. Although the facility was simple in design, it took around two years to agree and deliver, partly because of concerns about how horses would interact with other users such as walkers, cyclists, children and dogs.

Helen emphasised that inclusive access should recognise equestrians as part of the community and that facilities such as corrals can allow riders, walkers, cyclists and families to enjoy shared spaces more safely.

Points noted:

- Equestrian access is affected by urbanisation, road safety, fragmented off-road routes and limited rights of way funding.
- Volunteer-led access groups can deliver practical improvements, but this can require significant time and persistence.
- Shared-use greenspaces need to consider horses and riders alongside other users.
- Clear signage, education and partnership with local authorities are important in shared-use settings.

The Barry Sidings example provides a practical model for equestrian facilities in community greenspace.

Written contributions

Opportunity to ask questions about written contributions.

Rebecca Brough spoke to Ramblers Cymru contribution on the Access Denied campaign which will be circulated with this minute as it had not been submitted on time for the written contributions circulated.

AOB

Access to Water/Blue spaces

Members discussed access to water and blue spaces. Paddle Cymru highlighted the limited extent of public navigation rights and suggested that a future Forum item could consider access, safety, biodiversity, water quality and opportunities for collaboration with Welsh Government and NRW.

Digital walking resources

Members discussed route-finding resources and public-facing route information, including examples from Scotland and existing tools such as Komoot and OS Maps. The discussion noted the potential value of accessible public rights of way data and route information for Wales.

Illegal off-roading and green lanes

Members raised concerns about illegal off-roading, including damage, erosion, biodiversity impacts, conflict with other users, and challenges around reporting and enforcement. The need for cross-organisation collaboration and improved engagement with police and other enforcement bodies was noted.

Rights of way and planning — Mynydd y Gaer wind farm

Members discussed the Mynydd y Gaer wind farm case, including concern about potential downgrading of byways to bridleways through the planning process and the precedent this could set for access rights.

Sustainable Farming Scheme

The Sustainable Farming Scheme was discussed, including public access obligations, collaborative layers, enforcement and monitoring. Members noted that the topic may be suitable for a future Forum agenda item, depending on timing and opportunities for meaningful input.

Closing remarks - Chair

Members discussed potential themes for future meetings. Access to water / blue spaces emerged as a preferred future theme, with the collaborative layers of the Sustainable Farming Scheme, Active Travel* and the review of SSSIs also identified as possible future topics.

**At March meeting Fiona Clay Pool WLGA offered to ask a WLGA transport colleague to attend for this item when it is on the agenda.*

There was discussion about improving attendance at future face-to-face meetings, including seeking feedback from members on preferred timing and location and recognising the practical challenges of hybrid meetings.

Other potential future items included large events guidance follow-up, WG update on the Access grant and inviting new NRW senior leadership to a future face-to-face meeting.

The Chair thanked speakers, members, organisers and attendees for their contributions.

Presentations will be circulated with the confirmed note of this meeting.

Next meeting: 24 November 2026, online through Teams.