

Meeting note

Title of meeting:	National Access Forum for Wales meeting 74
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Date of meeting:	14 March 2023
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Time of meeting:	10:30 – 13:00 (Online through Teams)
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Present: (In order of joining)	Geraint Davies (Chair, NRW Board), Carys Drew (NRW Secretary), Rosie Plummer (NRW Board), Phil Stone (Canoe Wales), Tony Rooney (Welsh LAFs), Bernard Griffiths (FUW), Aled Jones (Cymen Cyfieithu/Translation), Dave Waterman (LARA), Sarah Smith (WG), Anthony Richards (Welsh National Parks), Emma Robinson (YHA), Rachel Lewis-Davies (NFU), James Nevitt (Defence Estates), Gwenda Owen (Cycling UK), Tom Sharp (WSA Outdoor Pursuits Group), Kate Ashbrook (OSS), Helen Donnan (BHS), Charles de Winton (CLBA), Jen Newman (Dŵr Cymru), Steve Rayner (WATO), Jont Bulbeck (NRW), Eben Muse (BMC), Ruth Rourke (Deputy Chair, IPROW), Rebecca Brough (Ramblers), Paula Brunt (Disabled Ramblers), David Evans (Elan Valley), Jonathan Hughes (NT), Presenters: Eve Nicholson (NRW), Joe Roberts (NRW), Peter Rutherford (Welsh National Parks), Amanda Hill (Ramblers),
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Apologies:	Andy Phillips (Angling Cymru), Chris Mills, (Afonydd Cymru), Rachel Evans, (Countryside Alliance) Ian Mabberley (Welsh LAFs), Emma Henwood (Sport Wales)
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Observers:	Andy Turner, Steve Jenkinson (Kennel Club), Quentin Grimley (NRW), Dawn Thompson (NRW), Rachel Parry (NRW), Aled Davies (NRW), Bill Purvis (NRW), Richard Thomas (NRW), Mark Weston (BHS), Kieron Foster (Cycling UK), Michael Smith (NRW), Alison Roberts (NRW), Ash Pearce (NRW), Phil Lewis (Bridgend Council), Liza Tomos (NRW), Dave MacCallum (NRW), Hannah Brett (NRW), Sarah Tindal (NRW), Matthew Williams (WSA Outdoor Pursuits Group),
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Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 74th NAFW meeting, and welcomed Emma Robinson (YHA) and Jen Newman (Dŵr Cymru) as new representatives for their organisations who then briefly introduced themselves.

Apologies and housekeeping matters were noted. It was noted that key points from the meeting chat would be included in the meeting summary and attendees were reminded that the meeting chat is visible to everyone. Observers were welcomed and reminded of their role to observe rather than participate in the meeting.

Actions and Matters arising

The Chair reported that he had met with Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd on the 8th February 2023, with Carys Drew, NRW and Sarah Smith WG.

He noted that this had been a constructive conversation about the Forum and ways of working. The Minister had agreed to attend the Forum's July meeting and to hopefully make this happen, the meeting would likely be arranged in Cardiff.

Discussion had touched on a number of different things, including to continue discussion with the Chair to have a walking meeting to discuss access issues and look for constructive ways forward.

Discussion points:

- Intention is to arrange the NAFW meeting for early July and need to avoid Royal Welsh Show dates in July
- Meeting date likely to be moved from 4th July as the Minister had advised that due to Senedd responsibilities Tuesdays are not suitable.
- Question about whether access to water had been raised in the meeting? Noting that further to strong commitment from WG in 2019, having not seen anything going forward asked whether the commitment is still there and for any update. The Chair confirmed that there had been conversation about access to water as part of wider discussion and he suggested raising this with the Minister when she attends the Forum meeting in July.

Wales Coast Path – promotion & partnership working in 10th Anniversary year

Creative Nature: Update on NRW's Arts programme

Joe Roberts, Lead Specialist Advisor: Recreation and Access shared work around art and culture and how it intersects with outdoor recreation. Since the signing of the Creative Nature Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2020, NRW has been working with the Arts Council of Wales and other partners in the cultural sector to explore how the arts can

be used to reconnect people with nature and engage people in a conversation about the climate and nature emergencies.

Currently coming to the end of a three-year project, initiated in 2020, the MoU was intended to set a foundation of understanding between the two organisations and begin a process of collaboration. Joe shared key points from the vision in the MoU:

- More people, particularly from under-represented groups, accessing the natural environment and the arts in new ways.
- More people valuing nature and actively contributing to sustaining its future through engagement in creative activity.
- A cultural sector that recognises the value of the natural environment as a platform for delivering artistic and cultural activity and utilises the arts for wider social and environmental benefit.
- An environment sector that recognises the value of the arts and utilises them, and culture professionals, to give a voice to underrepresented groups

He went on to share an overview of the programme, establishing the MoU which then enabled £300,000 external funding to be secured which enabled 61 artists to be commissioned on 11 projects who carried out 73 interventions and events with communities. Research was carried out to look at the value of the arts in helping deliver NRW's aims, and online events were hosted to build relationships between environment and cultural sectors. In addition to exploring the links, the aim was to lay foundation for further work, the outcome of this for NRW was helping Arts Council formulate one of 6 principles for future funding as climate justice – which is how Arts Council want to frame their work around environment, the Arts Council is a major funding distributor.

Joe shared the goals and values of the Plan for Climate Justice and the Arts which has been developed, which has social justice at its core and went on to share some of the case studies:

- The Writing Tree a project of creating writing and understanding health benefits. Measuring the health benefits and connection to nature in a creative writing intervention in a NRW managed woodland and then
- Exploring the Future Wales Coast Path. (Full film available here: [Exploring The \(Future\) Wales Coast Path - YouTube](#))

Connection to nature is emerging as a key theme from the foundation work. Contact with nature is important, but for people to adopt pro-environmental behaviour, research shows that *connection* to nature is most important.

Establishment of a National Strategic Partnership is being discussed to bring different environmental bodies, environmental NGOs, public health, and cultural sector with academia together to focus efforts on connection to nature as a bedrock to future work.

Disabled access video project: Eryri National Park Update

Peter Rutherford, Access and Well-being Manager, explained the background to new films that had been produced to promote accessible trails in the National Park. He noted that it is hard not to be prescriptive and assess suitability when asked about suitable routes, so they looked at how to get information across in a better, more modern way. With changes

of technology and equipment people can access more areas so there is increasing need for information.

There are 6 all ability routes available to trampers, and the National Park Authority have commissioned a film maker to cover these 6 principles routes, which will be added to in future. The films are 2 mins long and they give people the opportunity to have a quick look and decide for themselves if the routes are suitable. Trampers and a 4-wheeler are available to borrow, through a booking system in advance.

The films were then shared: [Foel Ispri - YouTube](#) and [Lon Gwyrfai - YouTube](#)

Further information: [Access For All | Snowdonia National Park \(gov.wales\)](#)

Peter talked about considerations around design and landscaping, noting the importance of provision benefitting carers as well as disabled and the films giving users confidence to use routes.

Discussion points:

Most of the routes have nearby toilet facilities and parking is available at all sites.

- Welcomed the films which are well put together and inspiring, making the routes available to wider range of users.
- In response to a question about gates shown, Peter noted that gates are two-way opening, but that the preference is to have no gates and that a policy of miles without stiles has been adopted across all National Parks. Turning area at Foel Isbri is currently 3-point turn but there are ways to adapt standards to the location.
- In suggestion that cattle grids could be as an option for stock proofing it was noted that cattle grids have complicated legislation to put in place and are very expensive.
- Question about whether there is a vision for strategic longer distance routes that connect places and integrate with facilities e.g., changing places along disused railway lines in Snowdonia. Peter noted that whilst the opportunity to acquire track beds was flagged in the Hobhouse report e.g., Trawsfynydd to Bala, that this opportunity was not taken at that time, so routes were lost, and some are now in private ownership. Some sections may be suitable for routes but with great deal of resources. Creation order powers exist but political will is needed.
- Connectivity is important, question about what the barriers are to creation of routes and whether there is need for clearer guidance?
- Advice around compensation for PROW creation: CCW and Countryside Agency [NRW and NE as now] produced guidance about that. It included how to take forward. No payment scales could be set in the guidance as the amount of compensation has to relate to land values in particular circumstances.
- Suggestion that uncertainty over potential compensation prevents a barrier to use of powers.
- Welcome the development of routes that are not over-sanitised and still feel that they are part of the countryside.
- There are videos online of users demonstrating how to use gates and things that can be helpful to take with them. Disabled Ramblers plan to having a week of rambles in Snowdonia.
- Noted that routes are made less usable due to barriers to stop illegal motorised use. Reference to [Garland & Anor v Secretary of State for Environment, Food And Rural Affairs \[2021\] EWCA Civ 1098 \(20 July 2021\) \(bailii.org\)](#) which refers to this point.

Paths to Wellbeing project update: Ramblers Cymru

Paths to Wellbeing has been a flagship project for Ramblers Cymru over the last 18 months, and Rebecca Brough presented with support from Amanda Hill, North Wales Team leader for the project.

Rebecca gave an overview of the project, its aims; of bringing into Wales a green infrastructure, place-based approach to help communities to understand, get involved with and manage their own green spaces and to access the path network in a new way. Trying to equip communities to understand what they've got on their doorstep and give them the skills to help look after it. She noted that the project has 12 outcomes and 55 outputs, and as a WG funded project (through the Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Scheme (ENRaW)

rural development programme money), is a comprehensive and well monitored project.

Rebecca shared the approach taken, from the initial call to action for communities to get involved, followed by community selection, community consultation and on to project plan development tailored towards each community's needs including:

- Physical improvements
- Youth engagement
- Biodiversity improvements
- Nature based citizen science
- Embedding Diversity – e.g., involving Welsh Refugee Council, Diverse Cymru and accessible routes
- Underpinned by community education – better understanding of how to use paths

Rebecca shared examples of route maps, 145 routes had been developed and would be published online as well as some hardcopies. She concluded by sharing the summary dashboard of things delivered in the 18 communities.

Discussion points:

- Comment welcoming the scheme seeing it is helping to local authorities and landowners but concern about longevity of scheme. Long-term is something Ramblers are very aware of and are looking at alternative future types of funding but challenges, local authorities are really supportive and helping provide information. Ramblers are looking at absorbing volunteer base and systems and path maintenance teams to make sure things are taken on at that level. Amanda noted that in terms of sustainability in communities worked with, at a local level, at least half the groups have a group of volunteers who will continue to work to maintain and waymark routes for a few years and looking at options where there are Ramblers volunteers to support. Would like to see a national profile and commitment.
- In relation to the information about the routes, question about whether Ramblers take the opportunity to advise walkers about the different types of access rights, how to behave and their responsibilities e.g., control of dogs and livestock. This is done at a national level and will be added to the microsite for paths to wellbeing, including links to the countryside code.
- Collaboration is evident in the project, suggestion that given the health benefits suggestion that health sector funding may be an avenue for enduring legacy funding.

Suggestion that Ramblers should try to get all routes onto the OS maps as a recommended route partner

Review of the Forum's terms of reference

The Forum's attention was drawn to the Terms of Reference. A thorough review of these was carried out in 2019 and at that time a review date was agreed of July 2022. As the last review had been in depth, major changes were not being proposed but members were invited to review and to provide any comments to Carys by 17th April which would be collated and considered at the next meeting.

Action 74.1: All members to review the Terms of Reference and respond to Carys Drew with any comments by 17th April 2023.

Discussion point:

Note the change in practice for some meetings to be held online rather than all being in person.

Written contributions

The written contributions were briefly summarised, and an opportunity given to ask questions of contributors. (See separate document circulated).

Forward look & dates of next meetings

July meeting date to be confirmed. In person meeting. Working with WG to give opportunity for Forum to meet with the Minister

7th November 2023

5th March 2024

To help plan future meetings, it was suggested that some meetings could be built around themes and members are invited and encouraged to make suggestions and put forward items.