

**Brecon Beacons National Park Local Access Forum**  
**Unconfirmed Minutes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting held at 2pm on Wednesday February**  
**11th 2015 at National Park Visitor Centre, Libanus**

**Present**

Secretary – Richard Ball (RB)

Chair – Ian Mabberley (IM)

Jeff Spencer (JS)

Hilda Williams (HW)

Phillipa Cherryson (PC)

Patrick Dobbs (PD)

Dave Sharman (DS)

Debbie Hughes (DH)

Pam Bell (PB)

Julian Atkins (JA)

Jon Everington (JE)

Denis Murphy (DM)

**Observers**

Richard Tyler (RT)     Tourism Manager BBNPA

Lisa Lloyd (LL)       Rights of Way Assistant BBNPA

Eifion Jones (EJ)     Rights of Way Officer BBNPA

Mark Stafford-Tolley   Powys County Council

Andy Fleming           Blaunau Gwent County Borough Council

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

IM welcomed members and observers. Apologies for absence were received from John Crellin, Colin Woodley, Sarah Tindell- Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Fiona Ford and Julian Atkins sent his apologies that he would be late attending the meeting.

**2. Confirmation of Minutes of Meetings held on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

The minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting were accepted with one alteration and it was agreed that IM should sign them as a true record.

The minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting were accepted and it was agreed that IM should sign them as a true record.

**3. Matters Arising Not Otherwise Appearing on Agenda**

**Press releases**

PC said that last year the LAF had one press release published and felt that it was important that the next press release should aim to tell the public what the role of the LAF is and

some of the issues that are covered. There are a number of options through local papers, television and radio as well as social media. PC suggested the minutes of the meetings are translated into press releases. PC also thought it would be a good idea if we took a photograph of all the LAF members and gave a brief introduction to each member. Members agreed that a group photograph should be taken at the next meeting.

RB added that members may want to consider if they wanted the public to contact them directly with issues. Currently there is a brief online biography but the public is directed to RB as secretary of the LAF.

Members agreed that if they are approached by members of the public and lobbied they should remain neutral and bring the matter to the following LAF meeting for discussion.

#### **4. Visitor Management Plan (VMP) Update**

IM welcomed RT to the meeting.

RT updated members on the current position of the VMP. A number of consultation responses have been absorbed into the plan and the National Park Authority has approved the changes. The plan is currently being altered and the document will be circulated to LAF members and RT said that he hoped to work with the LAF on the implementation of the plan.

PC asked if the lack of up to date data which the LAF raised as one as a concern regarding the VMP was being addressed in the updated document.

RT acknowledged that it was a key finding of the plan that there was a need to collect better data, however, the plan has only been able to use the data that was available.

IM suggested that there had been an immense growth in mountain biking in the past 5-10 years which would not have been taken into account in the VMP.

JA apologised for being late to join the meeting and added that money had been received from Welsh Government which is being used to purchase a number of visitor counters to monitor visitor numbers in certain areas. He also commented that he had seen an increase in event organisers contacting the BBNPA beforehand to discuss holding events in the National Park.

#### **5. LAND – PROPOSED INTERREG V Project**

RT explained to members that the VMP had raised a wide range of issues in relation to access and its management. Annex I. Introduces the aims of the LAND project and outlines a number of elements. [Annex I](#)

PD asked how would landowners be consulted and encouraged to participate as many farmers don't belong to just one group, they belong to various groups such as National Farmers Union, Country Landowners and Business Association, Farmers Union Wales, grazing Associations and sometimes don't belong to any groups.

RT confirmed that various groups would be consulted and individual landowners would be able to approach the project and would not necessarily need to be a member of a group.

IM said it would need to be simple enough for individuals to approach project officers for initial discussions.

JE added that there was an equal need for discussions to take place with user groups as well as landowners as both sides need to be heard.

RT agreed and said that discussions would involve Ramblers Association, Walkers are Welcome groups, tourism businesses etc.

JA added that the project had been framed in this context as much of the vocalisation around the issues had come from landowners.

DM asked if the areas of conflict were arising in upland areas or around farmyards.

RT replied that different access issues had been identified including users not keeping to paths and the control of dogs.

EJ agreed that dogs are the biggest issue and area of conflict.

DM suggested that landowners are given more information regarding the option of diverting rights of way out of farmyards and that generally this option is looked upon favourably when the LAF is consulted on applications.

EJ confirmed that there would be a cost to the landowner associated with the application to divert a path. The cost consists of advertising and officer time. The advertising doubles the cost of the application.

IM asked if it was feasible to use the money from the LAND project to provide discounts on applications for diversions around farmyards.

EJ thought it would be difficult as it would be seen as state aid.

DS suggested that a diversion subsidy could be offered to farms within the Glastir scheme.

RT added that Glastir may be a mechanism especially if they already have an access element. He said would take all on board all the comments and thanked members for their contribution.

## **6. Beacons Way Steering Group**

The Steering Group meets annually and 2015 is the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year for the Beacons Way. A number of items were discussed at the recent meeting. Chris Barber has decided not to republish his Beacons Way Guidebook; he is considering publishing it online or the possibility of selling the publishing rights. There have been a number of comments received claiming that the route had deteriorated, but the general feeling from Steering Group members was that the route is in a reasonable condition. Wales Trails was also discussed which will be discussed in the next agenda item.

## **7. Wales Trails**

Unfortunately Sarah Tindall, NRW, could not make today's meeting. NRW have been looking at recreational trails in wales (routes marked with green diamonds on OS 1:25000 maps). NRW is keen to look at how the routes are managed on the ground and to provide consistency so that users will know what to expect. The project doesn't affect National Trails. They are looking at condition standards that routes would need to meet to qualify as a 'Wales Trail'. In the BBNP the Beacons Way, Usk Valley Walk, Taff Trail, and Wye Valley Walk have been identified as potential trails. A lead organisation would need to be agreed for routes crossing more than 1 Local Authority area. The Beacons Way would not currently achieve the standard for way marking due to the BBNPA way marking policy in upland areas, therefore the BBNPA are not looking to submit the route as a promoted/recreational route.

JE added that the criteria for promoted route needs reviewing as it would be irresponsible to promote some of the more remote sections of the Beacons Way.

DM agreed and said we should not try and harmonise the East and West of the route as the sections are so different.

RB will feed these comments back to NRW.

The other routes are multiple authority routes and the BBNPA are not keen to take on the lead authority role. The Brecon and Monmouthshire Canal towpath is one route that we are looking to promote with the Canal and Rivers Trust taking on the lead role as it is understood that it is keen to promote this route.

PD asked if there had been any consideration of using rocks with painted symbols like in Switzerland and France instead of the post and way markers in upland locations.

It was agreed that the LAF should write a letter to NRW requesting that the criteria for promoted routes be reassessed.

## **8. BBNPA Wardens Service weekend working**

IM said that he had been made aware of proposed changes to the BBNPA Wardens Service and weekend working as part of the range of cost saving proposals put forward by BBNPA. He said that all the promotion brings people in to the National Park on weekends and the Wardens that cover weekend days provide a service where people are assisted and directed. It is important that this is protected as in recent years there has been a visible reduction in NRW, forestry workers working on weekends.

JA outlined that the BBNPA was facing budget cuts in 2015/16 which was proving a difficult challenge. Part of the cost saving proposals put forward is looking at enhancement pay for weekend working which is currently paid to some staff for working weekends and Bank Holidays.

JH thanked IM for bringing the matter to the attention of the LAF. She stated that two warden posts had been lost in the last year and there are 3 wardens that regularly work on weekends with others working occasionally. They often work with PCSO's on weekends who value the warden's knowledge.

NRW are major landowners and the BBNPA are paid a small amount of money to manage and warden areas such as the Waterfalls. The need for partnership working needs to be underlined to NRW.

JA added that he understands there is a reorganisation in the land management staff at NRW so it would be timely to remind NRW of the BBNPA partnership work.

All members agreed that the wardens should be present on weekends as this is when the visitor numbers are at their highest. It was felt that the wardens give a sense of authority and reassurance and are able to provide people with assistance and direction if needed. Weekends are often the best time to liaise with landowners and residents that work during the week days.

JH said that one of the problems is that the amount and variation of work that the wardens cover including looking after visitors, repairing paths, habitat management, Glastir projects etc. it is difficult to balance the work with the number of wardens in post.

Members agreed that IM should write a letter to the Chief Executive of the BBNPA stating that it would be advantageous to keep some form of weekend work for wardens. IM will circulate the letter to members for comment.

## **9. BBNP Nature Fund Access Works**

RB gave members an update on the project. The majority of the money needs to be spent before the end of March 2015. £160,000 is being spent on Waun Fach. Currently there is snow cover causing problems getting the stone onto site. Contractors are lined up and ready to commence when conditions improve. The access to Waun Fach is seen as one of the highest priority paths as it is currently a badly degraded area of peat and does not provide a very pleasant visitor experience.

## **10. Welsh Government funded access works**

RB explained that the WG had offered BBNPA an additional access grant in January most of which had to be spent by March 19<sup>th</sup>. RB outlined some of the access projects put forward for the £160,000 received from Welsh Government for access and rights of way work. The LAF agreed to write to the WG making the case for extending the time for a number of the projects. Some projects will need to be carried out by the end of March as they require SSSI consent due to ground nesting birds.

## **11. Potential ROWIP projects 2015/16**

EJ said that he had received confirmation from NRW that there will be a ROWIP grant in the next financial year and it will probably be around £50,000, the same as the previous year.

Members were asked that if they had any ROWIP projects in mind that they would like to see considered then please contact RB or EJ to discuss.

DH asked if ROWIP projects could include Rhiws.

RB said yes as long as they are either on access land or a public right of way.

## **12. Rights of Way Reports**

EJ outlined the consultations that have been sent to LAF members since the last meeting.

IM said that they had seemed sensible and that the LAF gave their full support. He added that it would be helpful if the consultation email could give a brief outline of the background to the application.

EJ agreed.

JS said that he had referred the recent consultation for a diversion at Middle Bettws to his colleagues at Glammorgan - Gwent Archaeological Trust and will respond in due course.

### **13. Any Other Competent Business**

#### **Closures to Rights of Way**

DM asked if LAF members could be informed of closures to Rights of Way. He was dismayed to find that the routes through Clydach Gorge are to be closed for 3 years due to the dualling of the Heads of the Valley Road and also a section of the Canal Towpath is to be closed for 3 months.

JE said that there is a notification system for closures along the canal.

EJ added that the Canal towpaths are exempt from having to apply for closure orders.

PB added that she had not seen any notices on the paths in the Clydach Gorge.

Blaunau Gwent RoW Officer confirmed that notices were posted on the 7<sup>th</sup> January at the end of each path and the contractor Costains had place an advertisement in the local newspapers.

EJ said he would look into the issue regarding the closure of paths in the BBNPA area of Clydach Gorge.

#### **Dedication of Access Land**

RB said that NRW had considered dedicating National Nature Reserves as CROW access land. BBNPA has been asked if there is any land that it would like to dedicate. Two sites have been suggested; Clyngwyn and the Gunpowder Works. The benefits would be reduced occupiers liability and visitors would be given a certainty over right of access.

JH added that the BBNPA is currently in the process of bidding for Heritage Lottery Funding to upgrade the structures at the Gunpowder works. At present a barrier has been installed on one of the two bridges to stop access to some of the structures as they are in a poor condition. The dedication of Clyngwyn is a good idea as it would bring a block of land into the other area of open access.

Members questioned whether the dedication of the Gunpowder Works would affect the application for funding.

RB thought that dedication of the land may help the funding process and if required access restrictions could be put in place until work had been carried out on the structures.

JS added that in his experience there is usually no problem with Scheduled Monuments being on access land.

Members agreed to support the suggestions.

#### **14. Date of the next meeting**

IM suggested that the next meeting be arranged for the end of May/beginning of June. Members agreed to a site visit followed by a meeting, the date and location to be confirmed.