

**Confirmed Minutes of the BBNP Local Access Forum Meeting held at 14.00 on Wednesday
10th July 2013 at The National Park Visitor Centre**

Present

Chairman: - Mike Scott Archer (MSA)

Secretary: - Richard Ball (RB)

Hilda Williams (HW)

Pam Bell (PM)

Ian Mabberley (IM)

Denis Murphy (DM)

Gwyn Gwillim (GG)

Colin Woodley (CW)

Jan Bailey (JB)

Julian Atkins (JA)

Observer:

Eifion Jones (EJ)

Michael Smith (MS)

Richard Tyler (RT)

Robert Deane (RD)

Right of Way Officer BBNPA

Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

BBNPA Sustainable Tourism Manager

Land Use Consultants

1. Welcomes and Apologies

MSA welcomed members and observers. Apologies for absence were received from Pavel Vitek, Fiona Ford Torfaen CBC, Stacey Delbridge RCT and Janet Bailey sent her apologies that she would be arriving late for the meeting.

2. Confirmation of Minutes from the Meeting on 19th April 2013

The Minutes were accepted and it was agreed MSA should sign them as a true record.

3. Matters Arising Not Otherwise Appearing On the Agenda

No matters arising.

4. Brecon Beacons National Park Visitor Management Plan Consultation

MSA welcomed Robert Deane of Land Use Consultants.

RD outlined the processes that have taken place between March and July for the preparation of the Visitor Management Plan (VMP). The draft plan is in progress with the aim being to present the final report to the Authority at the end of September.

RD presented the key findings that have come out of the VMP (relating to the LAF)

- 74% of visits were day visits with a high amount being repeat visitors.
- High level of participation in outdoor activities.
- Lack of recent evidence on the effect of visitor activities and the effect on the natural environment and biodiversity
- Pressure points with recreation and natural environment are very few but those that do occur are mainly in fragile upland areas.
- Strong support for tourism from local communities.
- Main concern of farmers is the effects on commons grazing.
- Opportunities available to involve more local people in visitor and countryside management.

RD spoke about specific issues that had come out of the consultation and asked the LAF for their comments.

To limit unlawful activities on open access land RD suggested that partners should agree to set tolerance limits. JA added that there was scope for the BBNP as landowners to introduce a permit system and added that the BBNP are in the process of introducing an events protocol.

RB mentioned the increase in use of the area by the military. JA confirmed that graziers had agreements with the MOD and questioned whether landowners should enter into similar agreements. IM explained that in the Black Mountains the main problem associated with the MOD use is the traffic disruption on the narrow lanes at the busiest times of day. JA added that at Storey Arms the number of MOD vehicles take up many of the parking spaces available for recreational users.

DM asked if the BBNP had been notified of the Original Mountain Marathon event due to take place in October. JA confirmed that the BBNP had worked with organisers and were asking for contributions from participants to go towards the management of the event area.

PB asked RD how they were defining outdoor activity providers. RD confirmed that they had consulted with South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group along with other groups such as DOE and Scouts. MS added that some groups have their own guidelines limiting numbers in groups.

RD suggested that to encourage appropriate behaviour from visitors that there is a need to increase the awareness of codes of conducts and for new ones, where none exist. DM said that he would be presenting his finding and his draft code of conduct for multi-use paths later in the meeting.

RD outlined the suggested hierarchy of interventions for eroded paths.

RD stated that in order to conserve the sense of remoteness, the VMP would show mapped areas and suggest ways in which inappropriate behaviour can be discouraged.

The VMP would also address traffic and parking. Priority sites need to be identified for interventions to be put in place and find opportunities to work with visitor attractions to provide parking.

MSA thought that to encourage more day visitors there was a need for the provision of attractive café facilities at Storey Arms. PB agreed and suggested that planning policy needed to be relaxed to encourage tearooms to set up away from honeypot sites. RT explained that the key was to promote existing facilities. JA suggested that maybe the next step would be to carry out market analysis to help understand visitor expectation which would help with diversification ideas and possible feed into planning policy. HW agreed that there was a need for facilities at Storey Arms. JA explained that the National Trust has looked into this but due to the current economic climate they have put the plans on hold.

PB stated that there was a community and tourism need for local shops. GG agreed and thought that they provide good stop off points for DoE groups for example to stock up with water.

IM highlighted the difficulty in managing areas on weekends and mentioned the lack of NRW staff working on weekends when the visitor numbers are greatest. RT explained that the BBNP are looking at ways of increasing volunteer numbers and the use of volunteers is working well in the Waterfalls Area. JA confirmed that Monday-Friday working hour's flexibility is being looked into.

CW thought that there should be more public conveniences and considered there to be a lack of facilities throughout the park.

DM mentioned that the lack of data on visitor numbers and biodiversity mentioned in the findings of the VMP could be addressed by linking to university students and asking them to carry out research projects.

MSA suggested that by encouraging children of all ages to the NP it would help foster a good future relationship and they would learn to appreciate the area. RT stated that there were opportunities to give training on environment/conservation principles to outdoor staff, DoE leaders etc. RB stated that mountain leaders already cover this in their training.

JA suggested that we need to publicise more the cost of maintaining public access. IM said an easy cost effective way of highlighting the cost of maintaining a specific section of path would be to put a sign up at each end. RB said that the point needs to be made that the responsibility for much of the work lies with the landowners.

MSA thanked RD for his presentation and the team for their work on the VMP.

5. Glastir Permissive Access

MSA highlighted the cul de sac bridleway path that leads to the Roman fort at The Gaer for possible permissive access if the landowner was to enter the Glastir scheme. The bridleway has already been improved using ROWIP money and there is currently no right of access to the remains of the fort.

MS explained that NRW are looking for recommendations of possible permissive paths from the LAF that they can then match up with Glastir applications. They were unable to give out details of farms/areas that were applying for Glastir. RB suggested the criteria for proposed permissive paths needs looking at.

6. Wales LAF Conference Report

MSA gave an update from the conference held in Builth Wells attended by MSA, RB, CW and DM. MSA summarised the NRW report on legislative development. MSA passed around the new Accessible Routes and accommodation publication produced by Powys County Council following a presentation at the conference.

DM gave a presentation on his draft code of conduct for multi-use paths. In summary multi-use paths are desirable however there is the potential for conflict between users due to routes being too narrow, lack of signage, obstructions e.g. moorings on tow paths, surface upgrading creating fast cycle routes. Many of these conflicts can be overcome by publishing a code of conduct, improving signage and considering the consequences of upgrading surfaces.

IM commented that cyclists were not always able to give way to pedestrians. RB stated that The Canal and Rivers Trust try to discourage Sustrans from putting National Cycle Routes on towpaths due to the implication that if it is a cycle route then cycles takes priority. MSA suggested that the fault lies in the designation of routes on paths that were too narrow for multi-use paths.

MSA informed members that the National Access Forum Wales is to meet Thursday 18th July in Newtown. Anyone is welcome to attend as observers. The agenda is to include a presentation by Jont Bulbeck, NRW, on promoted routes across Wales.

7. Phytophthora update

RB gave an update on the current situation. 300ha in the BBNP have been identified for clearance with the key areas being Talybont-on-Usk and Coed Rhaiadr. Works are due to start in the coming weeks. Paul Dann from NRW has indicated that the larch trees within 100m of public rights of way are to be felled and others will be injected.

JA stated that he was concerned for the BBNP. Mapping shows lots of small outbreaks in the last 12 months across the park and confirmed that the BBNP was working with colleagues at NRW to minimise the spread. JA emphasised the importance of cleaning boots after walking in forestry and encouraged everyone to spread the word.

MS explained that there were experiments being carried out using herbicides to try and kill spores without damaging the trees.

DM asked how the situation is affecting ROW in the park. EJ confirmed that there were 10 closures in the last year for forestry works.

DM asked if the restoration process had been considered and if it was possible to replant with a mixed deciduous. JA suggested that NRW would have to bring forward their re-design process plan and that future replanting would be critical.

DM asked if the disease can be spread by the storing the timber. JA confirmed that the felling of the trees interrupted the spores' lifecycle.

8. Promotion of easier access and disabled access routes

RB gave a presentation on the routes and facilities available to people with limited mobility within the BBNP. 25% of the routes promoted in the Powys booklet are with the BBNP and they outline details such as surface type, slopes and facilities. BBNP have details of routes on the website with maps and route descriptions.

RB explained there was the option for submitting details of routes onto the photo trails website. The Fieldfare Trust have developed the website and insist on an audit of the routes before publishing which they can carry out at a cost or train a member of BBNP staff to carry this out.

RB asked for feedback from the LAF on whether there should be more promotion on the website or to add trails to the Phototrails website?

MSA considered a booklet to be very useful especially for people who are not computer literate and also easy to pick up from accommodation providers and Information centres. MSA also suggested asking disabled users how they felt the best way to find out information and feed this back at the next LAF.

HW and IM both agreed that a booklet or leaflet would be useful.

9. Rights of Way Report

EJ provided the LAF with an update on Rights of Way.

10. ROWIP and ROWIP Funding programme Evaluation

MSA read out the questions and the responses from himself. MSA asked the LAF if they were satisfied with the responses, the LAF agreed.

JA explained that there was a big question mark over the ROWIP funding for 2014/2015

MSA asked for any comments/thoughts to be emailed to him by the weekend.

11. Natural Resources Wales LAF Work Programme

The LAF discussed the relevant matters that the NRW and Welsh Government would be referring to the LAF in the 2013/2014 year.

The Review of LAF Working Practices – MSA stated that nothing had been received but he would keep RB and members briefed.

Review of Open Access Draft Map – MS stated that NRW had sent out letters to all land owners affected.

Access to Water – SPLASH has continued this financial year but it was uncertain about next year.

12. Any Other Competent Business

MSA informed the LAF that NRW would be holding a Corporate Plan meeting at Garwnant Forest Centre where they would be looking at the ways forward for NRW and this would include seminar sessions.

13. Date of Future Meeting

Wednesday 9th October 2013, 14:00 at the National Park Visitor Centre.