

Confirmed Minutes of the Brecon Beacons National Park Local Access Forum Meeting held at 14.00 on Wednesday 9th October 2013 at The National Park Visitor Centre

Present

Chairman: - Mike Scott Archer (MSA)

Secretary: - Richard Ball (RB)

Pam Bell (PM)

Ian Mabberley (IM)

Denis Murphy (DM)

Gwyn Gwillim (GG)

Colin Woodley (CW)

Jan Bailey (JB)

Julian Atkins (JA)

Phillipa Cherryson (PC)

Patrick Dobbs (PD)

Observer:

Eifion Jones (EJ)

Right of Way Officer BBNPA

Michael Smith (MS)

Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

Roger Thomas (RT)

Tredegar Town Council

Mark Stafford-Tolley (MST)

Powys County Council

David Leighton (DL)

RCAHMW Guest speaker

I. Welcomes and Apologies

MSA welcomed members and observers.

Apologies for absence were received from Pavel Vitek, David Sharman, Jon Everington, Hilda Williams, Andrew Flemming (Blaenau Gwent CBC), Fiona Ford (Torfaen CBC), Stacey Delbridge (Rhondda Cynon Taff), Richard Davies (Monmouthshire LAF) and Karen Birch (Carmathenshire LAF).

MSA welcomed Phillipa Cherryson and Patrick Dobbs who have been recently appointed as members of the LAF. Jon Everington has also been appointed a member, however, was unable to make this meeting.

MSA invited all members present to give a brief introduction to themselves.

2. and 3. Election of Chair and Deputy Chair

As specified in Point 8 of the adopted Terms of Reference the appointment of The Chair and Deputy Chair will be for a 12 month period.

RB confirmed that he had not received any expressions of interest for the positions of Chair and Deputy Chair and asked members if anyone was interested in standing for either position.

MSA confirmed that he was happy to continue in the role of LAF Chair. CW nominated MSA as Chair, seconded by DM.

CW confirmed he would be happy to continue as Deputy Chair. MSA nominated CW as Deputy Chair, seconded by IM.

4. Confirmation of Minutes from the Meeting on 10th July 2013

MS highlighted an error under point five, first line of second paragraph which should read 'Welsh Government is looking for recommendations' and not Natural Resources Wales. The Minutes were accepted and it was agreed MSA should sign them as a true record.

5. Matters Arising Not Otherwise Appearing On the Agenda

Visitor Management Plan

PD queried the statement that came out of the Visitor Management Plan that said that there was strong support for tourism from local communities and stated that in his opinion that this was not the case in the Myddfai and Llangadog communities.

JA clarified that the statement was a finding that came out of the Brecon Beacons National Park Visitor Management Plan which gave an overall picture of the National Park.

Events

IM expressed concern regarding the high number of events being held in areas of the National Park and the disruption these cause. Specifically IM mentioned that Vale of Grwyney Community Council had written a letter voicing their concerns following a cycling event that was held on the same day as the Llanthony Show and caused problems on the narrow roads in the locality.

JA and RB both said that to date they had not received any written communication from Vale of Grwyney CC.

JA said that the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority is not always consulted by event organisers prior to events taking place. The proposed Events Policy related specifically to events being held on National Park Authority owned land. It is proposed to engage with other landowners such as the National Trust to see if a similar events Policy could be rolled out across the National Park.

JA also advised members of a mountain bike event due to be held in the Black Mountains in April 2014 with up to 600 cyclists. GG confirmed that graziers had received letters notifying them of the event.

JA said that the National Park Authority is working closely with the organisers of the Original Mountain Marathon (OMM) as they are holding part of the event on National Park Authority owned land. An additional voluntary levy to competitors is to be paid towards conservation in the event area.

IM asked MS to take back to NRW the issues regarding the number of events using forestry areas within the National Park.

PC was also concerned about the number of events on and around the Bloreng and the possibility of multiple events being held on the same day and the increased risk of an accident occurring.

GG suggested that there should be a limit to participant numbers.

IM thought that the issue was not sufficiently addressed in the Visitor Management Plan.

JA suggested that a report be brought back to the next LAF meeting and the event policy should be formalised.

IM offered to liaise with JA, RB and EJ on the events policy.

Phytophthora Update

JA gave members an update on the current situation. At the last meeting an area of 300ha had been identified for clearance within the National Park, this has now been revised up to 700ha. The proposal is to remove all larch trees on NRW owned land from within the National Park. There is a programme of felling and stem injection in place and NRW are trying to remove timber rather than leaving on site. There is also a plan to accelerate the redesign plans in the next few years.

LAF Conference 2013

MSA said that following the two papers which were presented to the conference on shared routes access, it was suggested that NRW should look to develop DM's Code of Conduct for Shared Use Routes for future use. MSA confirmed that NRW had not contacted DM to pursue this but an update from Joe Roberts, Recreation Advisor NRW, said that the upcoming Green Paper could be used as a vehicle to take this forward.

13. Historical Paths and Routes on the Black Mountain (brought forward)

MSA introduced guest speaker David Leighton from Royal Commission of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) who gave an informative talk on the Ancient Trackways in The Upland Landscape.

JB asked DL if following on from the upland survey the RCAHMW carried out, in his opinion, how at risk are the historical tracks from the use of off road motor vehicles.

DL replied that there were a number of historic routes threatened by the use of motorised vehicles and this was a particular problem in the Cambrian Mountains.

MSA thanked DL for his presentation.

6. Recreational Routes / Wales Trails and Beacons Way

RB informed members that NRW were carrying out work on promoting National Trails. NRW are not looking to create new routes but take existing ones which meet set criteria and provide additional funding to promote them as National Trails. The routes would require days of approximately 12 miles, a high standard of infrastructure and well waymarked to allow users to navigate without the need for a map and compass.

The Beacons Way fits the criteria for the first 3 days however, further west the route on open hill is not waymarked so would require a major re-route in places to be considered as a Recreational Trail as proposed by NRW. The Taff Trail and Usk Valley Walk would fit some of the physical criteria but both routes are more complex and may fail as they currently have no lead authority or formal agreement amongst managing Authorities. RB asked the members if in their view the Beacons Way should be put forward as a Recreational Trail.

IM asked what would be the advantage to the Brecon Beacons National Park?

RB replied that the additional promotion would be the main advantage.

MSA thought that the challenging areas in the western section of the Beacons Way are what appeal to certain walkers and it would be wise to protect areas such as these. MSA considered there to be plenty of lowland routes within the National Park that fit the criteria.

DM said that many walkers treat the individual days on the Beacons Way as day trips and a split between East and West allows for different levels of walking.

JA thought the suggestion was worthy of consideration. Concerns have been raised that walkers are being lulled into a false sense of security after the first three days and people really need to know what they are taking on.

PC raised concerns about having criteria that states that a map and compass are not needed as there are instances where mist may come down on high ground and walkers could find themselves in difficulty even if the path is well waymarked.

MSA said that the Brecon Beacons Park Society are aware of the project and may come back to the LAF with their comments.

PD said that the Beacons Way goes through his farm and there are some associated negatives such as gates being left open.

DM asked if both sections of the Taff Trail would be promoted. The cycle route fits in better as it is mainly surfaced and should be considered as a multi-use path.

EJ confirmed that the pedestrian route has more issues that would need addressing as it is less obvious on the ground and not as well way marked, but could easily be improved. The main issue with both routes is that they do not follow Public Rights of Way so there is the question over who would be responsible for the route.

MSA suggested the matter should be brought back to the next meeting.

7. Glastir

Members were provided with a briefing note from Jane Tibbott, Senior Tir Gofal Project Officer. JA explained that farmers that are looking to provide permissive routes as part of the Glastir scheme will only be allowed to put routes forward for inclusion if the route has been recommended/ suggested by the LAF.

There have been a couple of instances where landowners have not been able to apply for permissive access as the LAF has not put the routes forward. JA suggested the LAF should carry out an exercise to highlight routes that are considered to be desirable as permissive access.

MS agreed that the exercise would be difficult as NRW are unable to disclose which landowners are entering Glastir.

JA suggested that the LAF would be able to respond in a more targeted way if Glastir Officers approached the LAF after a permissive access proposal had been put forward by a landowner.

JB said that Natalie Ward, BBBNP Heritage Officer (Archaeology), should be involved as there is an opportunity to gain permissive access to historic sites.

JA proposed that a workshop be arranged to look at maps and highlight desirable permissive access.

RB agreed to arrange a meeting and send out invitations.

8. Welsh Government Access Review

EJ reminded members that an announcement was made by the Welsh Government in July that it would be undertaking a review of access and outdoor recreation legislation in Wales.

EJ said that there had been three meetings in September between Welsh Government officers and stakeholders on an invitation only basis. A working document had been provided before these meetings as a discussion document. The document is appended to the minutes.

The Welsh Government is planning to publish a Green Paper at the beginning of December and it will then be open to public consultation.

JA explained that the driver behind the review is the existing cumbersome legislation and the drive for economic development, jobs and growth. It is difficult to form an opinion and comment until we receive the green paper.

PD said that Farmers Unions and Reps in Carmarthenshire are certainly aware of the review and are looking into it.

9. Visitor Management Plan

JA gave a brief update. The executive summary has been circulated to LAF members. The draft report is now complete and will be taken to the National Park Authority meeting in October for approval to go out for formal consultation.

11. Rights of Way Report

EJ said that two consultation letters had been sent out to consultees since the last meeting; a reconsultation letter for the diversion application at Tynllyn, Llanfrynach and a diversion application at Maes Y fallen Farm, Llandeilo. There would be two to three more consultations soon.

EJ said he would be in contact with new LAF members to explain the procedure.

12. LAF Questionnaire

Information and questionnaires looking at the LAF working practices have been forwarded to the LAF from NRW. MSA worked through and discussed each question from part two of the questionnaire with the LAF members.

There were a number of issues that arose during the discussions.

RB said that the BBNPA needed more of a steer from the LAF in certain circumstances.

DM was concerned that the views of the LAF members were not always clear cut.

MSA suggested that in some instances members would need to vote so there would be a clear steer from the LAF

JB thought LAF members should have a presence at more events such as Hay Festival and Geoparks festival.

PD agreed that there should be more promotion of the role and the work carried out by the LAF.

PC offered her expertise as a journalist and said she would be willing to write press releases etc. The key was that it should come from the LAF members and not the BBNPA.

IM agreed with the suggestion and JB suggested a newsletter similar to that sent out by the BBNP volunteer coordinator to volunteers.

PD proposed that PC should become LAF Publicity Officer, this was seconded by PB.

JA suggested that PC liaise with RB and the BBNPA Communications Team and reiterated that it is important that the LAF is seen as independent body.

MSA had noted from attending neighbouring LAF meetings as an observer, that there were more observers attending and suggested we were precluding observers with day jobs from attending by holding our meetings during working hours.

DM suggested it was worth trialling with one evening meeting.

JA said that there was no reason not to have an evening meeting; however, the mechanics of the venue would need to be considered as the Mountain Centre for example would not be available.

MSA asked RT for his opinion as a Town Councillor.

RT replied that it would be worth experimenting to see if an evening meeting would see an improvement in attendance. He asked if anyone was able to attend a LAF meeting as an observer.

MSA confirmed that the meeting was open to anyone who wished to observe.

JA said there was always the opportunity for a site based meeting looking at problems on the ground. This is possibly a way of engaging more local members of the public.

14. AOB

Open Access Review consultation ends on 7th November

Following earlier discussions on the current situation with Phytophthora IM asked what would happen to larch trees on private property.

JA confirmed that if they were found to be infected DEFRA would serve a plant health notice and the tree would need to be felled. If the tree is not infected it would remain. NRW would be looking to clear all larch trees on its land.

15. Date of the next meeting:

Wednesday 22nd January 2014, 14:00 at the National Park Visitor Centre (Mountain Centre)

