

Carmarthenshire Local Access Forum (LAF)

Meeting Minutes

Thursday 14th January 2021

Online via Microsoft Teams, 6pm

Present:

Members:

Mark Hadley (MH) – LAF Chair
Karen Burch (KB) – Deputy Chair
Richard Leggett (RL)
Mo Rapley (MR)
Jillie Gardiner (JG)
Paul Barrett (PB)
David Stacey (DS)
Geoff Williams (GW) – intermittent network issues

Secretary - Caroline Ferguson (CF) – Countryside Access Manager

Advisors/ Observers/Speakers/Members of the Public

Councillor Hazel Evans (HE) Executive Board Member for Environment
Steve Pilliner (SP) CCC Transportation & Highways Manager
Neil Thomas (NT) CCC Senior Outdoor Recreation Manager
Helen Grey (HG) Natural Resources - Wales People & Places Officer
Stephen Barrett (SB)

Apologies: Members:

None

Advisors/Observers:

None

*CCC in these minutes refers to Carmarthenshire County Council

**NRW in these minutes refers to Natural Resources Wales

ITEM	ACTION
<p>Items 1 - Welcome & Introduction</p> <p>MH welcomed all to the meeting and outlined how meeting via MS Teams will work. Round screen introduction of all attendees.</p>	
<p>Item 2 – Apologies</p> <p>None</p>	
<p>Item 3 - New Members/Resignations</p> <p>None</p>	
<p>Item 4 – Matters Arising from Minutes</p> <p>KB – would like an update on item 9 – self closing gates – has concern been fed back? Update please.</p> <p>CF – concerns have been fed back to maintenance. Will generate formal response which can be fwd. to all members.</p> <p>RL – funding update & access reform further information?</p> <p>CF – 3 funded projects to be discussed under agenda item 6. Final stage of Access Reform commences next week so no additional information yet. ‘Cross Cutting Themes’ expert group being assembled to meet challenge of matters which cross the 3 separate topics of Access Reform under discussion.</p> <p>MH – UCRs and BOATs in PROW Access Management Plan or HAMP?</p> <p>CF – UCRs sit in HAMP, BOATs will sit in the PROW network hierarchy and asset management plan.</p> <p>MH - given leisure value of UCRs can the Highways money issued to PROW continue to be used on UCRs despite their position in the HAMP hierarchy</p> <p>RL – could UCRs be included on the ‘my nearest’ within the PROW webpage? Useful for reporting issues.</p> <p>CF/SP – will need to check.</p> <p>MH – Recruitment progress</p> <p>CF – final stages of Countryside Officer post recruitment approval.</p>	<p>CF</p> <p>CF/SP</p>

Item 5 – Covid19

CF – Impact on Countryside Access service continues. Increased restrictions imposed at Christmas means service is back to essential site visits only, Rangers continue to work under strict safe working practices, slowing overall work. Delivery of projects still viable, Order making regulations cannot be met so path Order work on stop again, legal Order been on stop for virtually the whole of the Covid pandemic.

NT – Similar problems to PROW. Also, staff were re-deployed out of service during pandemic, service is approx. 4 months behind where it would normally be. A significant increase in demand for service.

MH – What sites do you manage?

NT –Pembrey, Llyn Llech Owain, Mynydd Mawr, Nature Reserves

MH – is Pembrey closed/restricted?

NT – all sites are fully open, but guidance restricts people’s exercise to ‘from home’ only.

CF – Could Helen provide a picture of Covid19 impact on NRW estate?

HG – Can get that information, not part of People and Places role.

MH – Is Helen’s role best placed to attend the LAF.

HG – a matter under discussion within NRW. Aiming to get the best person in regular attendance. Could more than one NRW representative attend?

CF – more than one welcome to contribute to discussion.

SP – Covid has been a very difficult period, it will affect services for some time, priority at present is keeping everybody safe.

HG

Item 6 – PROW Projects

CF – recent meeting with KB & SP to go through 3 projects for this financial year. Projects selected for deliverability alongside strategic value, received positively by KB as a representative of LAF.

- 1) Signposting programme, aimed at routes that are open for use, 132 issues to be resolved, awaiting delivery of materials, satisfies ROWIP actions and Policies as well as a statutory duty. No landowner negotiation required. Scheduled to be delivered first.

MH – will this be roadside only? Previous information from former manager highlighted issue of new roadside signs being removed/vandalised.

CF – Only a highway signpost project, waymarking is a separate exercise. Comms exercise beforehand, this will hopefully reduce any negative response

to signposting. Exercise to check each signpost request for path condition was labour intensive but it will hopefully lead to improved acceptance of signposting across County.

KB – Are there any Bridleways being signposted?

CF – Will check spreadsheet and send results to all members

CF

- 2) All Ability Path to be developed along public footpath 36/53 (1.2km), alongside the Lower Lledi (Swiss Valley) reservoir. Not a high number of issues logged against it but old tarmac surface is breaking down so will require repair soon. Meet ROWIP objectives and aligns with high priority routes identified on draft PROW network hierarchy. Being delivered in partnership with a Llanelli Rural Council project to develop all ability leisure facilities on/around the reservoir.

MH – seems like a high-profile scheme, very positive outcomes, worth promoting both CCC and Comm Council efforts.

KB - Will facilities be available to everybody

CF – Llanelli Rural will manage the site facilities, it is understood access will be via a permit system. The footpath will obviously be open and accessible to all at all times, this will not be part of the permit system.

- 3) Kidwelly Byway Project. A significant Byway network in the kidwelly area, some status queries have prevented/delayed works in past. A circular route of Byways totalling 6.2km, has been identified incorporating routes with minimal status inconsistencies. Routes that may be subject to reclassification in future have been avoided. 25 issues to be resolved, scheduled to commence in March, last to be delivered due to remote landowner liaison slowing the process.

MH – will they be open to all, inc 4x4s

CF – one route may require a TRO due to restricted width, otherwise currently yes.

MH – are there projects ready for next financial year?

CF – some ideas already in place for next year, further ideas to be developed. Preparatory work can start earlier in the financial year enabling delivery of more complex schemes with resolution of more longstanding issues.

SP – plan is to be more strategic going forward, hopefully this year's projects demonstrate our commitment to making improvements.

KB – any news of additional funding this year following Covid pressures?

SP – not that we are aware of.

CF – nothing specific to ROWIP but recent notification of another Access Improvement Grant for 2021-22.

Item 7 – Ramblers ‘Don’t lose your way project’

CF – suggested agenda item from PB.

PB – national project identifying 700 miles of lost ways in Carmarthenshire. How do the authority propose to respond.

CF – Ramblers article issued recently highlighting significant mileage of lost PROWs in Carms, no detail on identification process or status of routes. No further communication with RA yet to get more details or cross reference routes identified with DMMOs already on our schedule. Article centred around the 2026 cut off date, not enacted in Wales, may not be applicable given access reform proposals.

RL – Raised subject with Jack Cornish (RA) having looked at a route identified by project. Paths identified by volunteers are ‘potential’ lost ways. RA intend to work with volunteers to further investigate routes and prioritise those routes with most value to the network. Recognition that situation in Wales is different to England.

JG – are RA working with other organisations such as BHS Dobbin group?

CF – nothing has been promoted as far as a collaboration, organisations will be aware of one another and will likely have considered a joint project.

Item 8 – Issues Reports

RL – identified key issues, issues have increased year on year, at no point has there been a reduction. Possibly better reporting. Last year has been significant, people discovering their local routes, dramatic rise in 3 months to January 2021, challenge for the team. Large jump in Byway issues, doubling in the last quarter.

CF – would need scrutiny to pick apart reasons for increased Byway issues. People are using PROWs more, are more active online and naturally are becoming more familiar with reporting issues.

SP – Covid has been an exceptional period that has seen people using their local PROWs more, inevitably finding and reporting problems. General trend of issues increasing has occurred in line with significant financial pressures in local government. Additional funding secured to allow us to start addressing those historic issues on the network.

RL – appreciate the financial constraints. Tourism and self-catering accommodation growing rapidly. Walking from the door is valuable to holiday makers. Might be possible for our local leaders to raise this with the Welsh Government as a way of getting support to maintain our local PROW resources. How does provision for local people intersect with the needs of tourists?

HE – Covid has taken so much out of public finances, WG doesn’t want to see money being put into tourism whilst ‘stay at home’ is the national message. When restrictions lift there should be a shift in resource towards attracting tourists. Need to

be mindful of potential conflict between local people and tourism, needs to be carefully managed.

MH – briefing note put together in issue reports, no formal response to date.

SP – strategic plans and a forward work programme now being delivered with a view to improving the overall picture. Being more strategic and using initiatives to help us improve performance.

KB – How does the Asset Management Plan compare with ROWIP – is there much difference.

CF – asset management is more around reduction of risk, particularly around our bridge structures than access improvement specifically. Complements the objectives of the ROWIP, providing a structured approach.

SP – In viewing the HAMP, bear in mind it is a very realistic document, putting matters into perspective, available resources, backlog and importantly prioritising the network according to risk.

Item 9 – AOB

Country Parks

MH – Pleased to have Neil in attendance, can updates be provided for each meeting if attendance isn't possible.

NT – Once staff have settled into new roles following a re-organisation it should be possible for a representative to attend the LAF. The situation with Covid has created restricted capacity, dividing maintenance teams to ensure continued workforce if a positive Covid test occurs within one of the teams. Working closely with Karen on access issues within the parks.

KB – We need to know who to approach on access matters outside of PROW, LAF should have an opportunity to comment on projects, schemes and funding elsewhere in access provision and to hear other positive stories.

NT – Involvement of both Crown land and NRW across sites under CCC management. Relationship with NRW is crucial at Pembrey.

Projects ongoing

- Scheme to solve a complex coastal erosion issue involving a PROW/cyclepath across SSSI/Ramsar/SAC designated area of saltmarsh.
- Llyn Llech Owain – expansion of designated equestrian access around park perimeter, improvement of boardwalks for all abilities, replacement/removal of gates to improve access, formalisation of parking arrangements ongoing.
- Mynydd Mawr – when resource is available there is a need to rationalise paths and clarify permitted use across the park to reduce user conflict and enhance experience.

MH – Need to keep conversation going, LAF will help where they can.

CF

JG – Car parks were closed at CCC parks during first lockdown, what is the situation now with regards to travelling horses for exercise and using car parks.

NT – Guidance is clear this time, country parks can stay open. Stay local guidance being strongly enforced by CCC and Dyfed Powys Police.

BOATS & UCRs

MH – BOATs and UCR projects for 2021-22. Could a UCR or BOAT be identified for volunteer involved project, something that could be promoted as beneficial for all users. Something to discuss further.

KB – would support that idea.

MH – Annual report to do, happy to undertake as usual if Authority are happy with arrangement?

CF/SP – Both agreed.

Equestrian Strategy

KB – would like to ask LAF to support some sort of survey to inform the Equestrian Strategy, important to understand the problem.

CF – Intending to conduct surveys, would hope there would be LAF support for that activity. Survey is essential for the strategy. Data is limited and outdated, need a picture of Carmarthenshire.

JG – Research of equestrian tourism has found some examples from Europe, happy to share and assist with strategy.

CF – Access reform could have significant impact on the strategy, need to keep in mind potential for change.

KB – when will reform come in? don't want to delay if changes are going to take time to come in.

CF – draft reform proposals by June, no implementation date currently. No intention of delaying the strategy but may need to future proof it as far as possible.

Area Statements

HG – Is there much knowledge of area statements within the LAF, would a short presentation of area statements be beneficial?

MH – nothing since the workshop, update welcome, item for next agenda.

MH

Active Travel Consultation

KB – County are asking for both Active Travel suggestions but also suggestions for ‘access for leisure.’ Are the County looking for ideas for leisure routes then equestrians should be given an opportunity to contribute.

SP – significant response to Active Travel consultation from equestrian community.

KB – consultation unclear as it appears leisure opportunities are being considered but the views of equestrians are not being taken on board. Horse riding views should be accepted if leisure routes outside of active travel are under consideration. Appreciate Active Travel constraints but leisure routes are not subject to same restrictions so horse riders should be involved in conversation. Will send exact wording contained in consultation to SP for comment.

JG – WG guidance states active travel routes in rural areas should take account of needs of equestrians.

MH – KB & JG to send information to Steve for consideration.

Other Access

CF – Keen to broaden LAF’s access interests, participation through Neil’s team underway, intention to approach Common Land Officer to attend LAF in future to advise of Common Land, Urban Common, Village Green issues/projects.

Network Hierarchy

CF – draft document has been circulated to members for comment before final version is taken through Council approval process.

Performance Indicators

CF – Email from RL enquiring about undertaking PIs in line with discussion during 2019 LAF meeting where a PI survey every 2 years was agreed in principle. Did not occur in 2020 (Covid) but we would like to complete PI surveys in 2021, data is useful, the task is ideal for volunteers. If successful PIs could return to an annual activity. This would be another volunteer activity that can be managed through the CAMSWeb software once it is installed.

MH – Good idea for use of volunteers.

<p>Item 10 – Future Agenda Items</p> <p>RL – revisit County Walks, consideration of walks removed from promoted list. Cycling on footpaths, current legal position. Carmarthen Wetlands project, any news on progress.</p> <p>SP – Review of forward work programmes involving access, CF to contact other services and provide a list. More strategic approach.</p>	<p>CF</p>
<p>Item 11 – Meetings for 2020/221</p> <p>CF – meeting by meeting approach until Covid19 situation settles, April 8th, 22nd or 29th tbc.</p> <p><i>**29th April now confirmed**</i></p>	