

Meeting note

Title of meeting	National Access Forum for Wales meeting 69	
Date of meeting	29 June 2021	
Time of meeting	10:30 – 13:00	
Present:	Howard Davies (NRW Chair), Geraint Davies (NRW Board Member/new Chair), Rosie Plummer (NRW Board member), Elfyn Jones (BMC/WEL), Mr Scott Ashworth (MOD), Rachel Lewis-Davies (NFU), Beverley Penney (OSS), Jonathan Hughes (National Trust), Phil Stone (CW), Charles de Winton (CLA), Kathryn Stewart (BHS), Adrian Walls (CSS Wales – WROWMWG), Rachel Evans (CA), Gwenda Owen (Cycling UK), Gerwyn Owen (RYA Cymru), Simon Patton (Mountain Training), David Evans (Elan Valley Trust), Bernard Griffiths (FUW), Ruth Rourke (IPROW, Deputy Chair), Tom Sharp (WSA), Rebecca Brough (Ramblers Cymru), Dave Waterman (LARA), Kieran Foster (Cycling UK), Steve Rayner (WATO), Ben Sears (WLGA), Simon Pickering (WG), Helen Lewis (WG), Ian Maberley (LAFs), Carys Drew & Jayne Carter (NRW Secretariat), Juliet Michael (NRW), Susan Williams (NRW), Jont Bulbeck (NRW), Delyth Davies (Translator),	
Apologies	Kerry Thatcher (Visit Wales), Eni Hansen-Magnusson (Sustrans), Chris Mills (Afonydd Cymru), Mark Weston (BHS), Phil Roberts (WG)	
Observers	Angela Charlton (Ramblers UK), Eben Muse (BMC), Eifion Jones (Ceredigion Council), Steve Jenkinson (Kennel Club), Anthony Richards (Welsh National Parks), Michael Smith (NRW), Alison Roberts (NRW), David Liddy (NRW), Bill Purvis (NRW), Dave Maccallum (NRW), Owen Gruffudd (NRW), Michael Smith (NRW), Liza Tomos (NRW)	
Item number	Item	Action

Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 69th meeting and advised that this would be his last as Chair. Meeting is recorded for meeting notes only and this recording will be deleted once these are complete.

Chair thanked the following for their support over the past 3 years;

- Carys Drew (NRW) – who organisational skills are second to none and who continues to work in the background on the NAFW meetings.
- Ruth Rourke (Vice Chair) – who is always willing to step in and assist where needed.
- Jayne Carter (NRW) – who is also in the background to help the meetings run smoothly.
- Thank you to all the Forum Members who put their time and energy into making the NAFW meetings work. This is truly a collaborative venture and only works if the Forum Members work as well.

1.

Chair noted that access to the natural environment and general access issues are very important, these can sometimes invoke differing opinions. Some of the discussions that follow can be quite tricky, and he was grateful that the forum has not shied away from these, and for how members have managed these discussions and the mileage covered over the years.

He thanked members for the card and comments, noting that this was hugely well received, and he was very thankful.

Introductions to the two NRW Board members joining the meeting were made; Geraint Davies, who will be taking over the role of Chair, and Rosie Plummer, who has an interest in access, is an active participant on NRW board and who is also involved with the Protected Areas Committee.

Geraint Davies introduced himself as an NRW board member and a hill farmer from Bala within the Snowdonia National Park. Dealing with access from day-to-day with visitors onto the land and enjoys discussions with people about the issues of land use and access within Wales. Looking forward to taking over as Chair and working with Forum members to help with access all over Wales.

Rosie Plummer introduced herself as an NRW board member and having an enduring interest in the outdoors. With a background in Agriculture and Forest Sciences; before taking to Science and Management. A broad set of interests and knowledge that impinge on the Access Forum and currently a member of the Pembrokeshire Coast and National Park Authority.

Chair ran through the meeting arrangements; including muting oneself during presentations and raising hands to speak, as well as using the 'Chat' function.

Carys advised on how the simultaneous translation worked and how to dial in to the teleconference number for those who require it.

Apologies were read out, including from John Morgan who had informed Carys that he has stepped down from his role as National Representative for LAFs. The Chair wished to formally thank John Morgan for his role as the National Representative for LAFs providing the key link between NAFW and the statutory local access forums.

Action 69.1: to thank John Morgan formally for this contribution to his National Representative role for all Forums.

Actions and Matters Arising

The notes of the previous meeting were signed off by email. Actions were completed or considered discharged.

Action 68.1 Members to provide written contributions by 30 March

2. Asked for any contribution to be sent in to Carys as they are compiled and kept on record.

68.2 Carys to compile a one-page summary of the meeting of 'Lessons Learnt' from Helen Pye's presentation

This had been agreed between the Chair and Carys in May and would be circulated to members when completed.

Why society needs nature: lessons from research during Covid 19

3. Dr Sue Williams, Social Research Lead Specialist Advisor, NRW shared highlights from a new report which had been published recently about the impact of Covid-19 on why

society needs nature. The work was initiated in October 2020 when the extent of the impact of Covid-19 was becoming apparent, especially in terms of people's use of the outdoors, their engagement with nature and impacts on recreation and land management.

There is a small group of Heads of social science from a variety of environment bodies and the main government departments in the UK. This group acknowledged the priority of needing to understand what was happening with Covid-19 and changes at a population level. One of the challenges faced was, how to get evidence to practitioners as quickly as possible in such an evolving and changing situation.

As a first, representatives from Natural Resources Wales, Forest Research, NatureScot, Natural England and the Environment Agency came together with their experience of in-house knowledge, with a dual remit of evidence and operations, and tried to complete a Rapid Evidence Review. As the people who produce the evidence, the focus was primarily on the evidence undertaken by the above. This included a range of national surveys across Wales, Scotland and England, site-based data was pooled from various sites and there was qualitative research. Forest Research looked at people's experiences during Covid-19 but practitioner knowledge was critical to this research. This included from site managers, operational colleagues and these were included within case studies.

All this information from Wales, Scotland and England was collated into one report to distribute to key stakeholders as soon as possible. Lessons learnt at this stage was trying to collaborate information from 5 government agencies is not 'rapid' or 'easy' to do, with a need to complete 5 differing government quality assurance processes and application processes, which took longer than originally intended.

This report has been published and is available from early this year [2021] for those who are dealing with the real-life impacts of Covid-19.

There were a number of key questions asked, to look at the actual impact of Covid-19 at an all population level to understand what was happening with people's engagement with the outdoors and recreation. There were also questions regarding what was happening during lockdown's and the subsequent easing of restrictions. Also, what challenges and benefits were there from the changes

in behaviour over the last 12 months. Lastly, whether there were any similarities across Wales, Scotland and England.

In the analysis, questions asked included whether there were any differences between social groups? What were the differences between places? Have the activities people been doing changed? Did this change people's barriers or motivation to visit the outdoors? Main benefits; e.g. health and wellbeing, which has been an issue as a whole through Covid-19. Main challenges; particularly around visitor numbers and responsible behaviours.

The results are within the report, but the main outcome from the research is that engagement of nature and recreation has become more polarised; the difference between those people who participate and those who don't has increased. Even though there were more people who indicated they participated 'more' than usual, there were as many indicating they participated 'less' than normal.

The first lockdown, in March to June 2020, saw a substantial drop in visitor numbers for use of the outdoors. When these restrictions started to ease, numbers increased considerably; like the first day of January sales. This type of polarisation has not been seen before, there has always been seasonal differences, but this was unprecedented in terms of the stresses and strains it has created.

Interestingly, looking at overall participation across 2020 during both lockdown and easing of restrictions, there is a net loss for the total of visit numbers for the whole year. Final point for concern is that twice as many children spent less time outdoors than the proportion of those spending time outdoors than normal. This is a critical issue and further work to look into this in more detail is needed, including the role of school closures.

Covid-19 has increased the pre-existing inequalities of participation of those who enjoy the outdoors. People from deprived areas who are more likely to be unemployed, or have a low income, with poor education, or those who are older or with disabilities had a more negative impact from Covid-19. Whereas the opposite occurred for those on higher incomes within less deprived areas, they would visit the outdoor spaces more. Some of these inequalities seem to be linked to an unequal distribution of local green space and those with a private garden. Especially in the 'Stay Local' messaging window, GIS shows those within deprived areas have less access to local green space.

Those that would benefit most, had the least provision and least opportunity, it has made inequality worse.

Local green spaces use in urban areas had a substantial increase in use, in particular within the first lockdown. Tourist 'hotspot' areas saw a considerable decrease within the first lockdown. NRW site data indicated a 90% reduction in visitor numbers during the first lockdown period. When restrictions eased, there was a doubling in numbers in the comparable month from 2019.

Looking at the Office for National Statistics data, who have been monitoring this on a weekly basis, when shops and hospitality reopened, there was a reduction of people going out for the purposes of outdoor exercise. But people have seen the outdoors as a 'safe space' during the whole of the pandemic. In subsequent lockdowns, such as Winter 2020, there has been a decrease in numbers but not too low; people are still using the outdoors for exercise during Covid-19 restrictions.

There is data on the type of activities people are undertaking, whilst this is in progress and results are indicative and not guaranteed at this stage. Walking has maintained the highest activity and has increased during Covid-19. Cycling has also increased, in particular as a family-based and younger person activity. There is an indicative result that water-based activities have increased too; outdoor [wild] swimming being a popular past time, from anecdotal reports. As well as paddle-boarding and 'inflatable watercraft' having an increase in activity too. 'Higher skill' activities; such as climbing, has not seen such a significant increase in participation.

Barriers to outdoor recreation has historically been due to lack of time, poor health and bad weather. This year these have changed under Covid-19 and various facets to why there are barriers to the outdoors in 2020. The barriers included; people complying with government restrictions and the 'stay home' messaging, concerns of spreading Covid-19 to others and/or concern of catching Covid-19 from others. Other Covid-related barriers were closure of car parks, whether there were restrictions on visitor numbers and the cancellation of outdoor events or group activities.

Benefits to engagement of the outdoors, sometimes can be overlooked, but were looked into under this survey. The biggest benefit for people were mental health and wellbeing; the psychological benefits of 'freedom', 'escape'

and the 'feeling of relief'. Physical health benefits, through increased activity, were also noted as gyms remained closed. Social engagement was cited as another benefit, as the outdoors gave a 'safe space' to spend time with family and friends. An increased connection and appreciation with the environment and nature was also a benefit for some. Even with Covid-19, the environment and climate change are still within the top 3 issues that concern people in the UK.

Challenges during Covid-19 included the 'peaks' and 'troughs' of opening up and closing down access in certain outdoor areas. Limited green space provision is also a concern, particularly in those areas of deprivation. The management of tourist hotspots is to look at how local green space and opportunities can be improved. Irresponsible behaviours; litter, fly-camping, overcrowding, damage to the environment etc. Within the report, there is a good case study from Lindisfarne where there was an impact on the nesting birds and the negative impacts. Covid-19 has impacted on local environment volunteers and organisation staffing levels, and the impact on local communities; especially the transmission of Covid-19 in overcrowded areas and impacts on infrastructure.

Conclusion: The report is a snapshot, given the time and resourcing available. Covid-19 is still an active situation, unpredictable and subject to change. Government organisations across the UK will now look to understand the likely future predictions of behaviour; what is likely to continue, to change and how concerns can be understood in advance rather than firefighting.

There is knowledge that Covid-19 will continue to impact on recreation and nature. Covid is not just a health issue for the UK, but it is also an environmental issue. A process is being set to monitor long-term visitor numbers and a new People and Nature survey is underway for Wales to look at the use of the outdoors. The need to look at the negative impacts of Covid; such as responsible behaviours and visitor numbers. But the need to increase the health and wellbeing benefits of participation is also required.

Discussion points

- Noted that Canoe Wales and British Canoeing had seen massive increase in past 12 months in enquiries about access to water and membership.

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- Green space references include blue space. Diversity of provision has been one of the challenges, that diversity of activities and of opportunities need to be closer to where people live. Within that there has been issues to access to water as well. There is an interesting case study in the report around the River Wharfe which obtained bathing water status, and saw a massive influx of visitors, which is indicative of the level of demand. One of the challenges of addressing issues in relation to hotspots and possible provision of more opportunities in order to help spread the load.
 - Report echoes the issues seen by PROW officers.
 - Whilst different weather patterns do play a part in terms of providing comparison of data from previous years, the general trend of the comparator is robust. Overall, there was a substantial increase compared to what would have been considered 'normal', or pre-Covid, late Summer. But equally the 80% increase is not an absolute, concrete difference.
 - Acknowledged the need to emphasise the difference between small scale wild camping undertaken responsibly and irresponsible fly-camping.
 - Sue will give further consideration to profiling new visitors and the question raised on whether there are any differences in incidents and accidents in the outdoors, in relation to new users and more people unaccustomed to the outdoors are going there, whether there is a trend from, e.g. the Coastguard or Mountain Rescue, of an increased number of unprepared people becoming a burden on the emergency services and how this can be addressed.
 - Given the massive increase in the use of outdoor recreation during the pandemic, it was suggested that there is a need for NRW and WG to prioritise responding to the challenges this poses around building responsible behaviours into Welsh culture for the future. There is a need to look at education and supporting people within their caring and enjoyment of the countryside and nature.
 - Within the Evidence remit in NRW, this has been prioritised to work on immediately. The work includes setting up a new People and Nature survey
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for Wales, which means data will be collated quicker, some should be available in September/October. The Access and Outdoor Recreation Team are also driving this work forward within NRW. Evidence is to be used to emphasise the real benefits and recognise challenges, and where these can be addressed. Evidence is one part of the picture, stakeholder opinion, advisors and land managers are all part of the solution.

- Chair noted that one statistic Dr. Miles Richardson from University of Derby uses regularly is that '70% of people who make an emotional connection to nature go on to exhibit pro-environmental behaviour.' So, this is about investing in the future of society and the environment. It is vital as an organisation to set up agreements with landowners, because a lot of the land is in private ownership. To have a bearing on any of that, there needs to be a mechanism in place.
- It would be useful to have in-depth statistical analysis across social groups to be able to identify the most important factors (and their interaction) that resulted in disparate visiting figures across social demographic groups.
- There is a focus on equality of outcome and less on equity of opportunity.
- Sue is working internally with NRW's senior statistician to look at new data as it is delivered.
- Sue flagged a 4-year project which is to analyse across Wales the between the distribution of green space, people's use of that green space and common mental health disorders from anonymised health records. NRW are partners in this work, along with the Exeter medical school, and it is being led by Swansea University. Results will be coming out later this year [2021].

Action 69.2: Sue to discuss presenting results of Swansea University-led programme of work to the Forum with Carys.

Sustainable Farming Scheme

Juliet Michael, Access & Outdoor Recreation Team Leader, NRW [on behalf of Phil Roberts, Welsh Government] delivered the Sustainable Farming Scheme PowerPoint Presentation.

Powers have been granted to the Welsh Government to implement their own post-Brexit Agricultural Support Scheme, being called the Sustainable Farming Scheme. Wales will manage the transition between schemes and primary and secondary legislation is required to do so.

The timeline for this was shared. Primary legislation will be required so Wales can have a Sustainable Farming Scheme, secondary legislation will be required to deliver that scheme. The timeline gives 2024 as the date first applications will be submitted.

The scheme currently looks at safe and sustainable food production, responding to both biodiversity and climate emergencies, and rewarding farmers for delivering on sustainable land management [SLM] outcomes. This reward scheme is to go above the statutory requirements and will look at holistic advisory service.

4.

The SLM outcomes are based on previous consultations and include; clean air and water, resilient ecosystems and enhanced access and engagement, which is the outcome the Forum will be focussed on.

In previous schemes, farmers were rewarded for costs incurred, but this new scheme will be rewarding food production and the outcomes.

The presentation covered scheme design and structure. The scheme would be available to most farmers most of the time, and incentivising and rewarding best practice. There will be National Minimum Standards [NMS] and NRW working to ensure that complying with access legislation is part of NMS. Further levels of the scheme were; optional higher level actions followed by collaboration which could progress over a number of years. The presentation ended with a focus on the principles of the scheme and next steps.

In Philip Roberts' absence it was agreed that any questions would be noted and passed back to him. Chair thanked Juliet Michael for stepping in to cover the item.

Questions raised to feedback to Philip Roberts:

Q. Access to 'Green Space', what about access to 'Blue Space' and inland waters, and, if this is based on ROWIPs this is not included currently. So, what is the scope and how is this being considered?

Q. Reassuring to hear about cross-compliance and this being applied to access this time, is there any indication from WG on what next steps will be initiated and when they will respond to the consultation, especially on being clear on 'next steps' in regards to stakeholder engagement?

Juliet noted that NRW were asking similar questions of WG and were advised that there are current staff shortages with new starts in September. One of the new staff members would lead on the People, Animals and Place Priority. The expectation is that by Autumn there will be a member of the Land Reform Unit whose role will be to engage with stakeholders.

Q. How does this Forum interact with WG over this issue? How can NAFW support the roll-out of a strategic approach to delivering this element of the Sustainable Farming Scheme, especially around Access?

Q. Most important part of this for farmers is the true cost to deliver it on the ground. Looking at previous similar programmes; such as Glastir, farmers will be doing this work at a loss and it will be of no interest to participate in creating access etc. Please can we ask WG to get the calculations and costs for this scheme correct so farmers will want to sign up to it, to start off with, and then to deliver?

Simon Pickering noted in relation to stakeholder engagement and the Land Management Reform Unit [LMRU], as part of the NAFW a representative from the WG Access Reform Team within WG has always attended the meetings and taken notes back to the LMRU and will continue to do so. There will be mechanisms put in place for wider engagement as part of the LMRU work and there is a line of communication within the WG team, which reflects in the status. It is early days, but there is discussion of access to water as a theme to be examined as part of the scheme development.

Q. The consultation that closed recently, when will the results of that consultation be published? Are we able to access information this time about the number of consultation responses that came in from Wales? Then the

number of responses that came from outside Wales and the rest of the World?

Q. It was mentioned that one of the aims is to increase ease of access to nature-based recreation, how does the scheme aim to incentivise farmers/landowners to allow additional access to green spaces and protect historical access? Will funding be conditional based on access in historical cases, or new cases?

Action 69.3 Carys to feedback questions from NAFW to Philip Roberts and will bring response back to next meeting.

Access Reform Programme

Simon Pickering, Head of Landscape and Outdoor Space [WG] and Jont Bulbeck, Programme Lead for Access Reform Programme [NRW] delivered a PowerPoint Presentation.

After the Senedd Election on 6th May 2021, a new Minister, Julie James, and Deputy Minister, Lee Water, have been appointed. With this a new 5-year 'Programme for Government' was published on 15th June, setting out key government priorities, government will also do other work.

5.

The Minister and Deputy Minister have responsibility for access to countryside, coast and rights of way, water is also a responsibility, climate change is a key priority, and they have a large ministerial portfolio including environment, housing, planning, energy, environment, transport and dedicated landscapes. The Deputy Minister, will lead on access and the Minister will lead on designated landscapes.

The 'Programme for Government' is available online <https://gov.wales/programme-government>

Simon noted the funding provided by WG for access:

- Access Improvement Grant funding to local authorities and national park authorities, allocated by a formula with £2million allocated in 2021/22.
 - Wales Coast Path
 - Additional funding for National Trails
 - Our Living Trails – new project to look at biodiversity.
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- Working with Visit Wales to promote responsible recreation and countryside code.

In relation to the medium to long term work, having had key pieces of work completed; the ARAG report and the NAFW Inland Water Subgroup, these reports are currently under review with the Minister.

Jont Bulbeck then recapped on the work and process of producing the ARAG report. The final report was delivered at the end of April 2021. He covered the reform areas and cross-cutting themes, the outputs delivered through the year then highlighted some of the recommendations in the ARAG report.

Simon and Jont gave their thanks to those involved in the work, in particular to the external stakeholders as part of Steering Group and Expert Groups.

All outputs would be available on the [WG ARAG webpage](#).

Discussion points:

- Simon Pickering noted that WG Water branch are initially leading work to begin to scope out the WG intent to "begin to designate Wales' inland waters for recreation" and said that work is in early stages. Helpfully, connections are being made with the work produced by the Access to Inland Water Sub-group.
- Chair hoped that the NAFW would provide one mechanism for discussion as the work develops.
- Noted that NRW and WG are having ongoing discussions on the relationship between access as part of Sustainable Farming Scheme, including the Access Reform Programme, and looking at the opportunities. This was also discussed within the ARAG discussions broadly on how they may interact, for example a farming scheme to support higher rights and provision of access infrastructure as an additionality to improve the access and its implementation. There is a lot of scope available to consider those relationships around the content of that reform and the way in which it would be implemented. Less in terms of taking forward the reforms themselves in the sense of legislative change.
- The ongoing Access Improvement Grant and the £2m for this year was welcome however it was noted that this was significantly less than that allocated for Active Travel, evidence in the covid report presented

highlights the case. Hoped that having same Deputy Minister with responsibility for both could bring more joined up thinking and more equity. Simon Pickering confirmed they would be working closely with Active Travel colleagues.

- In relation to the cross-cutting themes identified in the ARAG process, initially WG had said that responsible recreation was expected to be developed after the other reforms but it developed a higher profile and was considered in the ARAG process. Jont gave a summary of the process and the options considered for responsible recreation. Recommendations have been provided for WG to now decide on their preferred approach.
- Chair noted that his understanding of the Access to Water Sub-group was that this was a task and finish group and the work providing the report to the Minister was now complete.
- Requested that report be circulated to the full Forum.

Action 69.4: Access to Water Sub-group progress report to be circulated to the Forum.

- Noted that there was a different government and Minister in place and that there was no issue in circulating the report that had been produced.
- Simon Pickering noted that the establishment of the sub-group was requested by the deputy Minister and was initially intended as task and finish group. WG would not put forward a view about whether it should continue as it is considered as a NAFW sub group so for members to consider. A sub-group could be pulled together if there was a need to tackle a specific question.
- Report included points relating to suggestions for further work.
- Noted the effort that sub-group members had put into the report and members were now engaged, wanting to progress work.
- The response had been put forward to the new Deputy Minister but no final response had been received yet.

Action 69.5: When received, Minister's response to be circulated to the full Forum. Full Forum would make a

decision as to whether there is work required to take place, and whether sub-group is the best way of doing that.

- Concerns raised about rights of way service being under resourced and examples of significant backlogs and a need to tackle this. Given the range of presentations given this is opportune time to highlight this issue and considering the evidence from covid work a need to raise it up the agenda. Whilst the AIG is £2million is welcome this is relative drop in the ocean compare to other budgets e.g. Active Travel. All this evidence needs to be brought in front of the new Minister and prove the divide between recreation and active travel is uneven. There are six Ministers in total that cover this agenda, so how do we bring all this evidence and need for investment back around the table?

Action 69.6 An invite to the Minister to join the forum at an appropriate time in future.

Question about landowner liability and agreed to consider the topic for future agenda item.

Action 69.7 Add item on future agenda to look at landowning liabilities.

Written Contributions

6. Written contributions had been circulated; any further contributions could be sent to Carys for inclusion.

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- 7 **Next meeting:** 9th November 2021

Ruth Rourke, Deputy Chair gave sincere thanks on behalf of members to Howard for his chairing of some interesting and difficult topics and meetings, and all the work done in preparation to support meetings. Howard formally handed the Chair to Geraint Davies.