

# Meeting note

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<b>Title of meeting:</b>	National Access Forum for Wales Meeting No 77
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	5 March 2024
<b>Time of meeting:</b>	10:30-13:00

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## Members and named representatives:

### Present:

(\* = deputising for named representative)

Geraint Davies, NRW Chair, Carys Drew, NRW Secretary, Rosie Plummer NRW, Rachel Evans, CA, Beverley Penney, OSS, Jont Bulbeck, NRW, , Bill Purvis, NRW, Charles de Winton, CLA, David Evans, Elan Valley, Steve Rayner, WATO, Ruth Rourke, IPROW, Ian Maberley LAFs, Chris Mills, Afonydd Cymru, Rebecca Brough, Ramblers Cymru, Sarah Smith, WG, Gwenda Owen, Cycling UK, Fiona Clay-Poole, WLGA, Simon Pickering, WG, James Nevitt, Defence Estates, Steve Williams, Sport Wales, Phil Stone, Canoe Wales, Adrian Walls, CSS Wales, Jonathan Hughes, NT Cymru, Dave Waterman, LARA, Helen Donnan, BHS

**Observers:** Kieron Foster, Cycling UK, Dave Maccallum, NRW, Quentin Grimley, NRW, Michael Smith, NRW, Eifion Jones, Ceredigion CC, Dave Liddy, NRW, Gwyn Lloyd Evans, Gwynedd CC, Bill Somerfield, WG, Sarah Tindal, NRW, Matthew Williams, WSA, Rachel Parry, NRW,

**Speakers:** Dawn Thompson, NRW, Tom Luddington, Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum, Pam Bell, Waters of Wales,

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<b>Apologies:</b>	Peter Rutherford, NPAs, Eben Muse, BMC, Barry Andrews, Disabled Ramblers
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## Item

### 1. Welcome and apologies.

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The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting apologies were noted. Chair noted that there had been technical issues in issuing emails prior to the meeting and set out the meeting agenda.

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## 2. Connecting people with nature on the land in our care: NRW's outdoor recreation strategy

Dawn Thompson presented an overview of the draft strategy, talking through the process to date and next steps for strategy sign off and delivery.

Dawn reminded the meeting of the need for the strategy to consider the question *'what is the future of recreation on land cared for by Natural Resources Wales, considering the climate and nature emergencies, sustainability and the well-being of future generations?'*

The strategy had three aims to:

- Set strategic direction for recreation on freehold and leasehold land managed by NRW, and NRW managed National Nature Reserves
- Support local decision making
- Tell the story about what NRW does and why

Dawn noted the external context that the strategy lands in, which has seen a huge shift and change since NRW was formed in 2013 and since the first corporate plan was published in 2014. The context of the declaration of climate and nature emergencies, the pandemic, the cost of living and cost of energy crisis which continue now. She noted that those elements have really impacted the context that NRW and other organisations operate in now. Last year saw the publication of the second corporate plan for NRW. In reflecting on the shift seen in the last 10 years, there is a need to think about what the future holds, and the recreation strategy needs to be agile to what the next 10 years might bring about.

Dawn summarised the process to develop the strategy so far including 9 months engagement to get a huge amount of input into the development of the strategy, both internally and externally. She shared and summarised some of the key headlines that came out of the engagement:

**Access** - Use what we already have and create a consistent approach and standards for access

**Prevention** - Have a balance between nature and people and explore sustainable options for getting to and using sites

**Integration** - Explore what others are doing, share learning and identify future trends and needs

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**Evidence** - Identify what data we have and what data we need to evaluate delivery from an evidence-based position and use it to explain decisions

**Collaboration** - Work more with partners on volunteering, delivery, and communications

**Involvement** - Work with communities on maintenance and decision making to create a sense of ownership

**Awareness** - Provide better communication and guidance about what people can do and where they can go

**Long-term** - Make our offer viable year-round by adapting to spend and seasonality

Nature connection provides physical and mental wellbeing and during the pandemic there were a number of studies to explain that people noticing nature demonstrated benefits to people and to nature. People with a strong connection are more likely to be more considerate of the impact and more likely to show pro-environmental behaviours e.g. recycling and pro-nature conservation behaviours such as getting involved in volunteering and supporting nature conservation organisations.

Through the strategy, there is opportunity to support this connection through the access NRW provides, the activities NRW facilitates and how NRW engages people in the natural environment. It supports the corporate plan vision of nature and people thriving together.

Dawn shared the structure of the strategy, including long-term vision to 2050, guiding principles that sit as the foundation of the strategy, 8 strategic aims and goals to support the vision, with each goal having 3-4 objectives for each goal (objectives are shorter term to 2030 in line with the corporate plan). There would be some national level and local actions which would be evolved through area plans and with partners.

The vision is underpinned by 'we will' statements to achieve the vision: leading the way, protecting our special places and access for all, and Dawn explained what these meant.

Principles for the strategy (bold) are **living within our means**, given the squeeze on the public purse there is a need to maximise benefit, collaborate with partners, increase effectiveness and to make tough and necessary choices to provide where NRW can make the most difference. **Doing the right activity in the right place**, balancing people and nature, engaging with nature to improve wellbeing, use evidence to inform decisions using a zoning model, to identify areas for recreation, community and nature. **Enabling others to do more**, want to make it possible to make it possible for communities and other sectors to do more, streamlining processes, work with communities and support projects and opportunities including legacy of projects.

Dawn then set out detail behind each of the Strategy's 8 aims, explaining the different considerations and thinking behind these and setting out more detailed goals and objectives. She highlighted the importance of using evidence to inform decisions. The

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aims and objectives contribute to NRW's corporate plan and Wellbeing of Future Generation's Act goals.

Alongside the strategy there will be an evaluation framework which is being developed. This will include a set of indicators that will be used to measure progress.

**Discussion points:**

- View that as well as protecting nature, there should also be emphasis on protecting the communities that live in areas that will be zoned and question of community involvement in the zoning process.
- Dawn responded that the purpose of the community zones is to do that. The zoning model is evolving, and she is looking at methods for how communities are engaged in process, there's a need for two way dialogue and about parameters.
- Comment that lots of work and thought has gone into the draft strategy, appreciate the focus is land managed by NRW, question about the extent that the principles and ideas can be facilitated across public and other land owning bodies.
- Dawn noted that there is a big role for NRW to lead the way and influence, whilst setting high standards and principles but also working with others and reflective in their practices. The strategy is focussed on land in NRW's care but can see there are broader benefits to working with other organisations to instill the same principles in their operation as well as well as working with WG.
- Suggested potential conflict of interest, in nature conservation role and encouraging lots of people into the countryside. Question about whether Dawn perceived any conflicts. Should perhaps look at educating people to know how to behave and respect property.
- Dawn noted that whilst wanting to encourage people to get out to spaces and special places, with climate and nature emergencies there has to be a balance. Particularly evidenced in balance people and nature aim of the strategy and to have frameworks in place to make sure special places are protected, but in connecting people and nature hoping to encourage nature conservation behaviours and get people understanding more about the environment. The aims in the strategy give the tools to do this to help focus where NRW carry out activities. It is important to promote awareness and understanding and responsible behaviour and to see a focus on this in the strategy, educating older people as well as young people.
- In response to question about level of engagement to date with local authorities, noting their role as the education providers, Dawn noted that local authorities were included in engagement but discussion will now focus on the steps to take in local areas. Want to have stakeholder mapping of each place based team and local area needed to involve people in the conversation to make it a reality and look at what we can share. Fostering partnership working is key to working with other organisations in terms of tackling key issues. Focus is on land in the care of NRW but there are broader impacts and potential to instil in delivery of

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other organisations. Some authorities did feed in but there is more conversation to be had to engage on the ground at a local level.

- Tom Luddington, Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum supported on the engagement and the survey which received over 4,000 responses. He reflected on the way the draft strategy had incorporated key themes from the engagement including that partnership is in there strongly, that's what people really wanted. He suggested that using others as ambassadors is good way to solidify best practice in the outdoors and getting those messages into schools. Improving processes is also clearly included. Partnership working needs to begin now to develop the actions and to involve communities and partners.
- In terms of what recreation changes are being contemplated that may happen up to 2050, Dawn said NRW would like to see more people not only having understanding of nature but also how to protect it and using broader benefits of connection to nature to influence mental and physical wellbeing, and how can we use changes to further influence understanding of nature. Strategy needs to focus on broader benefits and influencing change in people's live rather than following recreational trends.
- In context of zoning there is a question of how this will be done if we don't know what will happen in the future and who will hold knowledge of these zones. Use of evidence is right but also need future scoping in a sound way that works for Wales.
- Dawn noted that zoning is in early stages of development so couldn't answer detailed questions but have set out the 3 types that we think we'll need, need to look at how to assess the zone, what each encompasses. It may be useful to look more broadly at this for Wales and to have the same zoning model across Wales. Dawn emphasised that evidence and data is key, to better to inform decisions.
- In terms of timelines streamlining NRW processes, there are a number of processes, e.g. permissions where work is already ongoing with a new online form, working on internal permissions policy and to make that process more streamlined.
- Not aware that a condition survey of PROW carried out on NRW managed land
- Survey went out and was circulated widely by some organisations to wider membership – others didn't. How was survey quantified.
- Noted that some organisations circulated the survey more widely than others. There was a huge response and including textual data. To process these, responses to questions were themed for each question e.g. working in partnership rather than weighting on numbers. There is ongoing work and engagement to do with groups at the local level. NRW have been provided with full level of detail.
- Reference to ROWIPs will be seen in the next level of detail, other things will also be picked up in the actions. NRW as a consultee for ROWIPs includes local link and connection, that will work into strategy and in terms of connection from other direction.

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### 3. Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) consultation - subgroup

Jont Bulbeck reported to the Forum about the sub group that had been held on 15<sup>th</sup> February to consider the SFS consultation. A draft note had been circulated to attendees. Jont noted that there had been good level of attendance with 20 attendees across all sectoral interests of the Forum. He reminded members of that subgroups are put on from time to time when the Forum wants more time for detailed discussion of topics. The aim is not to develop a NAFW response or agreed submission but rather to share views and allow organisations to develop their own understanding and in the case of a consultation to submit their own responses. It helps people to understand and hear other people's views. WG attended to observe the meeting, so this provided informal feedback.

Carys and Jont had developed themes to provide context to frame meeting discussions in terms of the Forum's remit, this focussed on recreational access and any other matters that attendees wanted to raise. The meeting note meeting summarised discussion around

- Scheme rules
- Universals actions – in particular that there wasn't one for recreational access
- Continued Professional Development (CPD)
- Optional and Collaborative actions
- Any other matters

There were a wide range of views and some differences between sectoral interests but also within sectoral interests. Also some broad areas of support, not all immediately obvious, which highlighted the benefit of having ability to consider detail and complexities in a subgroup. Jont highlighted some key points:

- Scheme rules – broadly there was support, but not across all the sectors. Within those compliance with public access obligations within legislation. Difference – concerns from landholding organisation representatives that they were being included. Lot of comments around the need for support and resources around the detail of how the scheme rule would work.
- CPD - There was a lot of broad support although conditioned according to perspective of sectoral interest in relation to how recreational access would be included in the. Support around health and safety and that if recreational access is included in the scheme that there should be information related to that.
- Across discussion there was a lot of broad support for certain issues, improving accessibility and least restrictive access was prominent whether related to scheme rules, or provision or development of new access. Responsible Recreation was another theme that was broadly supported.
- Broadly support for recreation and access provision within the scheme in the optional and collaborative elements, in relation to having a mix of both permanent paid for access and permissive type access, the latter being a potential gateway to permanent access and there was agreement across the

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sectoral interests around that point for this in optional and collaborative elements.

- Broad support for ensuring public access is recognised as constraint (or restriction in terms of the consultation) around other elements and actions that might be taken forward e.g., planting of woodland, where fencing is going in as part of a scheme, ponds and scrapes that might interfere or obstruct PROW, changing land type in relation to open access land.
- Having summarised the meeting topics, Jont invited feedback from subgroup attendees to make comments on the draft and provide feedback to Jont on accuracy or areas of emphasis. Noted that in terms of responding to the consultation the deadline was in a few days. The note is provided as a record but it is for individual organisations to take forward their own responses to the consultation

## Discussion

- CLA noted that many members involved in agriculture directly, there is a great assumption that members will go into the scheme. Members see conditions as onerous, suggest that WG will have to make significant changes to the overall scheme. So for the time being this would be wishful thinking, members are not happy about the process. Cannot make long term business decisions on no financial information, difficult for farmers and landowners to sign up to.
- Whilst this was recognised and discussed the subgroup decided to consider the consultation proposals but recognised that this is an issue but beyond the scope of subgroup discussions. If people don't join up it would be somewhat academic
- Noted the lively discussion as part of the subgroup. Notes encapsulate and provide valuable perspective. Excellent examples, and power of multi-interest discussion take place. NAFW well placed to provide, hope that member interest groups can include points in their own responses
- Feeling from CA that SFS unworkable for majority of farmers in Wales, anything we want in relation to access is dependent on what WG do with the scheme. Important to recognised that there is a need to tread carefully noted that morale is at an all-time low. There is huge pressure on individuals, there is a need to be mindful of the fragility of the farming community.
- Chair echoed these concerns about the future and ability to plan long term and huge pressures affecting farmers' mental health.

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## 4. Written contributions

Written contributions from WG and Dwr Cymru were noted, email contacts for contributors are included to facilitate following up on these.

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## 5. Application for NAFW membership – Waters of Wales

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Pam Bell, a trustee of Waters of Wales (WoW)/Dyfroedd Cymru presented to the Forum to apply for membership.

Pam explained the origins and background to WoW lie in the run up to the CROW Act, when they saw a need for a stronger voice for access to water; and also one that bridges the boundaries between different activities that take place on water.

Board of Welsh Canoeing Association (WCA) of which Pam was a member petitioned for a similar act in Wales as Scottish land reform, this was initially received well, going through two enquiries but then petition was dropped.

WoW was formed in 2014 as an un-constituted group to take forward campaign for access that had been initiated by the Wales Canoeing Association. Pam noted that the WoW founding members all came from WCA, all having background in paddlesports/coaching. Early membership largely from paddlesport community, but has gradually expanded. The basis of the WCA petition was the belief that access should be freely available to all, this attracted members from all walks of life who wanted to enjoy water.

Pam noted that WoW does not have a formal signed up membership, but gave a conservative estimate 4.5k members spread across social media, email subscribers and sign up for volunteering roles. There is no membership fee or sign up form but people who have expressed interest and follow and interact with WoW. Some members have considerable technical expertise, with a small number of overseas members who provide insight into ways things are done in other countries.

Pam set out WoW's vision for

'All members of the public to engage positively with our waters, blue space and the wider environment and to enjoy their rights of sustainable blue space recreation.'

noting that for that to happen there is a need to have some rights to sustainable blue space recreation, and they will vary depending on who is actually wanting to use the water.

WoW have been told that lack of clarity in the law has been a stumbling block to progress and once formed as a group, their first step was to try to petition the Welsh Assembly to seek clarity of legal position, this was rejected on the grounds that it wasn't part of their remit. A further petition was unsuccessful.

WoW are currently concentrating on stabilising existing access. There seems to be a certain attrition of access, access points to water seem to be being lost e.g. planning, rights of way.

WoW believe that people need nature and nature needs people, so want to make sure that the access we have stays open whilst consider how to take the campaign forward.

Still engaging with the process, circulate manifesto, raise issues and respond to government consultations, respond to planning applications, lot of members volunteer

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and carry out conservation work and water sampling, efforts to look after the environment but also make sure the public has access to it.

Pam then set out key points from WoW manifesto:

[https://www.bluespaceact.org/docs/Waters\\_of\\_Wales\\_Bluespace\\_Manifesto\\_2021\\_EN\\_G.pdf](https://www.bluespaceact.org/docs/Waters_of_Wales_Bluespace_Manifesto_2021_EN_G.pdf)

## Questions

Question: Where does WoW fit in relation to blue space access and conservation trust? What is the governance structure and is it legally constituted organisation?

Pam clarified WoW is legally constituted as a [registered charity](#) (same legal entity as blue space and access conservation trust and has a number of working names). There are four trustees, Pam is one of them.

Question: Membership whether membership of WoW was paid membership?

Pam confirmed that they do not charge for membership. Stated reason for this a campaigning for access for all, so do not feel it would be appropriate and want to be open to any member of the public

Question: would the organisation be in a position to send a representative and to contribute to meetings.

Pam confirmed that WoW would attend, and likely Pam would attend as spokesperson or another trustee would be named representative when necessary.

Question – given large membership how does WoW know member views to present their views to the Forum?

Pam responded that a main way to gather views is through online surveys and email as well as gathering views at events.

Observers were asked to leave the room whilst the membership application was considered.

## Members and name representatives' discussion

Members were reminded of the purpose of discussion about membership application as set out in the Terms of Reference:

'The aim of the discussion about the application is to reach a broad (not necessarily unanimous) consensus about whether to accept membership from the applicant. The main criteria for members to consider are:

- a. Whether the organisation has demonstrated a sufficient interest in recreational access to and engagement with the outdoors
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- b. That the organisation has sufficient experience and expertise at a national level that is relevant to and can inform the work of the Forum
  - c. That the organisation has demonstrated that it agrees to membership based on the Terms of Reference
  - d. And finally, there is broad agreement of members to the applying organisation becoming a member of the Forum'

Following discussions and comments from members the following actions and points were summarised:

There was not a consensus reached on WoW membership based on the presentation. Due to technical issues circulating information prior to the meeting, members had not had opportunity to review the WoW manifesto.

It was agreed that the background information would be re issued by email to members present and views sought in relation to whether to invite:

- a) Full membership – WoW would attend meetings and participate fully
- b) Decline membership – WoW will be able to attend meetings as observer but not be added to mailing list
- c) Correspondence membership (see point 39) – WoW would be added to circulation list and provided with papers, given notice of meetings to attend as an observer but would not be invited to participate in the meetings

**Action(s) 77.1:**

Secretariat to:

- advise Pam Bell that decision not reached and request clarification of organisational status
- circulate email to members present with background information and progress membership application by email

Members present to respond by email with their view regarding WoW membership application in order to inform NRW decision,

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## **6. Closing remarks**

The Chair thanks all contributors to the meeting.

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