

The Chairs of Welsh Local Access Forums

Appendix 1 Caerphilly LAF 24/02/23

Title of meeting:	The Chairs of Welsh LAFs Meeting: No 27
Date of meeting:	26/10/2022
Time of meeting:	10:30am – 2:30pm
Location:	MCRA, Plas Dolerw, Milford Road, Newtown, Powys, SY16 2EH

Item	
1.	<p>Chairs welcome and introduction Ian Mabberley (National LAF Representative & BBNPA Chair)</p> <p>The Chair welcomed attendees to the first in-person meeting since March 2019. Apologies were noted.</p> <p>The Meeting Summary of the last meeting had been circulated and were noted. All actions had been completed; Ian Mabberley had written to the Deputy Minister for Climate Change. He had received confirmation of receipt but no response to his letter. In following up on this action, the letter had since been forwarded to Designated Landscapes and Countryside Access, Welsh Government.</p>
2.	<p>Sustainable Farming Scheme; to consider the outline proposals and any representations to be made through online feedback form.</p> <p>https://gov.wales/sustainable-farming-scheme-guide</p> <p>The opportunity to contribute to the co-design of the Sustainable Farming Scheme was noted. Carys had circulated the information to all LAFs. Some LAFs had already considered the proposals and were considering how to respond. It was advised that the deadline for sending in responses had now been extended to the 21 November 2022. Vincent Mears had been in contact with the SFS co-design team and shared some of the points from this correspondence with the meeting.</p> <p>The following points were discussed in relation to the current outline proposals:</p>

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- Welcomed the inclusion of options to improve and enhance access within the scheme
 - SFS proposes 10% of land would be for the creation of woodland. It is unclear whether this should be in a block or blocks of trees or random planting
 - Funding for access would be for matters beyond additional legislative requirements
 - Public rights of way are not currently identified as being part of the National Minimum Standards. There was discussion about the principle that existing public rights of way on a farmer's land should be in good order before receiving additional options for improving access
 - There was a need to consider longevity of access and long term maintenance and monitoring of impact needs to be built into the scheme, as well as factoring in for land changing hands. To pay for new paths that are not maintained over a substantial period of time was thought to be a waste of public resources
 - Concern that if any maintenance falls to local authorities that they already have insufficient resource to manage the existing network. Any funding for new paths should come with a requirement for on-going maintenance by the landowner.
 - The need to consider a mechanism for inputting local knowledge to ensure any potential access improvements are useful, reflecting on examples from Tir Gofal and Glastir
 - There is a need to apply standards to access that is created or enhanced e.g. British Standards as a minimum
 - Concern whether there would be sufficient uptake of the scheme
 - There is a need to ensure that any access developed as part of the scheme is publicised so that users are aware of it. In previous schemes lack of awareness of access that had been created was an issue
 - In addition to access enhancements it was important to ensure that public rights of way are identified and protected so that they are not negatively impacted by other scheme interventions
 - Noted that the impact of access improvements would be impacted by the level of funding available

It was agreed that Ian would compile a response on behalf of the LAF Chairs meeting based on the discussion points above.

LAFs were encouraged to send in their own responses and were welcome to use the points from Chairs discussion.

Action: Ian Mabberley to submit written response to the online SFS consultation Carys to then circulate this to individual LAFs to inform further responses.

3. Working relationships with appointing authorities Sharing examples of current working

Attendees shared experiences. There were variations in the relationship between different LAFs and their appointing authorities.

Discussion points made:

- The relationship with the appointing authority should acknowledge the contribution LAF members make giving their time and expertise to as volunteers
 - Noted that there can be changes in relationship within the same authority after staff or cabinet changes
 - Whilst LAFs may not be a statutory consultee on TROs, where the LAF has expressed an interest, it is reasonable to expect the authority to consult the LAF for strategic matters and they have discretion to do so
 - Suggestion that having a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the LAF and appointing authority can provide a good formalised basis for engagement. Some LAFs have taken this course of action when there have been problems whilst other LAFs felt they had a good working relationship without the need of an MOU.
 - Noted that the Welsh Government Access Improvement Grant will include a funding condition for 2023-24 to have the 'the existence of a fully functioning Local Access Forum', this was welcomed and there followed a discussion about how 'fully functioning' would be defined
 - It was noted that all elected council members must sign up to a Code of Conduct, and each authority must have a monitoring officer reporting to an independent Standards Committee. If concerns arise, the monitoring officer should initially be approached informally for advice. (See [*The Code of Conduct for members of local authorities in Wales: Guidance from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. Revised May 2021*](#)).
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- Suggestion that part of LAF member training should include understanding how local authorities work, their standards, planning and conflicts of interest

Action: Send any examples of LAF/ appointing authority Memorandums of understanding and Carys for circulation to all

4. Welsh Government update Review and discuss written update

A written update from Sarah Smith, Designated Landscapes and Countryside Access, Welsh Government was circulated in advance and the meeting discussed this.

Discussion points:

- Whilst LAFs welcome the funding to authorities through Access Improvement Grant (AIG) there was concern that the administration of the scheme is overly bureaucratic and a suggestion that this should be reviewed so that authorities have more ability to adjust projects within the funding year.

Action: Graham Taylor to draft letter recommending improvements to AIG for Ian Mabberley to issue to Minister

5. Resourcing for public rights of way Consideration of resourcing levels and any action for LAF Chairs

Discussion points:

- General concern about staff resources and revenue funding in local authorities
 - Authorities identifying budget shortfalls in reporting on their ROWIP delivery
 - Noted that some authorities use volunteers to support delivery, this requires supervision and organisation
 - The problem of reduced resources is compounded by the need to seek external funding and in doing so the need to fit in with the external funding priorities, these being for additional rather than maintenance work
 - Noted that there is no longer a consistent performance indicator for rights of way and suggested that there is a need for a better picture of performance to demonstrate the need for more resources. It was suggested that Welsh Government or Natural Resources Wales should do a piece of work to look at expenditure on PROW in different authorities
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- There was concern about deterioration in the condition of public rights of way and for one LAF, a concern about the system to prioritise maintenance of the network based on community council feedback
 - There was suggestion to explore roles for resourcing through community councils
 - Richard Leggett, Carmarthenshire LAF shared the way they report on performance management and offered to circulate this example

Action: Richard Leggett to pass on information to Carys for circulation to all

6. Outdoor access and recreation Update from some of the NRW Outdoor Access and Recreation Team's work. Carys Drew, NRW

Carys shared a summary of work in relation to:

- Welsh Government Access Reform Programme – review of NRW work to date contributing to the Programme and work being undertaken this year in relation to Countryside Code and dogs on leads
- Least Restrictive Access work covering guidance, training, piloting and promotion
- Wales Coast Path team working in partnership with social media influencers during it's 10-year anniversary year to engage with new audiences

7. Wales Coast Path Review Opportunity to consider and discuss

It was noted that the Deputy Minister for Climate Change commissioned an independent rapid review of the Wales Coast Path to coincide with the 10th Anniversary, this was led by Huw Irranca-Davies MS. The report had been published and is available online [A Review of the Wales Coast Path on its 10th Anniversary \(gov.wales\)](#)

Discussion points:

- The need for adequate funding to maintain the route that is well promoted
 - Points around the idea of a tourism levy where visitors come to an area for public access, and examples where this happens elsewhere in the world to reinvest in access infrastructure
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- Impact of climate change in the dynamic coastal environment and the need for maintenance in the face of budget cuts
 - To note the WCP review in writing to the Minister (action above)
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8. AOB

Meeting closed.
