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Cyfarfod - BMC Cymru North/Gogledd - Meeting via ZOOM

Mis Medi 1 September 2020

Minutes - Cofnodion

1. Croeso/Welcome

The Chair (TJ) welcomed everyone to the area's second on-line (Zoom) meeting.

The BMC's review of the first round of on-line area meetings had not revealed any major disadvantages and it was probable that after Covid there would continue to be a mix of face-to-face and on-line gatherings.

Area chairs had been asked to restrict the length of meetings to 90 mins. TJ promised to do his best to comply, but late additions to agendas made this a tall order.

TJ checked that everyone was familiar with the technology, encouraged informal contributions to discussion and introduced the following individuals, all of whom have special roles to play during the meeting:

Tim Jepson (Area Chair)

Tarquin Shipley (Zoom Technician)

Steve Hobdell (Note taker)

Neal Hockley (Chair of Pwyllgor Cymru)

Lynn Robinson (President)

Gareth Pierce (Chair of the Board of Directors)

Elfyn Jones (Access and Conservation Officer for Wales)

Helen Pye (Engagement Officer for Snowdonia National Park Authority)

Peter Rutherford (Access Officer for Snowdonia National park Authority)

21 members were on-line at the start of the meeting, 14 at the end. The Chair expressed some disappointment at the low turnout.

The following members are recorded as having joined the meeting, for the purposes of proving the presence of a quorum: Ann Vowles, Neal Hockley, Tarquin Shipley, Stephen Williams, Lou Tully, Arwel Elias, Gareth Owen, Gwyn Jones, Ian Martin, Steve Long, Steve Hobdell, Simon Verspeak.

2. Apologies - Ymddiheuriadau

Mike Pycroft, Geoff Bennett, Andy Boorman, Chris Parkin, Myfyr Tomos

The Chair introduced agenda items 3 and 4 by saying that there were many issues which area members could constructively discuss with the Park, especially following Covid lockdown and re-opening, however, traffic/parking and footpaths were the two which had recently provoked significant correspondence, hence their appearance this evening

3. Traffic management around Eryri

Steve Williams (Clwb Mynydd Cymru) was invited to summarise the concerns of members with respect to traffic and parking around the Park, in light of the Consultation document due to be published in Sept. 2020. These included:

- i. A disappointment that the BMC and local clubs had not been asked to contribute to the consultation so far.
- ii. Although some positive, decisive action around Snowdon has been welcome, Ogwen was still a problem

due to the infrequent, or non-existent, bus service.

iii. BMC members won't all have the same opinions, but could contribute ideas on lay-bys, cycling, bus services, car-sharing etc.

Helen Pye responded for the Park, recognising that traffic and parking are massive issues and have been for some time. The escalation of the problems this year following Covid, and the consultation report compiled by a number of national and international experts, should now help to accelerate decision-making and implementation. However, there is no 'done deal' and there would be many opportunities for further consultation, including with organisations like the BMC. Unfortunately the Covid lockdown forced the cancellation of the scheduled public drop-in sessions.

The Consultants have focused on developing world-leading, sustainable solutions, financially and environmentally; The BMC would add real value in areas such as detailed knowledge of local usage of carparks and lay-bys.

The emergency measures implemented during the summer's re-opening have allowed some of the ideas from the draft plan to be piloted.

Steve Williams welcomed the opportunity for future involvement of the BMC and proposed that a further agenda item on the same topic was required to gather the views of the membership.

Neal Hockley asked how the BMC, and other local user organisations, eg Ramblers Cymru, could be represented on the sub-groups, as landowners had been from the start.

Helen Pye agreed that, so far, there had been little opportunity for local groups to feed into the operational groups set up two years ago, but that framework could now be changed. In response to a question from Dan Lane, Helen said that the Park could do nothing on its own, it needed 'buy-in' from all stakeholders,

Elfyn Jones stated that some parties say negative things about outdoor activities and there was a need to overcome the growing division between tourists, outdoor enthusiasts and elements of local communities.

Helen Pye admitted that the Park had to put out strong, balanced messages, but didn't always get these right. Fundamentally the Park is not anti-tourist, nor anti-outdoor activity, but is about protecting the environment and accessing the outdoors. Fly/Wild-camping was cited as an example where it is difficult to convey a subtle message to a variety of user groups in a single communication.

Gareth Pierce asked to what extent any proposals might get caught up in wider, post-covid issues of Wales's over-reliance on tourism. Helen believed that this could be used to our advantage to draw in government support for longer-term solutions

TJ asked, on behalf of a member corresponding by email, whether seasonality would be built into any solutions ... a sunny bank holiday being totally different to a damp weekday in November. Helen assured the meeting that it would.

4. Path Management/Maintenance within the National Park

Lou Tully was invited to summarise her concerns and questions about recent path maintenance/improvement work in the Park, notably on the Llanberis-Snowdon Ranger path.

- i. While accepting that maintenance is necessary, recent modifications to the LL-SR path have changed its character. The new path blends less well into the hillside and is unnecessarily homogeneous.
- ii. The path is now less interesting technically for walkers, runners and bikers.
- iii. Erosion problems do not seem to have been solved with wash-outs appearing already.
- iv. Natural rock has been removed in favour of chippings.
- v. How are decisions made about which paths to maintain or modify?
- vi. Are different user-groups' needs taken into account?

Peter Rutherford presented a robust defence of the Park's path maintenance policy and programme. He emphasised the following key points:

- i. The LL-SR path is part of Y Cylchdaith Yr Wyddfa and as such is designated as a 'strategic route'.
- ii. The Welsh Government offered a large sum of money to construct an all-user path around Yr Wyddfa, which was rejected as inappropriate by the Park.
- iii. This path is a Bridleway, thereby requires special consideration.
- iv. Landscaping will settle over the coming months, the initial, engineered appearance would soon grow over, leaving a discreet path.

- v. Construction must result in a long-lasting, low maintenance path. There is no money for patchwork repairs. £100k has been spent in recent years on the SR path.
- vi. The health and well-being agenda in Wales requires the Park to facilitate inclusive activity outdoors. The improved path will open access to people with limited mobility in vehicles such as 'Trampers'.
- vii. The Two Rights of Way up Maesgwm are being legally merged into the single route of the existing bridleway.

Lou Tully asked how people are consulted about path modifications.

Peter responded that the LAF (Local Access Forum) had discussed it and been welcoming of the proposals. But it was not the intention to construct an all-ability trail around Yr Wyddfa.

TJ reminded the meeting that Ray Wood sits on our LAF. Elfyn stated that local members don't object to the Cylchdaith in principle, but had concerns about implementation. In the Lakes, a user group advises the Park on design and style of paths – an open and strategic approach which could be replicated in N Wales.

Dan Lane was generally supportive of the Park saying that there were plenty of opportunities for runners and bikers to experience rough terrain elsewhere in the Park. He felt that money was being spent in the right places.

Both Peter and Helen restated their hope that consultation would improve and that establishing digital platforms for individuals and groups to contribute could help that aspiration from now on.

TJ invited Park officers to join BMC area meetings whenever they liked.

Helen and Peter were thanked for sharing their expertise and time, after which they left the meeting.

5. Minutes/Cofnodion (Zoom, 26/05/20)

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted without objection.

Proposer: Dan Lane. Seconder: Neal Hockley.

Matters Arising

1. Elfyn Jones had been asked to investigate the details of the Lluest y Gwynt wind turbine proposals. His report is part of this meeting's Access Notes.
2. Neal Hockley had been asked to raise the issue at the Pwyllgor Cymru. The PG decided that, if the scoping proposals progressed to a higher level, it would be an appropriate topic for its consideration.

6. What's happening at the BMC Board?

All areas had been asked to add this item to their agendas following the loss of three members of the Board of Directors over the summer.

Gareth Pierce, as Chair of the Board, was present to explain the situation and answer questions.

He reported that one director left due to his involvement in an historical procurement issue, during which he expected some support, which he felt was not forthcoming.. Two other, independent directors left feeling that they could not support the board any further following perceived disrespectful behaviours shown by the Board to other members.

As a result, the Board is now recruiting to fill those vacancies. Gareth himself does not intend to seek an extension to his contract when it comes to an end early next year.

Lynn Robinson stated that the work Gareth does is phenomenal, virtually full-time while dealing with the pandemic. The ramifications of these boardroom issues is being taken very seriously at all levels and Andy Syme has been chairing National Council whenever these issues are discussed, as Lynn is herself a director..

As an interim measure three advisors have been appointed to the Board in lieu of the out-going three directors.

Questions to Gareth and Lynn were invited, but there were none.

7. BMC Strategic Review 2021

All areas had been asked to include this item on their agendas, supported by a powerpoint presentation.

Gareth Pierce spoke to various slides, stressing the following points:

- i. This is not a fundamental review but a review brought about by the pressures on workload, staffing and finances due to the pandemic.
- ii. A balance needs to be found between running a deficit and curtailing short-term ambitions and activities.

- iii. An emphasis is to be placed on growing the membership.
 - iv. In Wales, Covid has highlighted issues of devolved government, access legislation, and the role of the National Park.
 - v. The Olympics 2020 were lost as an opportunity to promote the BMC and its work nationally.
 - vi. Membership engagement requires a stronger offer to members, and more effective work with partners to reach under-represented groups.
 - vii. Moves have been made to set up Competition Climbing as an internal department, but there is a need for more funding (eg. Through Sport England) and then to balance Competition Climbing against other members' interests
- Gareth invited questions now, or comments by Sept 7th.

Steve Long cited his experience with the UIAA to say that a focus on membership alone wouldn't work; increased membership would only come as a result of improved services.

Gareth agreed but indicated that in order to invest in the staff team, we couldn't allow membership to plateau at 80,000.. Lynn Robinson said that increased membership had to be in line with the BMC's values and beliefs.as outlined in the 5-year strategy, agreed at the AGM two years ago.

Dan Lane reminded the meeting that the Pwyllgor Cymru should now look at the Strategic Review using a Wales perspective.

Steve Long asked why there was a need for more staff; what could be done by professionals which couldn't be done by volunteers?

Gareth recognised the excellent work done by many volunteers but listed three areas where a professional hand was needed – co-ordinating the work of volunteers, developing work with partners and maximising our influence in Wales.

Using volunteers often enabled the BMC to punch above its weight, but this was not always sustainable.

Dan Lane confirmed that every year there were calls from volunteers for more support from BMC office staff.

TJ thanked Gareth for his work as Chair of the Board.

8. Reports

Pwyllgor Cymru (Neal Hockley)

The Pwyllgor Cymru has had its first meeting and is soon to have its second. Covid has taken up some time and effort, from which lessons have been learned which should help if there is a second wave of infections and lockdowns this winter. Discussions are taking place in respect of the BMC's future presence in Wales and meetings are being arranged with similar bodies (eg. Ramblers Cymru and Canoe Wales) to see how they organise themselves across the devolved governments in Westminster and Cardiff.

Access and Conservation (Elfyn Jones)

This report has been available on the BMC community page for a while.

Elfyn Jones added to the report by asking if there was interest in organising a Tremadog clean-up weekend, late in September. This was approved, with the reminder that complying with all Covid regulations would be essential. The organisation of the event would need to be small (under 30) local and focused.

Action EJ

Cwm Silyn Gwyn Jones and Simon Verspeak

The rockfall here is huge. Most of the climbs may have gone for good. Avoid completely.

Action: EJ to look into erecting a warning sign at the parking spot. It is already on the RAD.

Fedw Fawr

Parking at the small NT car park at the end of the lane has become very problematic – fly-camping, litter, vehicle damage etc.- resulting in closure. The answer is to park before entering the lane and to enjoy the short walk. Elfyn will make further enquires of the NT Anglesey manager.

9. Chair's Business a Unrhyw Fusnes Arall (AOB)

Members' Council Terms of Reference and Voting Procedures.

These issues are out for consultation with the membership and the documentation is available via the BMC website. All comments gratefully received.

Abseil Station above Castell Helen

There have been extensive posts about this on the AMI Facebook pages, with the suggestion that it be discussed at a local area BMC meeting.

Currently there are rusty pegs and corroded karabiners in place, and they evidently require back-up nuts to make a single safe anchor point for abseiling; however people have been seen abseiling on just one peg and krab.

There ensued the usual discussion about the merits and problems associated with fixed gear, and the full range of opinion from ... 'Leave it as it is' to 'Act Now! Clean it up and place bolts' was expressed with conviction. No agreement was reached other than the need for a wider discussion in the hope of achieving a resolution which could form the basis of a N Wales fixed gear policy.

Action: TJ to organise an on-line debate, using a few local case studies, including Castell Helen, to try to establish a policy which can be accepted by both local and visiting climbers.

CLOSING STATEMENT re VOLUNTEERS

The next meeting will be an AGM and local area meeting combined.

At that AGM:

Anthony Eccles has to stand down as area rep.

Dan Lane is choosing to stand down as area rep.

Tim Jepson is seeking a replacement after three years in the Chair.

So we need new, or returning, volunteers to fill these three vital positions if N Wales is to continue to be represented nationally.. Please put yourself forward or speak to a friend who you think could do a good job in order that their names can be proposed in November.

THANK YOU

11. Date of future meetings:

Mis Tachwedd 3 November Local Area + Local AGM

The meeting closed at 9.20pm (although a few members hung on to chat about fixed gear on Welsh crags!).

Tim Jepson

10.09.20