

NORTH WEST AREA Meeting

Meeting held in online via Zoom on Tuesday 5th March 2024

AGENDA

If anything to be discussed on this agenda gives rise to a conflict of interest for anyone, please declare it at the start of the meeting.

1.	Welcome and Attendance	3 mins
2.	Minutes of previous ordinary area meeting, held on 17th October 2023	5 mins
3.	Matters arising not covered elsewhere	2 mins
4.	Co-opting Luna Borella as North West secretary	
5.	Questions for BMC New CEO Paul Ratcliffe	
6.	Reports from area representatives: 6.1. Access - Lancashire (including proposal from Carl Spencer for abseil bolts above the climbs at Lester Mill) - Les Ainsworth, Martin Elliott, and Carl Spencer 6.2. Access - Cheshire & Merseyside - Tony Lowe and Jake Jackson 6.3 Clubs 6.4 Hill Walking 6.5 Youth and Walls	10 mins 10 mins 5 mins 10 mins 10 mins
7.	Guidebook and crag cleaning update - Matthew Thompson	5 mins
8.	Report from most recent Members' Council and BMC Board - Andy Say	10 mins
9.	Proposal to update Fixed Gear Guidance document: introduce time period where decisions cannot be reopened for discussion - Agustin	10 mins
10.	North West events calendar – recap of upcoming events	2 mins
11.	Any other business	5 min
12.	Date of next meeting (hybrid) – TBC	1 min

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Attendees: Agustin (Chair), Luna Borella (Secretary), Phil Kelly, Carl Spencer, Martin Elliot (Access rep), Richard Toon, Andrew Say (Council Nominated Director), Les Ainsworth (Access rep), James Pounder, Stuart, Ted (Ted's Ipad), Jake Jackson (Access Rep), Tim Greenhalgh, Paul Ratcliffe, Simon Lee, Steve Riley, Peter Billington, iPhone(6)

Apologies: Steve Charles, Dom Oughton, Tony Lowe

2. Minutes of previous ordinary area meeting, held on 25th April 2023

None

3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere 2 mins

Simon Lee wishes to cover proposed resolutions for disclosure of GB finances and potential setting up as an independent body.

4. Co-opting Luna Borella as North West secretary

Zoom Poll used, and this was approved

5. Questions for BMC New CEO Paul Ratcliffe

Paul has been attending all area meetings to get to know the community. Recognises the issues he will be facing as the new CEO, one of them being the BMC finances and has made a commitment to three things this first month, which include getting a grip of the finances this first month, take care of the internal team, which includes how the BMC operates with the staff and how they build a sense of team. And lastly to build an engagement plan, which includes wider membership around area meetings and BMC partners. He hopes to create a sense of stability within the BMC so as an organisation they can look to the future a bit more and consult on a wider strategy which might take the BMC into the next 10 years.

His background includes adventure sport of canoeing and hill walking. He wishes to operate with his core value of honesty and transparency.

Andy's Question:

What do you see as the biggest challenges for you (Paul) and the BMC currently?

Answer:

Biggest challenge for Paul is getting a grip of the diversity of the organisation including the trusts, access and conservation, and work that BMC does in sport and development.

Primary challenge within the BMC is the finances.

Carl's Question:

How's your first month been?

Answer:

Harder than expected but met some great people.

Carl's Question:

Does the BMC automatically receive money donated through the Facebook feature that allows people to raise money on their birthdays?

Answer:

Cath will sort that out for Carl. It's something they do want to encourage more of, BMC needs to look at different fundraising mechanisms to increase the work they can do through the charities.

Alex has just joined who will be in charge of connecting all the area meetings and the staff of the BMC to help with fundraising

Les Question:

How to donate money to things like the BMC access funds through people's wills?

Is it possible when donating money you can say which BMC area it goes to?

Answer:

Paul is going to get Cath to look into it and respond, his instinct says yes that these are possible.

6. Reports from area representatives:

6.1 Access - Lancashire

- Lester Mill

Carl Spencer – Proposal to add abseil bolts above climbs at Lester Mill as the rock at the top outs is unclimbable in hopes to increase the traffic to the crag.

Proposed Action – Proposal written up and shared across email and Facebook groups, hold vote at April/May meeting, delegated to Mathew who has been doing the cleaning.

Stuart – hasn't had time to bolt things on the top of his list so April/May time will allow him more time to get around to this.

Mathew – abseil bolts only on the terrace above evil wall, which contains new routes, not on any of the routes. He hopes to bypass the regular process as it's not restricted by the fixed gear guild lines as the bolts will be on unclimbable rock.

Steve – This might be an oversight in the current fix gear policy and might need to be revisited to capture these situations in the future.

Tim - Lester mill could do with even more lower offs, as this might increase traffic. Hard work cleaning something especially if no one climbs there.

Mathew – Proposes better publicity on social media in hopes more people climb there once cleaned and bolted. Especially if they get it bolted before spring so they can get people to attend the crag

Stuart – asks to publicise the rationale behind the decision so people don't go adding bolts without permission. (Matthew already has a document explaining the reasoning and why it's a special case)

Agustin – decision to vote on it within this meeting. Stuart is abstaining as he is doing the bolting.

Poll – Decision to add lower off bolts at Lester Mil above evil wall in the terrace

Proposal has been agreed on

Les – ask permission from united utility to remove some trees as Lester mill. They needed photos. Unable to cut down the trees currently due to bird nesting.

Action – get permission from UU to take down the trees

- Warton Main

(Martin Elliot)

Joint Scrub Clearance event with RSPB and Friends of Warton crag on the 17th feb - Successful

Ravens have started nesting and Peregrines are scoping for a nesting site.

Voluntary climbing restrictions were put in place on 14 February

Quarry monitored by Peregrine Watch Group and restrictions will be lifted as soon as possible.

Notices posted in the car park and access to Terrace and RAD updated

Action - Send thank you to the groups involved

- Trowbarrow

Scrub clearance at Red Wall by National Landscape volunteers following discussions with Trowbarrow Liaison Group

Consent now given by Natural England to remove loose blocks on the area left of Diamond Wall. Removal of rock potentially a damaging operation for the SSSI! Block to be removed soon if it doesn't fall down first! Block is about 10/20ft off the ground.

- Fairy Steps

Departing climbers engaged in an altercation with the gamekeeper. Days before Pheasants were to be released, the gamekeeper may have been stressed. No further reports of conflict. Martin will monitor and if an issue attempt to resurrect discussions with Landowner although not optimistic of any change

Old estate owner was ok but has recently died, the new owner isn't as accepting of climbers and local walkers. Only area offered to be the climbing area is 50 yards to the right of the top level of the steps. Meaning 93% of the climbs would have been lost, leaving us with only the shortest climbs. Access jumped out of the arrangement. Most climbers have just been bouldering without consent. Martin is going to continue trying to come up with an agreement with the estate.

- Blackburn/Bolton

Les

Les and Carl attended a meeting at Denham Quarry. The proposals for cleaning the crag was approved, which has gone ahead. Cleaned two main areas, which means you

can get to the rock now. A tree needs to be removed, and work on the path needs to be done.

- Houghton quarry

Estate still wishes to allow climbing but on their terms which are not helpful for the BMC. There are hopes that further talks can lead to a better deal.

Les and John have dates in the calendar to go discuss this issue.

- Wilton

They got rid of the Knotweed which has two seasons of treatments. The company that did the treatment will visit the crag this year and next to make sure they have killed all the knotweed.

However there is a lot of Himalayan balsam which needs treatment, it can be cut down annually if BMC follows correct rules and does it at the right time. (When it starts to flower but there are no seeds on it, Early June?).

Action – Arrange about 12 people for a date TBD in June to cut down Himalayan balsam. This depends on the dates of the Himalayan balsam flowering. This can potentially be done by Bolton conservation volunteers at a cost.

Steve and Stuart are organising a couple volunteering days there, which include a clear up of Himalayan balsam and a few crag clean up ones that Stuart has arranged through mountaineering training. These will involve him teaching people to abseil down a route with tools for cleaning.

Stuart wishes to place more stakes on the grave yard end of Wilton one to make cleaning easier and get more people to use it. Which he can do without a proposal.

Action – Proposal to add lower off on the route Dracula as it finishes half way up the wall, and there is unclimbable rock above

6.3 Access - Cheshire & Merseyside

Volunteers newly elected at the last AGM:

- Tony Lowe
- Jake Jackson

Issue at Helsby, upper and lower central buttresses are birds due to birds from 1st March to 30th June. Going to stay in contact with local bird groups to see if this is the case.

6.4 Clubs

No update

6.5 Hill Walking and Conservation

Main message is that there is more happening on the conservation and restoration front less so on the hillwalking

Upland Restoration Projects: since last meeting:

- Kinder/ Hayfield: Invasive species clearance
- Winter Hill: Invasive species clearance with Bolton Conservation Volunteers
- Goyt Valley: Moss planting with Moors for the Future

BMC Mend our Mountains: Get Stuck In! 2024

- 7 multi day events:
 - 3 events in Lakes (April, April, August):
 - 2 in Langdale (staying FRCC Raw Head),
 - 1 in Wasdale (staying FRCC Brackenclose)
 - Eryri (4 events): April, June, August, September

Free accommodation in National Trust Bunkhouse, Mainly Footpath construction/ repairs, Drain clearance, Cairn scattering

Further information: <https://hillwalking.thebmc.co.uk/get-involved-volunteering>

Other Plans for 2024:

- Invasive species clearance:
 - Winter Hill Invasive species clearance with Bolton Conservation Volunteers Sunday 24th March
 - On Winter Hill, aim for events twice a year, but project to be taken over by Bolton Conservation Volunteers
 - Hayfield/ Kinder: continue working with National Trust 2 dates TBC
- Moss Planting

- Increased collaboration with Moors for the Future with one more date this year and one early next year in Goyt Valley

Area Hill walks 2024

- This year due to demands of the NW and National “Get Stuck In!” conservation events and no support/ deputy I have not arranged any walks myself.
- Little interest from NW Clubs in having “Open walks” with individual members, except Rucsac Club:
- 30th November 2024: Hike with the Rucsac Club
- Other hillwalking reps are required to develop a walking calendar, although I feel that a good calendar could be offered if more clubs came forward, with little extra work.

If anyone is interested in leading a walk or a hike, or is a member of a club that arrange walks and will be interested in having an open walk. Let BMC know

Stuart - national council of hill walking (Rose) has been running walks in the lakes, he will check with her if she has any local routes she could run.

Future of Area walks:

- More volunteer walk leaders needed, or people interested in being a hillwalking rep
- However there is MUCH more interest in conservation work
- Opportunity for Clubs to have open walks and attract new members
- Please contact, stevecharles25@gmail.com, if you want to get involved, or to sign up for one of the events mentioned!

9. Youth and Walls

YCS finals went ahead

Plywood masters went well, supported by local walls and it had good attendance

Roefield climbing wall has closed.

Big depot Manchester, will be biggest centre in Europe, 214 rope line and same amount of bouldering as main Manchester – open towards the end of summer

GB Climbing – Letter of no confidence from the gb athletes, there are a lot of unhappy bmc members and hopefully Paul can get some quick results with this.

7. Guidebook and crag cleaning update - Matthew Thompson

Shout out to all the people who are cleaning, promoting and climbing the rock.

Chris spearheaded the renovation of the Wilton allotment, which he put in over a 100 hours into, which has led to more accents of this area.

Wilton fest went well with people getting on freshly cleaned routes.

Continued maintenance work on

- Wilton 1/2/3
- Anglezarke Quarry
- Lester Mill
- Egeton
- Ousel's Nest
- Denham
- Pinfolds
- Round Barn Quarry
- Stronstrey Bank Quarry

There has been updates to the northern limestone area as well

Promote people to clean while they climb and maybe spend 2 hours a year to clean a route so Lancashire climbing can stay clean.

Guidebook is moving forward, format and page style has been tweaked and finalised. Several smaller crags have been written up and most of the major ones are in progress.

Sample was given out at wilton fest and has had good reviews.

There is some uncertainty with some areas, if you are a guide author and you are not able to continue, contact Rick as soon as possible.

For authors send all updates including what you think of the grades.

Lester Mill is ready once it dries out for climbers.

Tim - when is the guide coming out?

Matt - Aimed for spring 2026.

8. Report from most recent Members' Council and BMC Board - Andy Say

Last year was very difficult for the BMC, Andy has been attending member's council since the middle of last year.

In October/November time, he was voted on to the board as a member's council director, so Andy has been going to board meetings

BMC had a budget which currently shows a deficit of £72,000 the accounts of 2023 haven't been finalised yet, the deficit will be way bigger than £72,000. The outcome financially at the end of 2023 isn't clear and the auditors are still working on the accounts.

The BMC lost the CFO, lost the company secretary and the CEO as well. It has become apparent that some errors with budgeting and calculating funding were made. This has brought the BMC to a tricky situation at the end of 2023.

There has been a letter of no confidence from the GB climbing Athletes.

This year is looking better in terms of information filtering down from the board to the member's council, which includes 40 pages of financial information to prepare people for the discussion about the budget this year.

This year seems positive with a new CEO, moves to potentially restructure GB climbing and BMC will be bringing on board a new CFO later in the year.

Toby Roberts will be in the Olympics which is another positive.

9. Proposal to update Fixed Gear Guidance document: introduce time period where decisions cannot be reopened for discussion – Agustin

Results of discussion in October, no need to vote on the same things over and over again.

After the conversations during the last fixed gear discussion. It was highlighted that we need a statement to avoid discussing the same route / issue over and over.

Proposal to add:

After a fixed gear change has been voted on, the issue cannot be reopened for a period of two years unless there is a significant change in the nature of the route or fixed gear under consideration.

This will be published in the usual channels and voted on at the next area meeting. To be voted on the next meeting

Tim – why 2 years?

Agustin – To Prevent people rehashing the same proposal even if it wasn't voted through the first time. No need to repeat the same discussions at every meeting. They are happy to change the wording.

Stuart – Agrees to a 2 year period if there is a wet summer it kind of gets pushed to the next summer, he proposed instead of a time period, a number of ascents.

10. North West events calendar – recap of upcoming events

BMC Mend our Mountains: Get Stuck In! 2024

-Eryri (4 events): April, June, August, September

-Lakes (3 events): April, April, August

Invasive species clearance:

-Winter Hill Invasive species clearance with Bolton Conservation Volunteers: Sunday 24th March

-Hayfield/ Kinder with National Trust: 2 dates TBC

Moss Planting

-Goyt Valley collaboration with Moors for the Future: 1 date this year, 1 date early next year

Area Walks:

-Hike with the Rucsac Club: 30th November 2024

11. Any other business

Simon –

One of the recommendation that came out of the organisational review group was to set up GB climbing as a subsidiary of the BMC so it could have its own identity. Andy Say has commented that there is tension between the BMC being both a governing body and a representative body. From a commercial point of view it makes sense that it has its own identity so that it could attract commercial partners. This could also mean it could have more control over its own future.

In 2019 the board went through the ORG report and considered the subsidiary question. Rab Carrington looked into it but they decided not to go with the ORG recommendations but to keep it as an internal department. But it needed to be set up with the same formality and robustness of arrangements as if it was a subsidiary. This never happened.

There has been a form of fudging of account in the last few years, the ways the metric are presented in the annual reports don't truly reflect the amount of money used to support GB climbing after grants have been subtracted. Carl looked into it and he said it is very difficult to find out how much is being spent and raised by GB climbing.

This year the announcement of cuts in the access and marketing departments which then led to the news that the budget didn't exactly make sense. This included the information that £90,000 spent at Ratho world cup wasn't included in the GB climbing expenditure.

In Simon's opinion he could see that it was the cost aspect of the GB climbing that was driving a lot of the problems with the finances.

Simon has gone through all the normal means to acquire the budget information for gb climbing but has been constantly shut down.

He feels that the GB Climbing should be set up as a subsidiary so they have more responsibility for their finances.

He wanted to make people aware of it, and hopes people spread the word as the bar to getting this through the board is high, around 350/400 signatures.

So far they have 333 signatures for the bmc to disclose the gb climbing finances and 283 for setting up GB climbing as an independent body.

<https://chnq.it/WRLdt7wGJ2>

Stuart has put it on the agenda of the next member's council meeting

Carl – agrees with the problems not the solutions, GB Climbing has resisted all interaction by CCPG in terms of supplying finances and supplying information on time, supplying advance notice of things like recruitment. Coaches were recruited to the development pathway project but none was agreed in advance with CCPG (CCPG – is a committee that is a sudo-board to manage just GB climbing). CCPG should have been managing and supervising GB climbing but the reality is GB climbing wasn't cooperative at all.

From the information Carl had he suspected that they would be in around £400K Debt, which is looking likely now. He took that to the board in January last year and to CCPG the December before that and they branded him a conspiracy theorist by the CEO and CFO.

An investigation was launched and they both resigned after this. GB climbing has been reluctant to let anyone interfere and Carl's worry is that the people that have been the issue still remain and GB climbing is fit for purpose.

Issue with Simon's resolution is that if it's set up as an independent part the staff will go with it and there are numerous letters of no confidence form parents, coaches, athletes in these staff. There are less athletes selected than last year despite more funding. He suspects that the staff are pocketing the extra funding.

His preferred option would be to force the board to do something about this issue rather than set up GP climbing as independent

Simon – resolution doesn't have a time frame as he doesn't wish for this to be a rushed job. The board is new and he hopes they will be less dismissive.

Andy – Paul (CEO) has been in charge of ccpg for over a year. Response to the letters of no confidence was a series of listening sessions were held with all the people involved in GB climbing. These were attended by chair of the board, director responsible of GB climbing and Paul Radcliffe. The New CEO is under no illusions with the problems that GB climbing faces and hopefully the board is getting to that understanding now.

12. Date of next meeting

The next North West Area meeting will be a hybrid meeting, physical location and date TBD.

Period of Mon 29 APR to Fri 10 MAY

Suggested having the meeting in a shop, for example Cotswold as they are BMC partners.

Stuarts – amount of face to face and online

Agustin - They will alternating

Stuart – is there a budget for area meetings?

Andy – There is a larger budget for area meetings

Agustin – will ask Alex, but Alex said area meetings and festivals were high on his priority list, especially to make the attendance better attended.

Tim – Wilton fest will go on ahead without BMC

Stuart – parking might be difficult, but centre of town might be a good idea. Maybe somewhere that has good parking but in the city centre.

Agustin – get people from right to roam to speak in the next meeting