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**BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
WESTERN AREA LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

ANNUAL REPORT

Chairman's Foreword

The Forum has been well attended, with its members contributing enthusiastically and robustly. Many matters have been considered in full meetings of the Forum and other matters progressed by sub-groups that have met outside the formal meetings.

The National Park's Rights of Way Improvement Plan has concerned us much and we have contributed to it. We look forward to its final adoption and to its hoped for impact on the condition of the Rights of Way in the park.

The LAF has suggested some improvements to the Rights of Way in the west, as exemplars of what might be adopted in a wider context. We hope that our suggestions for circular walks using already adopted Rights of Way and negotiating links to complete the circuit will prove of use in improving the infrastructure in the Park in the interests of both local and tourist use.

Currently the Forum continues to provide its advice to the Park Authority on the situation of the considerable erosion of the upland areas. In the face of the daunting damage caused by a combination of wear and climate rigours we will continue to offer every support to the Park Authority in combating the decline in the condition of the paths that draw so many to take their leisure time in our Park.

Secretary's Foreword

The past year has been a period of consolidation for the Western Area Local Access Forum (WALAF) following appointment of members in the previous year.

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) has undertaken a major redraft of its Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) following the consultation on the draft document. The Local Access Forums and other organisations provided useful and constructive comment which will result in the final Plan being an invaluable working document that will guide our work over the coming 10 years. It is anticipated that the ROWIP will be adopted by BBNPA in June and published later in September.

The WALAF has been kept informed about the work that BBNPA has been undertaking in developing an upland erosion strategy for the Park and it is hoped that they will respond to the formal consultation in the coming year and be involved in future development of the recommendations contained in it.

During the past year the BBNP Eastern Area LAF raised the issue of LAF re-organisation and BBNPA have presented a discussion document on the matter to all three Forums. The issue is being discussed further with the LAFs and a report will be presented to the BBNPA Planning, Access and Rights of Way Committee in August that takes due regard of LAF advice.

The WALAF has provided advice and comment on a number of operational issues and this advice will be reported to the Head of Countryside for consideration whilst the minutes of meetings and recommendations specifically aimed at the National Park Authority (such as those affecting strategy and policy) will continue to be reported to the BBNPA Planning, Access and Rights of Way Committee.

As always the BBNPA would like to take this opportunity to thank past and present members for their contributions during the past year which have been valued by NPA members and officers. The BBNPA looks forward to continuing to work with the WALAF during the forthcoming year.

Introduction

The Western Area Local Access Forum (WALAF) was originally established in December 2002 and re-appointed in December 2005. The Forum comprises 11 members, a Chairman and a Deputy Chairman. The National Park Authority (NPA) had a statutory duty to establish the Local Access Forum (LAF) as required by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000.

The Forum has only one statutory function which is to advise the NPA, the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) and others as to the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area. This advice should be given having taken due regard to the needs of land-management and the natural beauty of the area.

All meeting papers relating to the LAF can be found on the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) website at www.breconbeacons.org or members of the public can view copies at the National Park Office, Plas y Ffynnon, Cambrian Way, Brecon or can order individual copies from that office (at a small charge). Members of the public are welcomed at all meetings of the Forum and may be invited to speak at the discretion of the Chairman. Members of the public may contact Forum Members via the Secretary.

THE YEAR REVIEWED

Advice Given by the LAF 2006 - 2007

Consultation on the Process for Appointing Members to the Welsh National Park Authorities

The Forum considered this consultation document at the meeting in May and agreed the following response:

1. The Forum considered the present balance of members was about right and did not need changing. Members were intense in their view that the current two thirds/one third split was appropriate and that they would not wish to see the proportions changed.
2. The Forum made no decision about this option as members were divided in their opinions.
3. The Forum felt that members should not be directly elected to the NPAs.
4. The Forum felt the size and nature of the BBNPA justified the current number of members and that this should not be changed.
5. The Forum felt strongly that additional members should not be co-opted onto the NPA.
6. The Forum saw this as an ongoing issue (a problem already experienced by the Forums themselves when trying to recruit members) and felt that the Welsh Assembly Government could nominate these groups from within their portfolio when interviewing and appointing members.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP).

Throughout the year, Members received updates concerning the draft BBNPA Rights of Way Improvement Plan. At the September meeting, the BBNPA's draft rights of way hierarchy document was discussed and members provided useful feedback.

BBNP LAF Rationalisation

At the December meeting Members considered a paper produced by the BBNPA outlining various scenarios concerning the future of the three BBNP Local Access Forums. Following discussion, members were unanimous that the Forum should continue as at present and made the following recommendation to the BBNPA.

The Western Area Local Access Forum recommends that the BBNPA should continue with three separate Local Access Forums, all meeting four times a year.

Improving Liaison with Neighbouring LAFs

In December, Members discussed how best to improve liaison with the other BBNP and neighbouring LAFs and made the following recommendation to the BBNP LAFs:

The Western Area Local Access Forum recommends that the three BBNP LAF Chairmen meet four times a year and invite the Chairmen of the neighbouring Local Access Forums if necessary.

Consultation Over Changes to Rights of Way

The Forum considered the Rights of Way Review Committee Practice Guidance Note 1 and noted that Local Access Forums were not included in the Annex – Consultation with Interested Organisations. Members agreed that they would like to be formally consulted regarding any rights of way orders dealt with by the BBNPA and made the following recommendation to the Rights of Way Review Committee:

The Western Area Local Access Forum recommends that Local Access Forums be included on the list of prescribed consultees attached to Practice Guidance Note 1.

Members also wished to be consulted on any planning applications that involved a right of way and agreed a further recommendation to the BBNPA:

The Western Area Local Access Forum recommends that the Forum be included on the list of the BBNPA's consultees for orders and planning applications affecting rights of way.

Other Matters Considered

1. Transco Pipeline. Discussions took place throughout the year regarding the proposed route of the pipeline and any impact this might have. Particular attention was drawn to damage on Mynydd Myddfai following the National Grid's initial archaeological survey of the area and the BBNPA informed members of some possible methods for repairing the damage.
2. Walks publications. Members were concerned by the content of some recently produced walks publications and requested that the Forum be consulted on any walks booklets for the western area of the National Park. They agreed that a sub-group would be formed, if necessary, to deal with urgent matters. The Secretary informed the BBNPA of the Forum's request.
3. Rights of Way and Other Access Funding. The issue of rights of way funding was discussed at several meetings throughout the year. Members expressed their concern at the apparent under funding of rights of way throughout Wales and referred this matter to the National Access Forum for consideration. Members also expressed frustration at budget cuts proposed by the BBNPA and requested further information from officers. The Forum asked officers of the BBNPA to draw its disappointment concerning the proposed budget cuts to the attention of the National Park Authority and asked the NPA to justify why the rights of way budget might be subject to severe cuts against other areas of work. Later in the year, the BBNPA confirmed that budget cuts had not taken place as the Welsh Assembly Government had provided additional funding for capital works and access improvements for people with disabilities.
4. New Route at Coelbren – Penwyllt. The Forum considered information presented by a member highlighting how walking routes could be developed if the old railway line between Coelbren and Penwyllt became available for public use. The majority of members supported the principle of asking the BBNPA to investigate the viability of developing routes in the old railway line area. Additional information was presented at the December meeting regarding work that had already been carried out by Powys County Council in relation to this route and members were concerned that consultation regarding this had not taken place. As the Forum had been overlooked during the development of this project, the Chairman was asked to contact Powys

County Council to secure an invitation to future meetings to ensure that the Forum was formally represented.

5. Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act. Throughout the year Members received updates regarding the progress of the NERC Act and the sections which affected vehicular rights on public rights of way

Committees

A sub-group of five members was formed to respond to the Defra Consultation on the power for (English) National Park Authorities to make Traffic Regulation Orders - section 72 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

Other meetings attended

Elsie Little attended a liaison meeting with Chris Gledhill, Chief Executive BBNPA on 20 February 2007.

Elsie Little and Graham Davies attended the LAF Chairmen's Conference at Builth Wells on 21 September 2006.

PROGRAMME OF WORKS FOR COMING YEAR

Work Plan 2007 - 2008

Items expected to be referred to the LAF by:

National Park Authority

1. Legal and illegal off-road vehicle use. The NPA will seek to clarify the legal position and apply a consistent approach with neighbouring and constituent local authorities.
2. Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). The Forum will be heavily involved in this process as recommended in Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) guidance.
3. Proposals to exclude or restrict access for longer than 6 months - LAFs are statutory consultees for proposals to exclude or restrict access from access land for longer than 6 months.
4. Upland Erosion Strategy. Comments will be sought during preparation of this strategy by BBNPA.
5. Increasing the effectiveness of BBNP LAFs. Members will be asked to make recommendations about how the effectiveness of LAFs in the BBNP could be measured and how they can become more effective.

Countryside Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government

The following are matters that CCW & WAG anticipate that they will refer to LAFs during the year. This is for guidance only and may change to reflect work priorities. **It should not be taken as definitive.**

1. Access to Inland Water. Advice will be sought on aspects relating to access to water.
2. Exclusions and Restrictions on Access Land. Consultation on review of relevant authority guidance.
3. Off-roading. Advise on aspects of the provision of sites pilots to be undertaken by CCW in partnership with local authorities.
4. Commons Act – Implementation of the town and village greens provisions. Consultation on the implementation of section 15 of the Commons Act relating to town and village greens.

Items proposed by LAF members

To be considered throughout the year as and when they arise.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

APPOINTING AUTHORITY DETAILS

Appointing Authority:

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
Plas y Ffynnon
Cambrian Way
Brecon
Powys
LD3 7HP

Tel. 01874 624437

Fax. 01874 622574

Email. enquiries@breconbeacons.org

Secretary:

Richard Ball
Access Officer
Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
Plas y Ffynnon
Cambrian Way
Brecon
Powys
LD3 7HP.

Tel. 01874 620464

Email. richard.ball@breconbeacons.org

APPENDIX II

MEETING DETAILS

During the year the following meetings were held, all of which were open to the public:

2006

10 May

6 September

6 December

2007

1 March

All meetings took place at Craig-y-nos Country Park, Pen-y-cae.

APPENDIX IV**MEMBERSHIP DETAILS**

Name	Date Appointed To LAF	Background and Interests
Anne Amatt	10 Sept 2004 Re-appointed: 11 Jan 2006	Member of the South Wales Caving Club and West Brecon Cave Rescue Team. Interests include walking in the area and caving.
Graham Davies	9 Nov 2004 Re-appointed: 11 Jan 2006	Member of the Ystradgynlais Town Council, West Glamorgan Ramblers., Brecknock LAF, Board of Governors – Cwmtwrch CP School and the Management Board of Cwmtwrch Miners Welfare Hall. Has lived in the area all of his life and was the former Chairman of the Ffordd y Glowr Project. A keen walker with knowledge and expertise of the area.
Mary Galpin	11 Jan 2006	Member of South Wales Caving Club and the Ramblers Assoc. Has walked and caved in the area for over 45 years.
Judith Harvey	11 Dec 2002 Re-appointed: 11 Jan 2006	BBNPA Area Manager for the Western part of the Park. Duties include management of rights of way and access issues. Member of the British Mountaineering Council. Interests include farming & community issues and nature conservation and common land management.
Jerry Herbert	11 Jan 2006	Member of the Green Lane Association, Countryside Recreational Access Group, All Wheel Drive Club and LARA. Saw military service in the Sennybridge area and has enjoyed map reading and orienteering in the area for a long time. Has been a motorised user for the last 10 years and is interested in protecting ROW for use by all and working with other user groups to improve access for all.
Elsie Little	6 May 2003 Re-appointed: 11 Jan 2006	Represents cavers on the National Access Forum. Member of South Wales Caving Club, Cambrian Caving Council, British Cave Research Assoc. and British Caving Research Assoc. Enjoys walking, caving and cycling.
Eileen Millward	11 Dec 2002 Re-appointed: 11 Jan 2006	Retired. Formally science teacher at Brecon High School for 21 years. Interests include conservation, access, way marking, education and agriculture.
Gary Mitchell	11 Jan 2006	Member of Try'n Glas Community Council, Brecknock Wildlife Trust, Beacons Alive, British Mountaineering Council and Welsh Canoeing Assoc. Through his work and for pleasure partakes in walking, climbing, canoeing, mountaineering, caving and off-road driving.
Dyfrig Morgan	11 Dec 2002 Re-appointed: 11 Jan 2006	Lives and farms in the Forum area. Member of Country Landowners and Rural Business (CLA), NFU Cymru and Chairman of CL70 Graziers Assoc. Enjoys walking in the local area.
Nigel Phillips	11 Jan 2006	Member of the Brecon Beacons Park Society Executive and Central Area Local Advisory Forum. Enjoys walking, mountain navigation, conservation, access improvements and maintenance of PROW network.

David Vaughan	11 Dec 2002 Re-appointed: 11 Jan 2006	Manager of the Cnewr Estate. Member of the Sennybridge Farmers Hunt. Interests include tourism, hill-walking and hunting.
Ann Watkins	10 Sept 2004 Re-appointed: 11 Jan 2006	Lives and farms in the Forum area. Secretary of the Nantyffin Baptist Chapel and member of local Cancer Research Committee and L.O.F Ystradgynlais C. Hospital. Enjoys walking, local history and local access.
John Williams	11 Dec 2002 Re-appointed: 11 Jan 2006	Dry stone waller and hedge laying contractor. Keen walker and has hunted in the area for a number of years. Interested in the history of the area and the historical/archaeological remains in the region.

FURTHER READING

LAF Annual Reports

All appointing authorities are required by statute to produce annual reports to cover the year ending 31 March. These can be obtained from the relevant LAF Secretary. Agendas, minutes and other papers are also available for individual LAF meetings.

Government Act

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000;
The Stationary Office Limited (2000).

National Assembly for Wales

The Countryside Access (Local Access Forums)(Wales) Regulations 2001;
The Stationary Office Limited (2002).

Countryside Council for Wales

LAF Guidance 1: The Establishment of Local Access Forums –
Advice & Best Practice Guidance (2002).

LAF Guidance 2: The Role Duties and Functions of
Local Access Forums (2002).

Local Access Forums in Wales
Annual Report & Directory 2003 (2004).