

Notes from Meeting Held on 26 September 2013 at Burgedin Lock Cottages

Present

Elfyn Jones	[EJ]	BMC
Justin Cooke	[JC]	Ramblers
Dan Graham	[DG]	Gone Swimming and OSS
Jon Brookes	[JB]	Conwy Centre (AHOEC North Wales)
Peter Blackburn	[PB]	Plas Pencelli (AHOEC South Wales)
Ashley Charlwood	[AC]	Canoe Wales

Meeting started at 1030

The group felt as a whole that open access to the countryside did not present a problem. This discussion from WG was seen as a welcome and positive move.

PB outlined that commercial fees for the countryside access effectively formed a tax, as education centres especially pass this fee straight on to the participants. There was also a feeling that the bureaucracy associated with all the various mechanisms for accessing the countryside was very difficult at the best of times.

JB outlined that in the North area of Wales, OECs have some excellent working relations with land managers and other stakeholders-but also recognised that some objections to access are held by individuals. Specific examples of objections that were easily overreached by later beneficiaries of estates were raised. This was agreed to be the case across Wales.

DG outlined that commercial use of the countryside was difficult to define and represented a spectrum of activities. He further outlined that in the majority of cases it was the skills of a leader or coach that had the commercial value and not the natural resource. All agreed that this was a valid point.

JC outlined that whilst the Ramblers broadly welcomed the principles the phraseology presented in the discussion document caused some concern. These concerns were specific to the RoW network that currently exist. The Ramblers would see reassurance from WG that any variation in legislation of the current RoW network would:

1. Confer the existing duty to maintain the network
2. The current hierarchy of use be protected
3. The legal protection and enforcement power will be maintained

AC outlined that Canoe Wales felt the legal discussion about what is legitimate and isn't a difficulty, both EJ and JC confirmed and recognised this exists across terrestrial legislation as well as access to

water. AC outlined that the access to water that paddlesport required is similar to many other users, it is access along water that is contentious and causing a strong reaction from other stakeholders.

After lunch the group were joined by John Watkins [JW] Head of Outdoor Recreation Policy, Sport, Outdoor Recreation, and Landscapes Division, Culture and Sport, Welsh Government.

JW outlined that WG were not consulting on the intention to produce a specific new piece of legislation at this stage. At this point the discussion paper circulated formed a pre consultation exercise to inform a green paper. The aims at the next stage are to draft a green paper which will reflect on the discussions that have been had to date, and to seek views on whether changes to legislation, or new legislation was needed in this area. There was an outline given of the process. JW confirmed that NAW has legislative competence in this area.

JW outlined that at this stage it was principles that were being discussed, and that these principles would inform and create a range of proposals for consultation. The Minister would then decide on his preferred approach. The process beyond would depend on the Minister's decision, but should he wish to seek to introduce a Bill to the Assembly, proposals would need to be worked up into more specific provisions. The stages of Assembly legislation are set out on the National Assembly website,

The principles as presented in the discussion document are:

- presumption in favour of increasing access for responsible recreation
- meet the needs of the widest possible range of activities
- easy to communicate, both on the extent of access but also what is responsible use
- be flexible and responsive to changes in demand and use
- simplify administration for local authorities and other regulating
- bodies

The group discussed the areas raised before lunch.

JW felt that it was useful to hear the kind of discussion, and that WG was keen to receive representation from as wide a range of interests on what they felt the need for change was, and in particular any evidence they had in support. If there are examples of good practise that are experienced elsewhere that the representative bodies felt should be considered then identifying these would be useful.

AC asked JW whether it would be appropriate for representation be made directly to the minister- whilst this is a matter for each organisation to decide, JW repeated that WG wanted to hear as many views as possible, and that it therefore wouldn't be inappropriate for organisations to write to the lead Minister.

AC outlined that these proposals were of great interest to some UK organisations and asked whether there was consideration taken on whether there was a difference placed on views of Welsh

residents to those of visitors. JW confirmed that all views were important to WG, however a weighting in favour of Welsh residents existed due to the desires WG have to provide for their constituents.

JW asked all to consider whether there were areas of common ground that exist between stakeholders and that these should be identified if at all possible.

The meeting closed at 1530