

Grŵp Siarter Amgylcheddol Awyr Agored  
North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group

Monday 11th November - Loggerheads Country Park

Attendees:

Catherine Miles - Snowdonia-Active

Ashley Charlwood - Canoe Wales

David Shiel - AONB Clywdian Range and Dee Valley

Helen Mrowiec - Denbighshire County Council - Cycling Centre of Excellence

Ceri Hughes - Cadwyn Clwyd

Sam Twigger - Kingswood

Mike Smart - Trek Smart and Dee Valley Active

Frank Hill - Abseil UK

The meeting was opened by Catherine Miles (CM) who introduced herself and explained her current position with Snowdonia-Active (S-A). CM explained that at the last series of meetings in February and March, she was working for S-A on a freelance basis, two days a week on the Environmental Charter. Due to a lack of funding CM explained how she has now been employed by S-A for three days a week to work on other projects in addition to the Environmental Charter. The Environmental Charter is a development project for S-A therefore the more work CM can help S-A bring in, the more money can be released to the charter group. Currently this means that a maximum of one day a week of CMs time is spent on delivering the Environmental Charter.

Those present then introduced who they were and explained their interests in being at the meeting.

CM then gave a presentation explaining a bit about the environmental charter for those new to the group.

FH asked if the charter was only for those who live in North Wales. It was explained that anyone who operates in the North Wales, including those who travel from outside is encouraged to sign the environmental charter.

CM then went through each of the aims of objectives of the group and explained the developments and actions the group has taken on each.

#### **1. Providing environmental best practice guidelines to activity providers.**

- Environmental Charter open to regular review,
- Waterproof field guide - 'iSee North Wales Coast' - AONB Anglesey CM informed those present that the group been successful with an application to the Anglesey AONB Sustainable Development Fund to produce a waterproof field guide to the North Wales Coast which will be completed by March 2014. The guide will include input from Anglesey AONB project officers, North Wales

Wildlife Trust and Geomôn. The group hopes the guide will be the first in a series of guides to various habitats across North Wales.

- Contribution to consultations - Safety at Inland waters, Sea Kayaking Code and Bushcraft Guidelines - consultations are displayed on the North Wales Outdoor Forum and are also distributed around key members of the sector who have expert knowledge in the field and the group will feed back information for consultation.

## **2. Enabling an effective and reliable communication system to and from the sector internally and externally.**

- Snowdonia-Active customer relationship management (CRM) system was used to display the spread of charter group members across North Wales. CM explained that the CRM is being built by S-A, and is able to deliver timely and relevant information to those members of the sector the information needs to reach.
- A Facebook page has been set up for the group.
- A Twitter account has been set up for the group.
- Monthly updates are set out to over 300 people who have asked for requests.
- The North Wales Outdoor Forum is used to display a variety of information, in particular S-A keeps the site updated with the latest consultations which impact the outdoor sector, not limited to those which are link to the environment.

A couple of current issues which impact the outdoor sector were expanded upon.

### **Open Access - A review of Welsh Legislation**

Ashley Charwood was invited to report on the recent announcement from Welsh Government that they are to review existing legislation and guidance relating to access and outdoor recreation. If there was a change in legislation it could mean a 'scottish' style charter for Wales, where by it is your statutory right to access undeveloped land as long as you behave. More information can be found on the [Welsh Government Website](#). AC explained that this is "once in a lifetime" opportunity and very exciting for for the outdoor sector.

### **Natural Resources Wales: Planning our Future**

CM with input from AC explained how Natural Resources Wales who came into being in April 2013, amalgamating Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission and Environment Agency have released a document for consultation, titled Planning Our Future. Comments are invited on this consultation document until 10 January 2014. The document focuses on who NRW are and what they do, their purpose, their finances and how they will operate; contributing to their corporate plan for the next few years. The group plan on making a response to this consultation as it is essential that sustainable recreational use of the environment remains central to the work of NRW.

## **3. Offering relevant environmental training to raise awareness and encourage best practice.**

The group has run two environmental training sessions over the summer of which were accredited by the Mountain Training Association. The sessions were run in collaboration with North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT) who offered their time in kind meaning that the

sessions could be run for free for charter group members. CM explained how other steps have been taken to organise training, however, limited funds have thus far meant the group can only offer training if the trainer/organisation is able to offer their time in kind. It does not come as a surprise that this has been difficult to find. The group will continue to search for funding so more training sessions can be organised as relying on in kind contributions is not sustainable. A slide showing the type of resources NWWT brought to the sessions was displayed and those present were informed that useful resources such as this can be found on the [wildlife watch website](#).

#### **4. Facilitating a platform for discussion, development and action.**

CM explained that this is exactly what meetings such as this are for. These group meetings offer an opportunity for those involved in the sector to come together to discuss and share ideas on how we can sustainably grow the industry and ensure that popular venues are managed in a sustainable way. Meetings such as this give members an opportunity have their input into the group and to raise concerns they think the group might be able to assist with.

CM explained that as a result of the discussions had at the last series of meetings in February and March the steering group was able to group through the points raised and decided which they could action on.

After litter was reported at a number of previous meetings. The groups has organised two clean up events. One supported the Loving our Lake clean up of Llyn Padarn; Rubbish Paddle, Rubbish Walk, Rubbish Swim and the second event was a clean up of the Afon Ddu car park as part of Tidy Wales Week.

Due to the fact that in February and March four meetings were held in different areas, naturally different issues were brought up. CM explained how the group has tried to action on as much as possible from the outcomes of the previous meetings but recognised it was not relevant to go into detail on each development in each area, therefore a brief summary of the key successes/developments was delivered and then those specific to the area were expanded upon.

#### **Key Successes/ developments**

- Afon Ddu - CM explained how the charter group has good relationships with the NRW reserve manager of the SSSI which borders the Afon Ddu gorge. The reserve manager Mike McCabe (MM), reports information regarding the gorge to the group which is then distributed around members. CM has carried out a site visit with MM at the Afon Ddu to discuss improvements to egress points from the gorge.
- Craig Yr Undeb - Union Rock has been reported as a venue which could benefit from some remedial work due to ground erosion. Meeting with the BMC has revealed that the Access and Conservation Trust could be a potential source to finance the project which could also be undertaken partly as a voluntary conservation project by the group. The group has approached the landowner for permission and is awaiting a response. In the meantime the venue is being monitored.
- Clean Up events - Loving our lake and Keep Wales Tidy

- Mess bins - After a dog mess problem was reported to the group at Broadwater, Towyn, the group reported this problem to Gwynedd Council and there is now a mess bin in place. Those present reported that there has been a noticeable reduction in dog mess since the bin has been in place.
- Environmental Training - North Wales Wildlife Trust
- Charter Mark and promotion of the group
- Waterproof Field Guide - North Wales Coast - Anglesey AONB

## Funding Update

Those present were informed on the current funding situation for the group. Unfortunately, applications to SPLASH, NRW, Gwynedd Council and the Lush Charity pot have all been unsuccessful.

## 5. Building consensus between activity providers, external agencies, conservationist and land managers.

- NWEOCG represented at 20+ meetings since the inception of the group, there is more awareness of the environmental charter across the sector.
- The group has offered support for various external projects such as The Big Dee Day; a clean up of invasive species on the river Dee, Tidy Wales Week and the Snowdon Tidy which aims to achieve a meaningful reduction to litter on Snowdon.
- CM explained the links the group has with the other charter groups through the Wales Activity Tourism Organisation (WATO). WATO is a national forum which links S-A, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter Group (POC) and South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group (SWOAPG). The aims of WATO are to share good practice across Wales, ensure activity tourism in Wales is high quality, well managed and appropriately marketed and to ensure the sustainable development of the outdoor sector. Through WATO links the group is able to distribute copies of the Reconciling Conservation and Recreation, Sea Kayaking in Wales DVD produced by POC.

## 6. Promotion of the Environmental Charter

Since the last meeting a charter mark has been designed for the group which members are able to use to signal their environmental credentials.

CM delivered a presentation on the environmental charter at the North Wales Outdoor Forum which took place in March in Llanrwst. Around 200 people were present at the forum.

The environmental charter is now beginning to play a role in management plans and tourism strategies, evidence to it becoming more widely know of and accepted across the sector.

CM then reported membership numbers. As mentioned earlier in the meeting, over 300 individuals/organisations have requested updates from the group, however the number of those who have signed the charter is considerably lower.

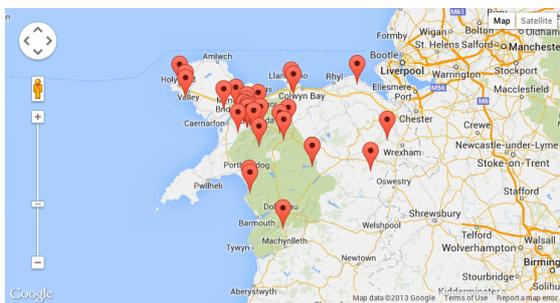
Individual = 11

Organisation = 18

Endorsing Partners = 2

Total Membership = 31

A following maps were shown of current members and potential members.



## Future and Events

Llyn Padarn Christmas Clean Up - 1st December, 2pm Surf-Lines. After the first clean up event of Llyn Padarn, it was suggested a repeat of the event should take place in the winter when the vegetation has died back. Barefoot wine will be sponsoring this event so everyone who takes part will receive a free glass of wine.

The charter group are trying to organise a screening of 'Project Wild Thing', a recently released feature length documentary which aims to reconnect children and their parents to nature.

The charter group will complete the Waterproof field guide to The North Wales Coast by March 2014.

Improvements to the Afon Ddu gorge will hopefully begin in early 2014.

The group will continue to promote the Environmental Charter to increase membership to the group and will also continue to search for funding for future projects.

## Comments

DS commented that it would be good to get in touch with Duke of Edinburgh as they are often misrepresented and might be interested in the signing up to the charter as a way of expressing their commitment to the environment.

It was mentioned that litter is still a problem in the area, particularly around Llandegla and the marshland beyond the forest.

It was stated that activity providers in the area have a general positive attitude to the environment which is fostered through good partnerships between Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONA and Dee Valley Active; a group of local activity providers. DS commented that the majority of the activity providers are based close to Llangollen and in the Dee Valley with very few further north into the Clwydian Range. This may explain the poor attendance at the meeting and it was suggested that next time a meeting would be held closer to Llangollen or even as part of the Dee Valley Active monthly meetings.

DS asked for a copy of tonight's presentation so it could be shared with Dee Valley Active.

## AONB Outdoor Badge - David Shiel

DS was invited to speak about a new scheme the AONB are designing with activity providers in the area with an aim of adding value to the delivery of outdoor sessions. Those who complete the course will receive a kite mark to promote themselves as

having expert knowledge of the area. The course will be about environmental best practice and local knowledge. Currently 14 businesses in the area are interested in achieving the badge. Although, the AONB are still in the planning stage of the Outdoor Badge it is thought that there will be six sessions including content on the following: Introduction to the course and the area, flora and fauna, history, farming in the Dee Valley and Welsh culture and language. It is hoped that the course will be accredited by either Bangor or Glyndŵr University. DS said the group would like to integrate the Environmental Charter into the scheme.

Sam Trigger asked whether all individuals would have to go through the outdoor badge scheme for the company to achieve the badge because at Kingswood they have a high turn over of staff and in addition to this not all staff would be able to get the badge due to the different areas of work they operate in. DS said this is something that would be discussed with the group and there is potential for someone from the organisation could get the badge and then facilitate the cascading of information to staff.

### **Cycling Centre of Excellence - Helen Mrowiec**

HM was invited to share the latest information on the cycling centre of excellence. First HM showed a short film which has been produced on mountain biking on the Clwydian Range which can be viewed here - [Denbigh County Council - Clwydian Range](#).

HM started by saying that the Environmental Charter could be useful in educating bikers on good environmental practice on the trails.

HM then continued to explain more about the latest developments in the area. A 3 dale mountain biking trail has been mapped, which starts in Ruthin goes to Llyn Brenig and then back to Ruthin, covering 150 km. 50% of the trail is off-road. Sections of the trail will soon be way marked and an app is also in the process of being created for the trail.

Helen expressed that they would have liked the trail to have had more off-road components but had struggled to further negotiate with landowners and managers.

HM revealed there is still concern over motor bikers using the trails and regularly engages in police exercises out on the mountain. Those caught are then exposed in press and media campaigns. There has been a decrease in the number of motorbikes on the trails.

### **Discussion**

The whole meeting was informal and questions were asked throughout therefore breaking off for discussion was not necessary.

It is evident from the meeting that the AONB have a good relationship with activity providers in the area and messages of environmental good practice are regularly communicated.

The location of the meeting tonight was not ideal for those providers in the Dee Valley and therefore CM suggested that perhaps it would be good to come and speak at a Dee Valley Active meeting about the charter.

### **Close**

Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB were thanked for their hospitality and the meeting came to a close.