

Grŵp Siarter Amgylcheddol Awyr Agored
North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group

Tuesday 12th November - Plas Y Brenin

Attendees

Catherine Miles - Snowdonia-Active
Ashley Charlwood - Canoe Wales
Chris Wright - Snowdonia-Active
Andy Lewis-Olding - Freelance and D of E Wrexham
Gordon Neil - Bach Ventures
Martin Chesmer - Marle Hall OEC
Tom Carter - Freelance
Richard Watson - Canoe Wales
Gareth Chapman - Ty n y Berth OEC
Jim Potter - Conway Centres
Steve Smith - Conway Centres
Karl Midlane - Freelance
Dave Parry - Planet Zorb
Gerwyn James - MOD
David Snape - MOD
Paul Frost - The Outdoor Partnership
Mike Raine - Plas Y Brenin and The Outdoor Partnership
John Ratcliffe - Natural Resources Wales
Joe Roberts - Natural Resources Wales

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.

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 groups 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 Charlwood 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. There has been a series of consultations around the country engaging key stakeholders to make recommendations for the Green Paper. In December Welsh Government will released a green paper stating proposals for the potential change. The public will have an opportunity to respond to this. Ashley expressed that a meeting Denbigh (6th December) chaired by the Welsh Conservative Party, held to gauge a demand for a change in legislation is now full and no more people are able to attend. However, due to the overwhelming interest, a forum has been set where we people can submit their feedback and post questions that they wish to see raised on the day. This

will be shared with attendees prior to the meeting and will influence the agenda for the discussion on the day: <http://yourvoiceintheassembly.co.uk/access/>

MR asked if environmental education centres were taking any action on this. AC responded by saying that until the Green Paper is released there is very little we can do as only key stakeholders have been engaged with at this point. When the Green Paper is released in December 2013 it is important that as many people as possible respond. MR commented that surely the more which goes into the Green Paper now it is more likely to get set in stone so should more people try to get involved now.

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 first corporate plan. 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.

CM asked the representatives from NRW if they wanted to add anything on the consultation. JR commented that the driver for NRW is health and social justice therefore outdoor education important and that organisations like the Environmental Charter and The Outdoor Partnership should respond to the consultation document. JR contributed by saying NRW has a duty to learning outside. Recreation, access and learning outside should all be embedded within the work of NFW. JR expressed that responses to the consultation will be used to refine NRW first corporate plan. NRW's aim is sustainable use of the environment.

CW said if the outdoor sector doesn't have an input at this stage then a great opportunity will be missed. He stated that within NRW there is a strong drive towards economic gains reflected by board of NRW. It is important that NRW recognises that the outdoor sector heavily contributes to Welsh economy and sector needs to be written into the corporate plan.

CM then continued with the presentation.

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.

Joe Roberts was invited to share on the work he has been conducting in the Afon Ddu gorge. JR said the research which has been carried in the gorge investigates the effectiveness of the interpretation of the panel at the base of the gorge and it explores the distribution of use in the gorge. Chris Hooper's dissertation (NAME) recommended that the gorge needed either more management or less people. The work which Joe has carried out for NRW and his own MSc dissertation has explored this further. Four people counters are in the gorge, one at the base, one at the lower exit, one at the middle exit and one at the top exit at the end of the typical path those gorge walking would exit.

JR first talked about the interpretation panel and how it was designed in away to highlight sensitive areas without drawing direct attention to exactly where they are. There had been concern that drawing too much attention to where the sensitive areas could have a detrimental effect on the gorge. JR distributed questionnaires to people who use the gorge regularly to see if they could identify the sites which were pointed out on the interpretation panel (cartoon form). Only 50% of the sites were correctly identified, questioning the effectiveness of the panel. The general consensus from those who completed the questionnaire was that the panel would be more useful if there was extra information to accompany the panel such as a leaflet explaining more about the

gorge including the history and geology of the gorge. Therefore there is a possibility of changing the panel to be more of an educational tool and then creating a leaflet detailing on the sensitive spots in the gorge.

Facts on the gorge from 2012 foot counters:

- 16,000 people used the gorge.
- Very weighted to July (3000 people)
- December only 100 people
- Busiest days are Wednesday and Thursday.
- Average is 64 people per day
- Maximum in one day is 184 and the least is 0
- Peak time of the day for gorge use is 10am
- Bottom exit gets used the most when it is wet
- Middle exit gets used the most when its busy
- Top exit gets used the most when it is dry

Suggestions include that it would be better to look at group management and spread of gorge uses throughout the day rather than trying to reduce use. Ecological surveys suggest that the gorge is in a better environmental condition than in previous years reflecting that people are using the gorge more sustainably. The questions remain of What do you do about the times people go in the gorge? Could the foot counter information go to straight centre heads (up to date) so they can make a decision about whether to go to the gorge? Potential for training on group management in the gorge for environmental protection.

GJ suggested a concordat as similar to the Sycrydd Gorge in South Wales.

JR suggested an agreement about group management rather than a concordat as this is not the route the outdoor sector has previously wanted to go down. The gorge itself if not an SSSI (just boarders one).

JP commented that it wasn't just about centre use and that Conway Centres makes sure they send no more than two minibuses to the gorge at any one time. He suggested a leaflet and a panel would be useful. The panel still needs to be in place to get the message out to those who visit from outside of North Wales.

ALO thought a code of conduct would be good so those outside the area would understand the gorge better.

MR raised the point that we don't know who the people are who are visiting from outside so how do we contact them?

JR said it would be good to find a way of engaging with people from afar. It was suggest that striking up a conversation to find out where they are from and then sending information on who they are back to CM could be one way.

CW commented that we are never going to be able to legislate the gorge and that it is worth reflecting on how much 16,000 per head brings to the economy and benefits of exposing people to the environment. The point was about the need to consider the wider value of the gorge.

JR expressed that this work was never about restricting gorge use but merely an exploration of sustainable use of 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.

Small Group Discussion

AC then facilitated a discussion session, suggesting that due to the numbers in attendance it would be better to break into two smaller groups to discuss the following which was offered as a guide:

- Focus for 2014?
- Problems/ issues/ opportunities?
- Structure of meetings/ group - themes/area specific/activity specific?
- Desired environmental training - ideas for collaboration?
- Is NWEOCG missing out on anything which we could support?

Discussion Outcomes

Training largely dominated discussion.

There was a general consensus that NRW has the expert knowledge and outdoor providers want to learn more.

Those from NRW said they need to know what instructors want to know and which level to pitch it.

As a starting point, more information on SSSIs where they are and their significance. Trainings should be habitat specific.

Training should use appropriate language for outdoor instructors and their application.

GJ suggested a similar format to what happened when initial conversations started in South Wales and the solution was to have a 'round robin' at venues with Countryside Council for Wales (as it was) and outdoor providers had the opportunity to ask questions - an informative exercise for the providers and CCW.

Best example of conveying environmental information is US National Park standard leaflet.

Meeting needs to be organised between NRW and outdoor providers.

Outdoor providers should have an input into the NRW: Planning for Our Future consultation to highlight the importance on the role NRW can play in sharing information with the outdoor sector.

Signatories to the environmental charter could provide exposure on poster boards at within centres - outward statement of environmental best practice.

Education packs at a certain level - syllabus leading to certification for certain trainings.

School Programme

Liaise with organisations such as Keep Wales Tidy and Tesco discuss lunch packaging and biodegradable bottles.

Could have a coast tidy - Menai Straights and Cable Bay.

Afon Ddu - there has been chainsaw activity.

CPD for environmental trainings. Should also focus on sanctions for misuse.

Wild Camping - good environment for training.....

John Muir exemplars of success.

Duke of Edinburgh - Approved Activity Provider - environmental requirements?

Wild Country panel for schools.