



# **CEREDIGION LOCAL ACCESS FORUM ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17**

# **CEREDIGION LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

## **ANNUAL REPORT – 2016-17**

The annual report of the Ceredigion Local Access Forum has been prepared in accordance with Regulation 16 of the Countryside Access (Local Access Forums) (Wales) Regulations 2001.

The report highlights the work of the Local Access Forum during 2016-2017 and sets out its proposed work programme for 2017-2018.

### **FORUM OFFICIALS**

Chair: John Morgan  
Vice Chair: Chris Belsey  
Secretary: Eifion Jones (Ceredigion County Council)

### **CONTENTS**

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION.....	3
THE CEREDIGION LOCAL ACCESS FORUM.....	4
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2016-2017.....	5
RAMBLER TRAILER & CONSULTATION .....	6
VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTION.....	7
RECREATIONAL VEHICLES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.....	8
START THINKING ABOUT THE NEXT FORUM.....	9
FORUM WORK PROGRAMME 2017-2018.....	10 –11
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MEMBERSHIP.....	12
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM AREA.....	13



# CHAIRMANS INTRODUCTION

An important aspect of the year has been Ceredigion County Council's good progress towards compiling its new Rights of Way Improvement Plan. This Plan is fundamental to maintaining and improving the public's access to our Ceredigion countryside. The Welsh Government have involved Local Access Forums (LAFs) in the work and it has been gratifying to hear Council Officers commending the work of the Ceredigion Local Access Forum Subcommittee set up for the purpose.

The previous Rights of Way Improvement Plan included a commitment to set up an 'Adopt a Path' scheme. Such a scheme allows individuals or groups to adopt a public right of way to regularly report back on its condition and to carry out light maintenance work where necessary. For a number of years the Local Access Forum has urged the Council to implement the Plan proposal and it is pleasing to see that it is now set up. It has currently attracted over 50 volunteers which is a good start though the LAF would urge a target of 200 upon the Council. The concern of the LAF lies in the scalability and sustainability of the scheme. Scalability will involve ensuring that, as the number of volunteers increases, the administrative support can cope. Sustainability requires the commitment of the Council continuing to ensure the provision of what few staff are necessary to support what is an exemplar project.

Community Councils have powers to carry out maintenance and other work on public rights of way which could make a useful contribution to their condition and use. Though there are notable exceptions, especially amongst the Town Councils, the average level of interest expressed by Community Councils is not high. Over the years the LAF has attempted unsuccessfully to more closely understand the problems leading to the lack of use of their powers. This remains something for the LAF to tackle as part of its new work programme.

The LAF has considered the Welsh Government's consultation document titled 'Taking Forward Wales: Sustainable Management of Natural Resources'. Implementation of the actions in the document would significantly change the public's rights of access to the countryside. In its response the LAF did not support the use of footpaths by cyclists and riders. Neither did it support a proposal to allow cycle racing on bridleways. It opposed an unrestricted right to camp on Open Access land. The LAF agreed that dogs should be on a short fixed length lead in the vicinity of livestock. It accepted that revised procedures for the diversion of public rights of Way could be beneficial. The LAF was doubtful of the intention of only relying on a published code of practice for users of the new rights. Taking a long term view the proposals in the document constitute the most important issue of the year.

During its term the LAF has benefitted considerably from the presence of Council Officers and Members and my thanks go to them for their contributions to our discussions and also to Eifion Jones the Forum's Secretary.

John Morgan, Chair of the Ceredigion Local Access Forum



# **THE CEREDIGION LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

Ceredigion Local Access Forum performs the function of advising the Local Authority, Natural Resources Wales and others as to the improvement of public access for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment.

The Main Forum met five times in 2016 - 2017:

- 12<sup>th</sup> January 2017
- 20<sup>th</sup> April 2017
- 20<sup>th</sup> July 2017
- 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017

In addition a number of sub-committees also met to look at the works of volunteers, path complaints and potential funding opportunities.

## **ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF ACCESS**

In Ceredigion, countryside access is a fundamental part of the rural tourism product and the network of paths is a key economic asset.

The value of access to the countryside on a local level is identified by the following simple worked example:

In 2015 an electronic path counter recorded over 103,000 people using the coast path between Aberporth and Tresaith in the south of the county. According to the Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey (2014) money is spent during 42% of all visits taken to the outdoors.

A calculation identifies that 43,000 people will have spent money in either Aberporth or Tresaith directly as a result of walking this section of path. That is 43,000 opportunities to spend money in the local economy, which would not exist without the coast path. The coast path is of course only one short route in a county full of access opportunities, not only for walkers, but for cyclists, horse riders and mechanically propelled vehicles.



# **LOCAL ACCESS FORUM KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2016-2017**

This section highlights the Forum's key achievements in 2016-2017. The minutes of Forum meetings provide a more detailed account of the work undertaken during the year.



## **RIGHTS OF WAY AND ACCESS**

The LAF continue to play an important part in the strategic management of Public Rights of Way (PROW) through assisting the Authority in administering the Primary Path network. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) sub-committee met twice during the year to look at path complaints and help shape the strategic development of the Right of Way network.

The LAF remain one of the non-statutory consultees on Public Path Orders, advising on changes to the PROW network such as changes in alignment.



## **VOLUNTEERING AND COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS IN CEREDIGION**

Ceredigion County Council has a long history of working with volunteers when it comes to developing and maintaining Public Rights of Way. The LAF are keen to support this effort and explore opportunities where this can possibly be enhanced. A Volunteer sub-committee was established and met twice during the year and prepared a paper which looked at how the current volunteer resource was being utilised by the Council and how this could possibly be developed further in the future.

The Volunteer Sub-committee analysed the data relating to volunteer effort on ROW maintenance for the past 6 years and found this to be consistently equivalent to about an additional 1.3 staff members, contributing an equivalent total of more than £66k when costed at the minimum wage.

These efforts of the Ceredigion Rights of Way Volunteers have been given national recognition recently with a Highly Commended Certificate in the Wales Volunteer of the Year Awards 2016.

## RAMBLERS TRAILER

In September 2017 Ramblers Cymru volunteers presented Ceredigion County Council with a new trailer which will help the Public Rights of Way team with their duties across the county. Volunteers who help maintain public footpaths secured funding from Ramblers Cymru 'Tools for Teams' fund. This fund provides support to groups of committed volunteers who've been working together with the Council's officers for over twenty years and are involved with a wide range of work including erecting bridges and gates, cutting back overgrowth, and general maintenance work on the county's paths.



Angela Charlton, Director of Ramblers Cymru, highlighted the good work of the volunteers. "During the run up to May 2017, when Ramblers Cymru held The Big Welsh Walk in Devil's Bridge, our volunteers alongside Ceredigion County Council worked tirelessly maintaining footpaths, gates and way markers to ensure everyone walking the routes could do so in an accessible and enjoyable manner.

Hopefully the addition of this new trailer will make their voluntary work easier and allow even more paths to be maintained."

The handover of the new trailer to the Council and the volunteers took place at the Council's depot, Glanrafon Industrial Estate, Llanbadarn, Aberystwyth.



## CONSULTATION

In 2017 the Welsh Government initiated a consultation Taking Forward Wales' Sustainable Management of Natural Resources; the proposals were wide ranging covering topics from fisheries, forestry, designated landscapes, environmental quality, agriculture and access to name but a few. Detailed consideration was given to these items at a meeting of a sub-committee and discussed at a full LAF meeting on the 19th October 2017; a thorough response was submitted to the Welsh Government prior to the submission deadline in September 2017.

# VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTION

One of the regular concerns of the Local Access Forum in recent years has been the problem of how to increase voluntary involvement in the care of our paths. For many years there have been three volunteer working parties, based in Aberystwyth, Lampeter and Cardigan, carrying out regular maintenance of the gates, stiles and bridges under the supervision of the local area Ranger. A study by LAF found that this arrangement worked well and had consistently contributed effort by volunteers equivalent to an additional 1.3 members of staff for a long time. However, scope for expansion of such activity was very limited without the employment of additional Rangers by the Council.

One possible way forward was to develop an Adopt a Path scheme, where trained volunteers could carry out lighter duties looking after a few paths in their immediate neighbourhood. We were delighted that Ceredigion Council found the resources to set up such a scheme, employing a part-time staff member to recruit and train a new set of volunteers. During the first year of Adopt a Path more than 45 people have become involved across the county. They have already made a significant difference and given a total of more than 775 hours of their time to caring for paths.



**Do you use Public Rights of Way such as footpaths and  
bridleways?**

**Would you like to learn new skills and help your  
community?**

If so, you might consider becoming a local hero and joining Ceredigion  
County Councils 'Adopt a Path' scheme.

Another area where volunteers have begun to help the Rights of Way team has been in the office, scanning and digitising old paper records so that staff can now access this vital material quickly by computer, using the Countryside Access Management (CAMs) software.



What more can be done? There is scope for local community groups to become involved. For example, a group in Aberystwyth have this year raised about £6000 from grants and organised almost 500 hours of voluntary effort improving the footpaths in the Parc Natur Penglais local nature reserve. So the challenge goes out across Ceredigion. Do you want better paths on which to stroll or walk the dog close to your home? The Council is doing what it can, but it needs your help. We do not all have the time or skills to maintain our paths, but many more of us could keep an eye out on a few of them by joining Adopt a Path. In addition, some of us might even consider raising a little money locally that might, for example, buy a self-closing gate. Donating a gate to replace a stile could make it much easier for dog walkers and mothers with children to enjoy a particular path in your community. If you think that you might be able to help in any way, please get in touch with the Rights of Way team.

# RECREATIONAL VEHICLES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Owing to it being a conspicuous often debated countryside activity the Ceredigion Local Access Forum has considered issues affecting motorised recreational use on a number of occasions.

Though attention has been drawn to wear and tear on tracks there has not been that much attention paid to the legitimate use of motorised vehicles as a means of access to the countryside. Not everyone enjoys the countryside in the same way. Consider too that age or infirmity may prevent walking, cycling or horse riding. We have experienced occasions when the presence of a vehicle has aided others using the countryside.

We recognise that there will be occasions when motorised vehicles impact on the enjoyment of others. But there are areas too where this need not be the case. One of the problems is that over time the number of routes which can be used by vehicles has been reduced by legislation. This leads to more intensive use of the remaining byways with more inconvenience to land users and an increased likelihood of damage to routes.

Though highway authorities have a responsibility it is unrealistic to expect them to have the necessary resources to maintain all the possible vehicular routes. Over the last ten years Treadlightly has emerged as an organisation which can find volunteer labour and resources to carry out repairs. In some counties there may be a need to examine possible cultural barriers to work by voluntary agencies. In Ceredigion, at Soar y Mynydd in the Llyn Brianne area, Treadlightly have promised regular inspection and the carrying out of some of the required maintenance of a popular route for recreational vehicle users. This will be a good test of how far a voluntary organisation can reduce the need for public resources.

As with other access users the majority of problems are caused by a small proportion of people. With motorised vehicles that problem minority is more conspicuous and damage caused can be more evident. Policing resources are stretched but they could be helped if enforcement or the law was easier, for example by enabling the seizure of vehicles at the time of an offence without further warning.

Motorised recreational vehicles do contribute to the local economy. It is by no means unusual to meet vehicles from far afield, including the continent, which will need fuelling and whose occupants need food and accommodation in our County. Regrettably, no objective survey has been done on the economic benefits of motorised recreational vehicles in rural Wales. This would at least allow of a reasonable objective basis for decision making by public agencies.

It is getting on for 10 years ago that the Cambrian Mountains Recreational Vehicle Pilot Project was announced by the Welsh Government. The intention was to create a managed network of vehicular routes taking into account of a range of environmental factors and stakeholders. There were no published results from the study. Perhaps now is the time to resuscitate the project.

Whatever the may happen one can confidently forecast that recreational vehicles will from time to time continue to appear on the agenda of the Ceredigion Local Access Forum.

Paul Green and David Owen





# **START THINKING ABOUT THE NEXT FORUM**

With this Annual Report being circulated to the known organisations in Ceredigion which have interests within the remit of the Local Access Forum, and with Forum membership in mind, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that the three period of appointment of the existing Forum comes to its end in summer 2018 with the appointment of a new Forum thereafter.

I would hope that many current members will put their names forward for reappointment. Their experience will be useful to the next Forum. Nevertheless we would also look to new people coming forward. Apart from anything else it must be remembered that the Local Access Forum is a statutory body and needs to fulfil certain statutory requirements. One of these is a balanced membership with representative of land owning and land management interests as well as those with an interest in the recreational use of the countryside.

It is almost self-evident that we need those who own or manage land – mostly the agricultural interest – to be well represented. The existing Forum is well covered for interests such as walking, riding and motorised vehicle use. What is remarkable is that a popular activity such as cycling is not currently served by Forum members with specialised cycling knowledge. The present Forum also lacks specialised input from the disabled sector. There is the important matter of a severe gender imbalance on the existing Forum. Women are particularly encouraged to come forward or to be nominated by an organisation. Youth organisations should consider taking up the opportunities offered through being represented on a Local Access Forum.

If it is to be effective there is the need for members who can make the modest commitment of time to serve on the subcommittees which may be established to serve the Forum

The advantage of membership is that issues of importance can be tabled for discussion and possible resolution with appropriate officers being asked to specifically respond. It offers the possibility of influencing decisions at the time of policy formulation rather than the less preferable occasion of policy announcement for public consultation. In short it offers the opportunity of getting into officialdom and its ways so as to better influence the decisions made. None of this is easy but a Local Access Forum which is broadly representative with an interested vigorous membership offers an avenue to success.

John Morgan, Chair, Ceredigion Local Access Forum



## **FORUM WORK PROGRAMME** **2017 – 2018**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Mode of Implementation</b>	<b>Report back arrangements and date</b>
Annual Report	Discuss format of Report with Ceredigion C.C. Seek submissions from Forum Members	October 2017
Members' Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. CAMS</li> <li>ii. Statutory, Remit and other aspects of LAFs</li> <li>iii. The four public rights of. Access</li> <li>iv. Maintenance and Obstructions</li> </ul>	October 2017 January 2018 March 2018 June 2018
Adopt a Path	Continuing Review	October 2018 March 2018
Volunteer work	Review organisation, current and future work	January 2018
Cycling	List topics of interest for inclusion in ROWP or for further inclusion in future Forum agendas.	October 2018
Cycling Safety	Speaker from the cycling interest	March 2018
Community Councils	Further review on Forum action on Community Council topics	October 2018

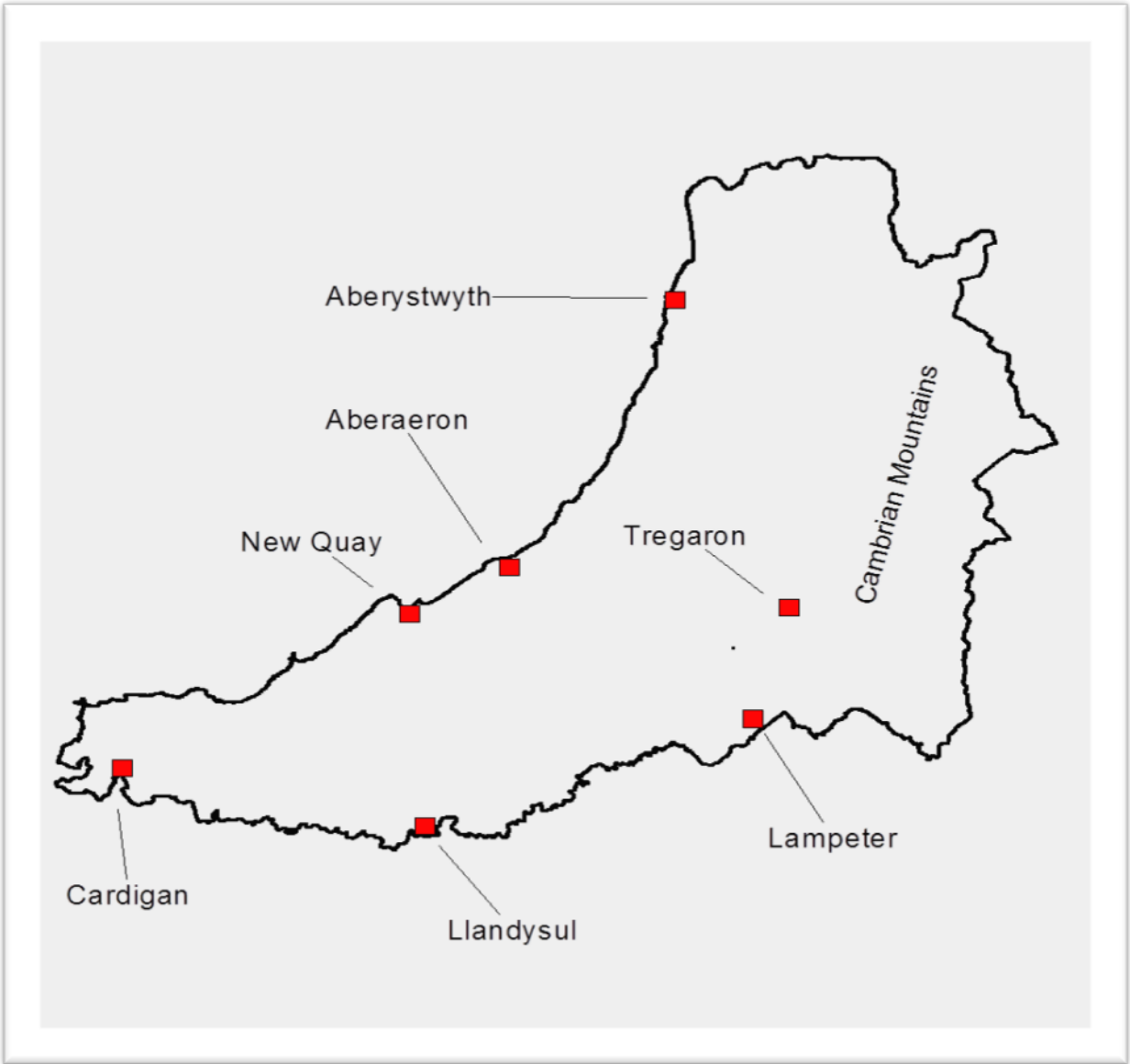
Task	Mode of Implementation	Report back arrangements and date
Motorised Vehicles	Arrange presentation on local economic and other impact	March 2018
CC Planning procedures in respect of rights of way	Eifion Jones to explain	March 2018
Tourism	Consider effectiveness of publicity for Ceredigion walking, riding and associated countryside pursuits	January 2018
Farming	Arrange speaker on the effect of existing and proposed future public access rights on farming.	January 2018
Natural Resources Wales (NRW)	Ascertain local NRW procedures for liaison with LAF	January 2018
Natural Resources Wales (NRW)	Obtain information on current and future NRW activities and budget in Ceredigion that fall within LAF remit	Special meeting
Ceredigion County Council Access budget progress	Continuing review of budget achievement using agreed proforma.	October 2017 January 2018 March 2018 June 2018
Scrutiny Committee	Brief Scrutiny Committee on current public access rights and Welsh Government White paper	March 2018
Chief Executive, appropriate Cabinet Members and Senior Officers	Briefing on LAF activities	March 2018
Review of ROWIP actions and decisions	Presentation from ROWIP Sub Committee and Ceredigion C.C.	January 2018

# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MEMBERSHIP

Lists of members and interests

<b>Name</b>	<b>Interest</b>	<b>Date Appointed to the LAF</b>
John Morgan (LAF Chair)	Walking	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Richard Squires	Horse riding & Cycling	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Leonard Kersley	Walking, Volunteering	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Nigel Jones	Landowner	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Councillor Gareth Lloyd (Ceredigion County Council)	Performance & Economy Portfolio Holder and Landowner	N/A
Councillor Ray Quant (Ceredigion County Council)	Highways Portfolio Holder	N/A
Felicity Wills	Horse riding	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Glyn Davies	Landowner	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Gordon Lumby	Ecology, Walking,	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Roger Fisher	Walking	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Simon Wright	Landowner	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Morgan Evans	Landowner	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Darryl Evans	All	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Christopher John Belsey	Walking, Horse riding	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Paul Green	Off Road Driving	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
Gwilym Williams	Landowner	April 2016
David Owen	Off Road Driving	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2015

# CEREDIGION: LOCAL ACCESS FORUM AREA



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of HMSO  
© Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Cyngor Sir Ceredigion License No 100024419, 2016.