

Stop Natural Resources Wales closing the visitor centre at Ynyslas National Nature Reserve

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 8 Gorffennaf 2024
Petitions Committee | 8 July 2024

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Petition Number: P-05-1447

Petition title: Stop Natural Resources Wales closing the visitor centre at Ynyslas National Nature Reserve

Text of petition: It has come to the attention of the local community that NRW are planning to close the Visitor Centre at Ynyslas at the end of this year. This is taking place with no consultation, no provision of alternative protection for the nature reserve and the loss of local jobs.

NRW is the organisation that should be protecting our wildlife and communities not destroying them.

The visitor centre at Ynyslas is critical in managing the 400,000 visitors a year that use the site. The wildlife and the habitats of the nature reserve are fragile and need protecting from this large number of visitors, vehicles and dogs if we are to avoid further biodiversity loss in Wales.

The year round presence of NRW staff at the reserve mean that there is a natural deterrent to antisocial behaviour (lighting of fires, fly tipping, vehicle access) and that any incidents that do occur are dealt with quickly and efficiently.

The centre provides information and education to all visitor so that they understand why the place is special and what impacts their actions have on it. It is also a place of social contact for the local community and is a place where nature is accessible to those with limited mobility.



Effective visitor management at Ynyslas is essential for the protection of the Nature Reserve and its wildlife.

1. Background

Ynyslas visitor centre is operated by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) in the Dyfi National Nature Reserve (NNR) near Borth, Ceredigion. The visitor centre contains an exhibition informing visitors about the reserve, toilets, cafe and a shop.

It was reported in December 2023 that NRW was considering closing its Ynyslas, Bwlch Nant yr Arian and Coed y Brenin visitor centres. An NRW official told the Cambrian News:

...we are having to look across all of our remit and critically review what we can and must continue to do, what we stop and what we slow...

Our visitor centres are part of this review, but no decision has yet been made on how they will operate in the future.

Over the coming months we'll be drawing up options and recommendations for the future and the final decisions for 2024/25 will be made by our board before the end of March.

Referring to visitor centres at the 2 February 2024 NRW board meeting, it was said that:

The budget for 2024/25 was not yet finalised and the Board had not been asked to approve any decisions on visitor centres. Management information was being collated for a decision by the end of March. It was important to avoid conflating the level of services and the ability of the public to access land. Public access to the land would be maintained but what sort of services provided there was being considered. Where NRW could not continue to provide those services, it would be looking for others to take those on.

In March 2024, the Cambrian News reported that representatives of NRW attended a public meeting in Borth to discuss Ynyslas visitor centre. An NRW

official reported that the visitor centre would not be closing at the end of March 2024, and that:

We are looking to keep things running for as long as we can, but it is difficult and we want to work with people to find a long term solution.

There is no secret plan, and no decisions have been made yet. But the reality is these visitor centres were built in a time of plenty, when we had funding we don't have now.

The Cambrian News also reported that Ynyslas visitor centre makes “a loss of about £50,000 a year”, and that NRW was looking to work with local people and enterprises who might be interested in running the visitor centre café and shop.

The NRW Board most recently met on 23 May 2024. Although the final minutes of this meeting were not publicly available at the time of writing, among the items discussed was the draft NRW Recreation Strategy. The draft strategy includes the statement “By 2030 the Strategy will have provided the direction to, for example: Enable third parties to step in and deliver intense tourism based activity such as mountain biking and Visitor Centres”.

2. Welsh Government action

NRW is a Welsh Government-Sponsored Body. Its roles include managing 7% of land in Wales (including Dyfi NNR and 55 other NNRs), maintaining flood defences, responding to environmental incidents, and advising public bodies. The Welsh Government provides the majority of NRW's funding through Grant in Aid and other grants. In 2022/23 59% of NRW's income came from the Welsh Government, with the remainder raised through charges (17%), commercial/other income (21%), and European/external funding (2%). Its total expenditure of £272m in 2022/23 exceeded its income of £234m, implying a £38m deficit.

Then First Minister Mark Drakeford answered Mabon ap Gwynfor's question on potential closures of NRW's Visitor Centres, including Ynyslas, during Plenary on 2 January 2024, saying:

Natural Resources Wales, like every service here in Wales, is under financial pressures. There will be difficult choices for them to make, just as we have had to make over the past few years, but I'm sure that when that agency makes those decisions, they will listen to the points that the Member has made and the other issues that local people want to raise.

Huw Irranca-Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, reiterated this position in his response to this petition. He highlighted NRW's budgetary pressures and its priority to deliver core functions and statutory duties. Regarding visitor centres, he said NRW is considering future options "including provision of opportunities to local businesses, partnership working with social and community groups", but that any final decisions will be made by the NRW Board.

3. Welsh Parliament action

Clare Pilman, Chief Executive of NRW, directly addressed concerns about the closure of visitor centres during the [annual NRW scrutiny session](#) by the Senedd Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure (CCEI) Committee in January 2024. She told the committee that no decisions had been made regarding closures, but that NRW had to consider all options. In its subsequent [May 2024 report](#), the CCEI Committee suggested, with regard to visitor centres, that "NRW should do all it can to ensure their continued operation" and recommended NRW "report to the Committee on the status of visitor centres within the next six months".

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.