



**Minutes for the eighth Cross Party Group on Rural Affairs
Tuesday 27 January 2015**

12.15 – 13.15

Conference Room 24, Ty Hywel

Off-roading in Rural Wales

Does the economic benefit out-weigh the environmental damage?

Present:

Chair:

Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM (PC)

Secretariat:

Cat Griffith-Williams - The Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW)

Present

Assembly Members

& AMSS:

Russell George - (Con),

William Powell – (LD)

Antoinette Sandbach – (Con)

Elin Jones – (PC)

Aled Roberts – (LD)

Mark Isherwood – (Con)

Invited speakers:

Mr Adrian Walls

Rights of Way Manager for Denbighshire CC; Secretary of the Welsh Rights of Way Management Group of the County Surveyors Society / Association of Directors of Environment Planning and Transport Member of the Parliamentary Rights of Way Review Committee

Mr Jont Bullbeck

Access, Recreation and Tourism Team Leader, Natural Resources Wales
Welsh Off Road Motoring Steering Group

Representatives on behalf of Green Lane, Byways, and Bridleway groups, and representatives on behalf of Off-Road Vehicle users all made contributions from the floor.

In attendance:

Robin Hickins - Treadlightly

Duncan Green - Treadlightly

Rev Richard Kirlew – Church in Wales



Sheila Wren – John Muir Trust
Rachel Evans - Countryside Alliance
Anita Banks - On behalf of Alun Davies AM
Robert Taylor - Welsh Government
Rachel Lewis-Davies - NFU Cymru
Alun Jones - Cambrian Mountain Society
Rosemary Watton - CPRW
Diana Mallinson - SOPS/GLPG
Hannah Norman - on behalf of Ramblers Cymru
Jocelyn Kynch - Open Spaces Society

- 1 **Llyr Huws Gruffydd** AM opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. He was particularly pleased with the number of AMs in attendance.
2. Mr Jont Bullbeck from NRW began his presentation by differentiating between the illegal and legal use of recreational motor vehicles.

Legal use includes:

- 'Site based' riding e.g. for motocross. Can include: dedicated off-road facilities/tracks (such as Moto-x site in Cardiff or Sweet Lamb in mid-Wales);
- Temporary sites with permission (e.g. events on NRW managed forestry land such as the Wales Rally GB).
- (often) Untarmacked routes e.g. for competitive 'enduro', or recreational trail riding.
- Routes can include: certain public rights of way (Byways Open to All Traffic which have motor rights);
- Unclassified Roads (UCRs with motorised rights);
- Routes over land with permissions

Research characterised **illegal off-road use** into the following types:

- **Neighbourhood off-road activity** [typically in or close to residential areas on green open space, parks, local public rights of way (PRoW) cycle routes, nature reserves, farm land, forestry]
- **Off-road trail riding** [may be illegal use of a PRoW without rights for motorised use, riding across areas of land, such as open common land without 'Mechanically Propelled Vehicular' (MPV) rights / land owners permission; use while unlicensed or using unregistered or non-road legal MPV]
- **Practice for off-roading events** [e.g. to practice for motocross events without land owners permission or other breach of road and licensing requirements]

Illegal use with an off-road element:



- **Off-road activity for socialising** [going 'off-road' is often incidental rather than being sport or recreational motor use; often close to residential areas e.g. raves]
- **Fly tipping and vehicle dumping** [i.e. includes use and/or dumping of vehicles on routes or land without vehicular rights]

2.1 Jont Bullbeck went on to present data on potential off road stock and potential participation he then detailed the findings of participation from the Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey from 2011 which was a telephone based survey of Welsh residents' participation in recreational activities. It provides statistically robust data.

In addition to basic demographic information, survey questions were asked about what recreational activities people took part in, how often they took part, where about they went, who with etc.

The % figures from the survey are statistically representative of the Welsh population as a whole.

NRW's WORS, 2011 includes data about 'Off-road driving and motorcycling':

- Overall participation over the previous 12 months: 10% of Welsh population
- Young people (16-24) are much more likely to participate: 18%, followed by 25-34 yr olds at 13%
- Significantly more men (13%) than women (7%)
- More associated with living in a rural area (highest participation is in central Wales).
- No statistical association with deprivation
- More likely to be working than not working

2.2 Statistics and findings of **off roading sites and routes** in Wales were presented. Jont Bullbeck clarified that the number of legitimate **sites** in Wales has not been estimated to date as they are generally private businesses. Similarly they have no data about the number of sites operating under the planning 28 day rule. Motor organisation have data for their authorised events. **Routes:** There are around 33,100 kms of public rights of way in Wales made up of footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways [limited to non- mechanically propelled vehicles (MPVs) - i.e. motor vehicles] and BOATs. DfT statistics record a total of 26,600 kms of rural and urban unclassified roads (UCRs) in Wales as of 2013. They do not have figures about the length of unsurfaced UCRs, nor of the status of these routes [not all UCRs will have public rights for motor vehicles] . Most UCRs will be 'ordinary' tarmaced roads for MPV use.

The public rights that exist over many unsurfaced UCRs is not generally explicitly stated in highway records and this issue is a source of dispute both as a matter of local government and government policy and for individual routes. (Government advice is that each case must be determined on its own merits).

Therefore the clearly legitimate network of unsurfaced [off-road type] recreational



routes is fragmented and short. This requires trail riders to link such sections together using the ordinary highway network [if they are not to ride illegally]

Sites: They have no data about the number of legitimate facilities or sites operating in Wales although NRW estimate it to be between 6 and 15. An NRW survey found of 16 replies from local authorities [Inc. 1 National Park] they were aware of 7 sites providing off-roading within the 14 day planning rule.

2.3 **Estimates of economic benefits** were discussed. However the economic data is limited. Evaluation of the Wales GB rally by Welsh Government estimated a value to Wales over 5 years [to 2010] of £50 million. An informal survey of a multi-day moto-cross event in Cardiff, estimated spend of around £250 to £1000 per person. Around £75k to £300k for the event. Although only partially relate, Aberystwyth University research into on-road motor cycle related tourism estimated a value of £70 million [without multipliers] to the Welsh economy per year. There has not been an evaluation of the financial benefits to Wales of recreational off-roading. Although NRW aims to provide an overall estimate in its Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey for 2014, due to be published later in 2015. NRW have no estimates of the financial costs to public authorities (or others) in relation to upkeep of routes, site management, policing/enforcement, wardening, damage to land etc.

2.4 **Impacts on the environment:** Defra/CCW funded research in 2007 which estimated that only 5% of the PRow network in England and Wales were affected by illegal off-roading. Serious problems tended to be localised. The research also found that around half of PRow are not passable by any kind of motor vehicle; much MPV use of PRow appeared to be legal and connected with access to land or dwellings. The same research found that the areas affected by illegal use were generally open in character [and therefore accessible to MPVs] with low intensity land use. Motor bike use causes the greatest concerns to local authorities surveyed during the research. Wide spread reports of illegal use, though the frequency and impacts are mostly not systematically recorded. Some authorities, such as Brecon Beacons NPA, have reporting systems e.g. on their website.

Wales Off-road Motors Steering Group [WORMSG] has investigated compiling Wales's data. While, police forces do record incidents they all have somewhat different recording categories and methods that make compiling valid Wales data difficult. Generally illegal off-roading appears to have been a lower priority for the police over the last few years.

2.5 **NRW experience:** NRW has agreements with organisations for running events within their managed forestry estate e.g. ACU, MSA for the Wales Rally GB; also for local use e.g. Legal Forest Riders [in Rhondda Cynon Taff]. WG have asked NRW to assess the scope for further site based provision on the WG Woodland Estate.



Enforcement: NRW publicised a campaign with police forces across Wales to address illegal use of forestry sites, as well as protected nature conservation sites (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation). Dune NNRs often have illegal use. A number of forestry sites have been the subject of recent NRW/police enforcement operations, including: Dyfi, Coed y Cymoedd, Maesteg, Nantyr [near Wrexham]. Information provided by site staff note different degrees of impact. There appears to be some increase in the problem over the last year or 2. Impacts are more often linked to motor bike use, & close to residential areas. Work with police to address illegal use on sites in N Wales led to 10 anti-social driving notices.

2.6 **The Wales Off-road Motors Steering Group** is a cross –sector partnership including: central and local government organisations (e.g. NRW, WLGA, local authority representatives,) police forces in Wales and the NGO sector (users/manufacturers groups (Treadlightly, Auto Cycle Union, LARA, MCIA), land managers (NFU, CLA) and other recreational users groups. WORMSG approach is to address the 3 elements :

- **enforcement** of illegal use
- **provision** [of suitable sites and routes];
- **education and information** about responsible motorised recreation (where people can go and what they can do)

The Group has helped support members sharing experience and good practice, in developing information and education materials, in the development of provision projects, enforcement operations and the Treadlightly organisation’s work. There has been a decrease in the involvement of many organisations over the last 3-4 years as the issues have apparently reduced and/or become a lower priority.

Results have been:

Strategic

- Good research and data
- Competing priorities
- Co-ordinated effort

Enforcement

- Sustained policing and public sector priorities
- Displacement & temporary reductions
- Identification of legitimate sites and route

Improved provision

- Suitable sites
- Clarity about route networks



Education & information

- Where people can go
- Requirements – permission on sites; road legal on routes
- Peer to peer working

2.7 Questions were received from the floor. **Antoinette Sandbach AM** asked what is being done to work with Sat Nav companies to not take road users on routes which are not suitable for motor vehicles. **Aled Roberts AM** felt there is a lack of coordination with neighbouring authorities and there's need for a strategic approach. He asked NRW to look within as AONBs are SSSI's, NRW seems to be robust in its agricultural land management but not in others. **Anita Banks - On behalf of Alun Davies AM**, pointed out that farmers have to comply with Green Lane rights of way but certain local areas are just common land so there's no legal protection, therefore off roaders are destroying nature and species and is worried they'd lose their World Heritage status. NRW confirmed that if off roading is impacting on protected sites then NRW will speak to the Highways department to address these specific issues.

3. Mr Adrian Walls

Gave a presentation on managing off road access by the Dee Valley Off-roading Strategy Partnership based on the document which accompany these minutes.

4. Llyr Huws Gruffydd closed the meeting thanking the speakers, contributions from the attendees and the accompanying briefing papers which have been submitted.

5. The Cross Party Group on Rural Affairs will next meet on Tuesday, 17 March 2015. 11.15am – 12.15, Conference room 24 in Ty Hywel, National Assembly for Wales. The session will consider the future of rural Wales: grass roots heritage and affordable homes where the Adfer Ban a Chwm (ABC) will be launching their Report into views on affordable housing and the use of derelict vernacular buildings.

The meeting ended on the bell for Plenary.