

CCB CYMDEITHAS ERYRI the SNOWDONIA SOCIETY AGM
Held on Saturday 18 October 2014 at Bodnant Welsh Food, Tal y Cafn

MINUTES

Present: 49 members, with President John Lloyd-Jones in the Chair.

Apologies were received from:

Vice-Presidents:

Sir John Houghton

Trustees:

Margaret Thomas

Gareth Roberts

And 16 other members

1. The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held in 2013 were approved *nem con* (proposed by Jacob Buis, seconded by Netti Collister).

2. **Matters arising** - None

Chair's report

3. David Archer introduced himself.

- i. He reported that the threats facing the Welsh National Parks referred to at the 2013 AGM had materialised with severe financial cuts to National Park Authority budgets and the prospect of them losing planning powers and independence. The Welsh Government's new powers enable it to legislate for significant amendments to the status and governance of our National Parks, and change looks inevitable. Welsh Ministers have recently announced a Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales. The Review will be split into two stages comprising examination of the designations and their purposes, and the governance arrangements. The review Panel is made up of Professor Tony Marsden, Dr Ruth Williams and Society President John Lloyd Jones, and the report was expected to be available before the end of 2015. DA invited the floor to discuss the Review at one of the discussion forums after tea.
- ii. DA expressed concern over the Welsh Government's recently published Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill and Planning Bill, neither of which included any reference to the value of landscape. "Well being" is new government speak for sustainable development, but despite the National Parks pressing the buttons of environmental resilience, health, culture, *and* economic prosperity, this message is failing to get through to politicians. The Planning Bill is silent on whether Park Authorities should retain planning functions, but DA hoped the view of Ministers would become clearer when the Bill is debated in the Assembly. It is worrying that the Bill will be decided without reference to the Designated Landscapes Review; planning functions are fundamental to the effective operation of Park Authorities and it is the Society's view that any decision should await the recommendations of the Review Panel.
- iii. DA emphasised the crucial role of the National Parks and AONBs in influencing the wellbeing agenda, and said that if arguments are not heard and understood by Ministers, the most cherished landscaped of Wales could lose their protection. He reported the Society's central role in the new *Alliance for National Parks Cymru*, which is responding vigorously to relevant Government Bills and presenting evidence to the Designated Landscapes Review.
- iv. DA explained the increasing significance of the Society's liaison with the Park Authority as public purse strings are tightened and the Park Authority's independence is questioned. Current collaborations include pressing for the undergrounding of power lines, litter clearance initiatives on Snowdon, maintenance of Lon Gwyrfa (the new Rhyd Ddu to Beddgelert multi-use path), and other volunteer conservation work through the Society's Ecosystem Project. He praised the work of the Ecosystem Project and its valuable work helping to look after Snowdonia and providing skills development to volunteers.

- v. He mentioned the continued popularity amongst members of the Society's Events Programme, managed by the Enhancement Sub-committee, adding that the risk assessments procedure was put to the test during the Solstice walk and shown to be effective. He invited the floor to discuss this Programme during the discussions after tea.
- vi. DA drew attention to the work of the Policy Sub-committee, which monitors planning applications. It is being kept very busy by the plethora of renewable energy schemes; the Society is positive about small-scale hydro-electric schemes but is increasingly exercised over the number of applications where scenic beauty and sensitive riparian ecology have not been adequately protected. Proposals for large wind turbine close to the Park boundary continue to be a major concern but the Society was heartened by two decisions which found in favour of Snowdonia's landscape and views into and out of the Park.
- vii. He reported that the Society's finances are in reasonable shape this year, with no resort to capital reserves to fund expenditure, reminding the floor that fundraising continues to be vital. Matched funding for the well regarded Ecosystem Project work is increasingly difficult to secure, with staff having to spend more time pursuing grants.
- viii. Membership of the Society remains steady at a little under 1500 but the turnover of 10% means recruitment of new members remains a high priority. Trustees are currently considering the level of subscriptions, which haven't been reviewed since 2009, and a phased introduction of a small increase, commencing next March is anticipated. DA expressed pleasure at the steady increase in Business Members - now 22 - who are a great asset in raising public awareness of the Society and its work.
- ix. DA reported that the change to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), agreed at the last AGM, had been completed adding that while the majority of the present trustees have agreed to be nominated to the new CIO, new trustees are actively being sought.
- x. DA welcomed the appointment in January of John Harold as the new Director, replacing Huw Jenkins' interim appointment. He thanked Jenny Whitmore for her work as Project Officer, and welcomed her replacement, Owain Thomas, emphasising the Society's fortune in attracting really good staff, making an effective and committed team. Tŷ Hyll has again attracted some 40,000 visitors in the year and is a huge asset to the Society. A successful funding bid resulted in employing Lisa Mundle to deliver a series of bee and pollinator events over the summer. Finally, he congratulated Margaret Thomas, one of the Society's longest serving Trustees, for her *Wales Volunteer of the Year Award* for her work at Ty Hyll.

Snowdonia Ecosystem Project Manager's presentation

- 4. Mary-Kate Jones reported on the activities of the Snowdonia Ecosystem Project.
 - i. It has been an interesting year, particularly the appointment of the new Officer, Owain Thomas. She thanked Owain for his efficient and organised work and said he was a great asset to the Project.
 - ii. She reported that the year had included the equivalent of 1,300 volunteer days, more than 7,000 volunteer hours, or an average of one workday a week - a great achievement considering the limited staff time.
 - iii. She summarised the main volunteering activities: three workdays with Capel Manor College in May, working on Rhododendron Ponticum clearance at Bryn Gwynant YH, pine regeneration removal to improve river water quality as part of the Pearls in Peril project; and footpath maintenance on the Rhyd Ddu path.
 - iv. Natural Resources Wales and SNPA were the main partners during the year, with volunteers also from a growing list of partners such as CAIS, Scope, North Wales Police and Gwynedd Council.
 - v. As usual, the summer task was Himalayan Balsam clearance and the work of Society volunteers at y Bala, with 1,200 bags collected, was praised by SNPA warden, Bill Taylor; work with NWWT on the big D-day, resulted in 600 bags of balsam collected.
 - vi. the Project has started doing litter surveys, creating distribution maps to identify litter hotspots and help target education in order to change behavior.
 - vii. the new species-survey workdays were over-subscribed, with amphibian and reptile surveys at Gwaith Powdwr counting adders, slow worms and newts. Results are entered on the Cofnod

website with the aim of raising awareness and encouraging individuals to do their own recording of these under-recorded species.

- viii. Mary-Kate urged all members and Trustees to attend a workday to see the work for themselves, whether for one hour or a whole day.

Director's Report

5. John Harold introduced himself as the new Director.

- i. He described his first eight months in the role, during which he had identified three elements of the Society ie the strong roots of campaign and policy work, the long-established practical conservation work, and Tŷ Hyll, whose potential was starting to be realised as a Society flagship. These elements seemed unconnected until he unearthed the 1967 poster for the Society's inaugural meeting which crystallised the Society's purpose for him, highlighting the Society's conservation action and persistent campaigning on long-term challenges.
- ii. He referred to Esmé Kirby and his attendance at the recent launch of a biography, taking the poster along with him. The day was interesting: in the morning he talked to the media about the Llanbedr spaceport; he drove to the launch through the Llanberis Pass past the Cromlech Boulders - a landmark in Society history; he saw excavators working on the most spectacular mountainside of Snowdonia at Cwm Glas, and wondered what Esmé would have said and done. The nature of the challenges changes - Esmé could never have foreseen a space port in Snowdonia, or the scale of hydro schemes - but the need for vigilance with a long-term perspective remains.
- iii. JH said he has found a Society that is robust, committed and effective: a fantastic staff who work together incredibly hard, and whom it is a privilege to join; the highly respected Ecosystem Project doing really practical work; and an engaged membership. He has also found strong mature relationships with key agencies such as NRW and SNPA, commenting that the Society has outlived NRW's predecessors, and will probably outlive NRW.
- iv. He sees his role as: 1. weaving together the apparently separate strands of the Society to make them more meaningful and effective; 2. Being vigilant and responding to the growing and changing nature of the ways Snowdonia is used; 3. pressing for a sustainable transport system; and 4. fostering respect for the Park and its special qualities.
- v. JH referred to the recent membership survey and the visions for Snowdonia's future which reflected the value, love and commitment that the membership has for Snowdonia.
- vi. He summarised where he wants the Society to go as being the same as where we come from ie working for the long term and working to nurture respect. He quoted Bill Condry who in 1966 marvelled at the variety, abundance and vigour of the mountain plants in Cwm Glas and their long duration, while mourning the despoilation of natural habitats; he added that now we have diggers on the lower slopes of Cwm Glas and half a million people annually on the upper slopes, but those plants are still there.

Finance Report

6. Judith Bellis introduced herself and explained she had been in the role for 18 months. To keep the presentation brief she referred the floor to the accounts summary available in the magazine, for more detail.

- i. JB reported that the total funds at the end of 2013/14 were higher than previously by £27,289, an apparent operating surplus that could be explained by three factors: approximately £6,000 was due to an increase in the value of investments; the Society had received a legacy and a substantial donation, which including Gift Aid brought in slightly over £10,000; and grant income received for specific projects is included in the accounts in the year in which it is received, though it may not be spent in that year, eg. approximately £7,000 related to the Catalyst fundraising capacity project and £3,000 to the Ty Hyll pollinator events programme.

- ii. She summarized staff and Trustee efforts in relation to finance: John Harold and Mary-Kate Jones have been applying for grants for the Snowdonia Ecosystem Project, an increasingly difficult task each year as sources of funding reduce; Frances Smith has done sterling work in contacting members including life members and encouraging them to donate or remember us in their wills; Margaret Thomas works very hard at Tŷ Hyll, which is now a net contributor to the charity and we anticipate being able to cover any expenses arising there from these funds raised. Thanks are due to all of these as well as all the other trustees, event leaders and volunteers who give their time freely to ensure the continuing success and viability of the society.
- iii. JB said the Society is actively looking at other ways of raising money eg. holding two collection days outside supermarkets recently, which helps raise the charity's profile as well as raising funds. She invited suggestions for other fundraising and awareness-raising opportunities, and reminded the floor to urge friends and family to join as members.

Questions to Director and Officers

Mr John Lloyd-Jones invited questions from the floor.

- 8. **Mr John Lloyd Jones** asked for clarification about the £285,000 described as 'Heritage Assets' in the financial summary.
- 9. **JB** explained this was Tŷ Hyll, a restricted asset with rules that stipulate that it cannot be disposed for a minimum period after receipt of grants.
- 10. **DA** emphasised that the Society has no plans to sell Tŷ Hyll.
- 11. **Mr O G Thomas** commented that the Society doesn't give enough consideration to the workers in Eryri, that the area is losing young talented people that it can't afford to lose. The Society and the National Park are unpopular because they are in the habit of opposing every development that might offer jobs. He pointed out that if the Society or the National Park had existed 200 years ago there would now be no quarries and we wouldn't have benefited from the jobs they offered. Initiatives like hydro-power schemes enable farmers to stay on the land; do we want farmers or moss?
- 12. **JH** thanked Mr Thomas for his comments and responded that he was disappointed to hear a local councilor criticise the Society's opposition to the spaceport by saying "We have nothing in the Llanbedr area"; this displayed a lack of imagination in terms of seeing the incredible value of the local natural resources. He said businesses that invest in these resources should be supported, for example the huge potential of the mountains in supporting businesses in outdoor activities.
- 13. **Mr OGT** claimed such businesses weren't sustainable or large enough scale to be worthwhile.
- 14. **Mr JJJ** summed up saying it was a subject that would be continued, and added that even old quarries were providing sites for new industry in the form of extreme sports; the important thing being that development should be appropriate and sustainable. He thanked Mr Thomas for his attendance and for expressing his views at the AGM every year.
- 15. **Mike Roberts** asked whether the Society supports the application for what can only be described as a fairground at Betws y Coed.
- 16. **DA** said plans were at an early stage and he hadn't seen the details, but he had reservations about the visual impact of carparks, etc.
- 17. **MR** asked if there had been a full feasibility study.
- 18. **DA** said yes and one of the Trustees has seen it but no judgement had been made on it, yet.
- 19. **Maximilian Grant** asked if there was to be a focus group session on re-wilding.
- 20. **DA** said no and explained that when the agenda was prepared, there was some uncertainty about whether the review on designated landscapes would be available; as it is now available it made more sense to concentrate on the other session options. Rewilding is an interesting and controversial issue that would no doubt be returned to.
- 21. **JH** added that the Society would definitely engage the membership in discussions on re-wilding, as it is of great interest to many of them.

22. **MR OGT** asked how the Society could object to proposals in the name of its whole membership without consulting the membership.
23. **DA** explained the Society speaks on behalf of its members, as in any large organization. Only 3 weeks are given to respond to planning applications. Also, every member has the right to stand as a Trustee.
24. **Mr OGT** argued that he sat on 2 or 3 committees and wouldn't object to applications in their name without consulting them. The spaceport is an important opportunity providing potentially hundreds of jobs
25. **DA** noted that nothing can be done till the detail has been published.
26. **JLJ** added Trustees are accountable to the members at the AGM.
27. **Mr OGT** emphasised again that the area is losing its best brains as there aren't jobs to support families.
28. **Netti Collister** argued that she and her husband had successfully raised a family.
29. **Mr OGT** insisted that people in his area were very excited about the spaceport and would be flabbergasted to see so many people against it.
30. **DA** commented that despite promises, no jobs seemed to have been created at Llanbedr as yet.
31. **Mr OGT** protested that the first company there left because of the planning issues and have since set up a venture in Devon creating 40 jobs there – jobs that could have been here.
32. **JLJ** thanked Mr Thomas and acknowledged his points.

Adoption of 2013/14 Annual Report and Accounts

33. The motion to adopt the 2013/14 Annual Report and summary of the accounts for the year ending 30 June 2014 was proposed by Netti Collister, seconded by John Dick-Cleland and passed *nem con*.

Appointment of independent examiners

34. A motion to reappoint TiernayFedrick as independent examiners of the Society's accounts for 2014/15 was proposed by Netti Collister, seconded by Shan Roberts and passed *nem con*.

Re-election of President and Vice-Presidents

35. The re-election of President, John Lloyd Jones, was proposed by Kate Gibbs, seconded by Rob Collister and passed *nem con*.
36. The re-election of Vice-Presidents, Sir John Houghton CBE FRS, Sir Simon Jenkins FSA, David Firth and Dr Morag McGrath was proposed by Judith Bellis, seconded by Netti Collister and passed *nem con*.

Election of officers and members of the Executive Committee

37. The election of the following was approved *nem con*:
 - Chair: David Archer (proposed by David Firth, seconded by Kate Gibbs)
 - Executive Committee (Trustees): Katherine Himsworth, Margaret Thomas, Netti Collister, Paul Gannon (proposed by Bob Lowe, seconded by Judith Bellis).

Any urgent business

38. None.
39. John Harold thanked Mr John Lloyd Jones for chairing the meeting.
40. The date of next year's meeting was announced as 17th October 2015.