

North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group

Minutes from Inaugural Meeting

November 12th 2012 – 7 p.m. – The Heights

Attendees

Catherine Miles – Group co-ordinator
Alexandra Macgregor – Bangor University
Becks Davie-Tettmar – CMC Pensarn Harbour
Beth Heyward – OMC Pensarn Harbour
Jasper Davie – Freelance
Dan Jackson – Plas Gwynant OEC
Daniel Moncrieff – FSC Rhyd y Creuau Field Centre
Steve Mattock – Nantyr Outdoor Education Centre
Gordon Neil – Bach Adventures
Joe Roberts – Countryside Council Wales
Ash Charlwood – Canoe Wales and Canolfan Tryweryn
Matt Strickland – Environment Agency Wales
Karl Midlane – Sustainable Use Snowdonia
Chris Hooper – Conway Centres Anglesey
Jon Brookes – Conway Centres Anglesey, AHOEC Regional Chair
Tom Carter – Freelance
Eluned Roberts – Sustainable Use Snowdonia
Mark Lynden – Snowdonia Active
Ray Wood – Snowdonia Active
Chris Wright – Snowdonia Active
Ifer Gwyn – Snowdonia National Park
Phil Nelson – Surf Lines

1. Welcome

The meeting was chaired by Catherine Miles the co-ordinator for the North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group who opened the meeting, thanked everyone for coming and reminded everyone the meeting was intended to be as open and informal as possible. Although there would be a short presentation the evening was about sharing ideas as this is just the beginning of the group.

2. Apologies

Dan Graham and Gabs Dickinson – Gone Swimming
Elfyn Jones – BMC
Jim Langley – Natures Work
Dave Crombie – Boulder Adventure
Rod Waterfield – Woodland Skills Centre
Nathan Davies and colleagues – RoSPA

3. Introductions

Catherine introduced herself as the newly appointed co-ordinator for the group and said a little about her background and what had led her to this post. Catherine has a background in psychology, predominantly in researching the relationship humans have to nature, helps run North Wales Active and is a trainee psychotherapist with a view to implement adventure therapy into outdoor work.

The floor was then opened up to those present to introduce themselves and comment on why they had attended the meeting tonight. A broad spectrum of the sector was present, including centre staff, conservationists, freelance instructors and those from external organisations. Those present seemed to share the common view that they had attended the meeting because they recognise the responsibility activity providers have in caring for the environments they operate within.

4. Presentation by Catherine Miles (CM)

The purpose of the meeting was to explain the why, what and how of the charter group, to discuss aim's and objectives, to elect a steering group and to agree on some planned actions for moving the group forward.

Why?

Proactive approach to management solutions, rather than the traditional reactionary stance associated with this topic area.

What?

A way to ensure the goodwill between stakeholders remains firmly in place and an opportunity to demonstrate the care for the environments in which outdoor providers operate.

How?

Collaborative working and improved communication.

CM then elaborated on why it was necessary to form such a group as NWECCG and that a reliance on a voluntary approach to this kind of work had a proven record of not being sustainable which is why a part-time paid co-ordinator has been appointed. At this point CM announced that SUS had disbanded and decided to hand over their existing funds (approx £700) to NWECCG so they could carrying on with the valuable work SUS had started on maintaining the Afon Ddu gorge. There were a variety of other reason why the group had been formed including, organised group use is predicted to increase in the future which will put more pressure on popular venues, to stop solutions being imposed on us and a response to increasing environmental pressures. CM also pointed out that

ultimately the outdoors is our livelihood; we rely directly on quality natural environments for our own recreation and as a source of income.

CM then talked about where NWECCG sits alongside other organisations. CM explained how the group does not want to undermine the work of other organisations which are already working hard to sustainably manage our local environments. It is essential that the group collaborates with other organisations to establish and maintain a joined up approach to the sustainable development of the outdoor sector without duplicating effort. CM thanked representatives from other organisations that were there.

CM then explained how other groups operate in Wales who are similar to what NWECCG aspires to be. These groups are the Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter Group (POC) and the South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group (SWOAPG). Although there are differences between North Wales and the areas where the other groups operate it is worth learning lessons from the way other groups are run as to not 'reinvent the wheel'.

POC and SWOAPG both provide a platform for solid partnerships between conservationists, activity providers and landowners who work together to ensure outdoor activities are developed in a sustainable way. Both groups enable a means of effectively distributing information and provide opportunities for staff training and development. Each group holds routine meetings where concern can be voiced, issues resolved and sector specific information disseminated. Members make a commitment to an environmental charter. The groups are represented at meetings and to external groups and all information can be fed back to members. Drawing on the successes of POC and SWOAPG, CM gave a few examples of what can be achieved through such a group. The FCW Concordat written by SWOAPG means access to the Schryd gorge can be obtained through agreement with a concordat. Both groups organise popular environmental trainings and workshops and promote best practice. POC have produced waterproof environmental fact sheets and held well attended events, such as 'Wildlife Sightings' evenings which are enjoyable and informative whilst helping to raise funds for the group.

CM went on to explain how POC, SWOAPG and Snowdonia Active the umbrella organisation of NWECCG, are all part of Wales Activity Tourism Organisation (WATO). The aims of WATO are:

- To share 'good practice' across the outdoor sector in Wales,
- To ensure activity tourism in Wales is high quality, well managed and appropriately marketed,
- To ensure the sustainable development of the outdoor sector.

WATO is a means of effectively disseminating ideas throughout Wales and to help those from the 3 national parks work effectively together through sharing

resources and working on joint initiatives. 85% of activity providers can be reached through WATO.

CM gave a current example of the designation of Marine Conservation Zones in Wales. CM explained how a representative from WATO could attend such meetings and information would be fed back to providers across Wales but also members ideas and concerns could be voice at such meetings through a WATO representative.

North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group (NWEOCG)

After explaining other organisations CM explained the groundwork behind NWEOCG. In November 2011 Chris Hooper in collaboration with Snowdonia Active put together a proposal for the NWEOCG which can be found [here](#). CM stressed that the 'how' and 'what' the group will be should be decided by the members but there are fundamental foundations of the group which CM summarised from the proposal as:

- Enabling activity providers in North Wales to be proactive when it comes to the continuing debate on sustainability and environmental impact,
 - Ensuring a cohesive voice for consultation with external agencies, conservationists and land managers,
 - Ensuring sustainable management of activity venues.
- How the group will achieve these aims will be devised by considering the needs of the group and that rather than writing anything into the aims which is not relevant issues should be dealt with as they occur. CM pointed out that critical mass was important for the future of the group to enable information to be widely distributed across Wales.

5. Questions and comments

Eluned Roberts (ER) – Lateral thinking needed to deliver solutions which is what the group can achieve with a joined up approach and a broad spectrum from across the sector involved.

Question 1: Ash Charwood (AC) – Who is the group for, activity providers, recreationists or clubs?

(CM) Although a group could be classed as 3 or more people NWEOCG is specifically aimed at activity providers rather than recreationists. Clubs could be classed as activity providers and thus the charter group be open to clubs.

AC then made that the point that most clubs are run by volunteers who already give up a lot of spare time.

CM responded by suggesting NWECCG could offer membership at different levels which is how SWOAPG operate. This would ensure anyone joining would have a measure of control over their level of involvement but would ensure urgent messages are relayed to everyone.

AC suggested that information to clubs could be filtered through organisations such as the BMC. For example the BMC could provide clubs with information from the charter group rather than directly from NWECCG.

This is something that will need to be discussed in more detail as the group evolves and perhaps go to a group vote.

Question 2: Joe Roberts (JR) – It would be useful for organisations such as CCW to be able to have a point of reference for finding out more information within the outdoor sector. For example if the CCW wanted to know who to speak to about Wild Camping they could be directed by NWECCG to an appropriate contact. Would this be something the group could offer?

(CM) This definitely could be something NWECCG could offer and the benefit of having a group which encompasses the broad spectrum of the sector. CM also commented that it is an example of how it is useful to have organisations such as CCW present at such meetings so we can accommodate their needs into the the group.

Question 3: Phil Nelson – To help the group to be sustainable over time it would be good if NWECCG stays under the umbrella organisation of Snowdonia Active, is this likely to happen?

Chris Wright (CW) implied this would be the case. Ideas for the outdoor charter group have been in the pipeline for a couple of years and it was suggested that Snowdonia Active was the most appropriate organisation to host such a group. Snowdonia Active has a solid reputation within the outdoor sector, has a lot of knowledge and experience and is good at fund finding! Having Snowdonia Active as an umbrella organisation over the NWECCG seemed a better idea than having a separate group in its own right.

6. Group split for discussion

30 minute discussion then a spokesperson elected to bring ideas to the group.

Things to think about:

- What do you want the Charter Group to be?
- Members needs?
- Relevant Issues which should be brought to the groups attention?
- Relevant Training?
- Regularity of meetings?
- A better name than NWECCG!

7. Points raised during discussion

- Group to be an interface between outdoor sector providers (A) and interested parties and public sector bodies (B),
- Provide information between A and B,
- Training should focus on the environmental not the activity,
- Relevant issues: Wild Camping, RSPB (Choughs), need for a focal point for issues to be addressed,
- Relevant training – accredited CPD and free, environmental awareness training,
- Publicity for the charter so people know what we are doing,
- Steering group to be re-appointed quarterly/seasonally,
- Full group meetings should be 1 or 2/ year
- It should be for freelancers, commercial businesses and Outdoor Education Centre,
- A cohesive voice,
- Should be for group leaders,
- Create a climate of how to be seen in the outdoors – lead by example,
- Should be a place for issues to be discussed such as ‘mountain biking on snowdon’ as an example,
- Could be divided into sub groups (working parties) which are overseen by charter group,
- Need to be proactive – an environmental arm of outdoor pursuits,
- Question over whether there should be a ‘charter’,
- If there is an environmental charter it has to be spot on,
- Introduce a 1% environmental tax to clients bill which they can chose to take off, money put back into maintaining venues and also a chance to educate clients on importance of caring for environment,
- A consultative body,
- There are unrepresented groups here today, more people need to get involved,
- Work alongside National Park to understand where there are ‘hot spots’ of environmental concern,
- Overuse of venues is causing angst,
- Sharing of best practice across the sector, learning from others,
- Snowdonia Active remains the umbrella organisation for NWOCG.

8. Steering Group Election

CM gave a brief overview of what would be expected from steering group members: likely to meet quarterly, have more input into the group in terms of day to day decisions and assist the co-ordinator.

The following people were elected for the steering group.

Catherine Miles (Co-ordinator) – North Wales Active

Dan Jackson – Plas Gwynant OEC

Gordon Neil – Bach Adventures

Joe Roberts – CCW

Ash Charlwood – Canoe Wales and Canolfan Tryweryn

Karl Midlane – SUS
Chris Hooper – Conway Centres Anglesey
Tom Carter – Freelance
Eluned Roberts – SUS
Gabs Dickenson – Gone Swimming
Ifer Gywn – Snowdonia National Park

9. Role of co-ordinator

This was only touched on at the meeting so these are notes from the presentation:

- 2 days/week, admin and secretariat services to group,
- Represent NWECCG at relevant meetings and to other organisations,
- Promote CG through social media sites and develop resources,
- Build on working relationships with members and external organisations,
- Liaise with WATO on joint initiatives,
- Identify needs of the charter group members and deliver relevant work programme and monitor progress.

10. What now?

CM will draw from the meeting the most important points and start to design a work programme.

Steering group (SG) will meet and work on the environmental charter which will be then distributed for input.

The SG will also work on a membership criteria which will also distributed for input and be ready for the next full group meeting so providers can sign up.

Move forward on Afon Ddu work after SUS.

ER talked about the work Sustainable Use of Snowdonia (SUS) had done in the Afon Ddu gorge and what work needed to continue such as the maintenance of the footpaths within the gorge. ER said she and other members were very happy to hand over the remaining funds from SUS to help the charter group move forward with this work. SUS was thanked for this contribution.

11. Timeline

12th November 2012 – Launch of NWECCG – it's happening!
December 2012 – Steering Group Meeting,
January/ February 2013 – Full Group Meeting,
March 2013 – Steering Group Meeting.

12. Close

CM thanked Countryside Council Wales and Tourism Partnership North Wales for funding the project until March 2013.

CM thanked everyone for attending and for their input and the meeting was closed.