

## **Access, Enjoyment and Participation**

### **Introduction**

The Llŷn Peninsula is an ideal place to roam in the countryside and along the coast whilst enjoying spectacular views. It is also a place to rest, keep fit and see wildlife, historical remains and buildings and various other interesting features. However, not much of what the area has to offer can be enjoyed unless you can access them - therefore, rights of way and lands that are open to the public are important.

Public rights of way (prow) include public footpaths, bridleways and roads and byways. Public footpaths are by far in the greatest number and many are open and in a good condition - but some problems exist and ensuring sufficient resources for maintenance is challenging. Also, there are many rural roads in the area - small country lanes - and these are also useful for travelling by car, bus, bicycle or on foot.

Common lands are another valuable resource in terms of access in Llŷn. Although these lands are in private ownership, access can be gained to substantial parts of them as Access Land. Many of these sites are uncultivated and unimproved lands and many are natural heathland which are a valuable habitat to a variety of wildlife.

In addition to the common land, restricted public access is available on other land, namely Access Land, which have come into existence as a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The former Countryside Council for Wales led on this process and exercises were undertaken to raise awareness and consult as part of the registration. Information about Access Lands in the Llŷn AONB area can be seen on OS maps with a Scale of 1:25,000. Further information about Access Lands can be seen on Natural Resources Wales website.

Opportunities for public access is also available on land in the ownership of conservation organisations (access to some lands by prior arrangement). The two obvious ones in Llŷn are the National Trust which owns a number of sites, coastal lands and farms, including Llanbedrog and Porthdinllaen beaches and also the Bardsey Island Trust.

Gwynedd Council is responsible for rights of way as well as for leading the work on the Coast Path. Since 2005, many resources have been allocated to the development of the Coast Path, which form a section of the Wales Coast Path, with support from Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Government. Community Councils have an important role to play in terms of path maintenance in their areas whilst landowners also have a responsibility to keep statutory paths open.

The Arfon and Dwyfor Access Forum has a role to play in terms of the supervision of rights of way and public access. Regular meetings of the Forum are held to discuss various access issues and the Forum can contribute to the implementation of some of the Management Plan's policies regarding access issues.

Opportunities to roam are important in order to enjoy the area, visit historical remains and habitats, see a variety of wildlife and birds and for health benefits and keeping fit. Also, it is a part of the tourism

resource that brings work and substantial income into Llŷn.

The Main Aim of the Management Plan in terms of Access and Enjoyment is:

<p><b>IMPROVE AND PROMOTE THE PROVISION OF RIGHTS OF WAY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACCESS IN THE AREA TO ALL USERS AND RAISE AWARENESS AND IMPROVE APPRECIATION OF THE AREA'S SPECIAL FEATURES AND THE PUBLIC BENEFITS OFFERED BY THE ENVIRONMENT.</b></p>
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## **Special Qualities**

### **Paths and Rights of Way**

The paths and rights of way include footpaths, bridleways and byways. There is an extensive network of public footpaths in Llŷn although significant sections are not in regular use by now. Gwynedd Council retains the information about the route of paths which is shown on a series of maps and computer system.

Access to many historical sites and archaeological remains is obtained via rights of way. One can walk to the summit of many of the area's hills and see remains of the ancient forts such as Tre'r Ceiri or see monoliths and dolmens as well as the more recent artefacts of the minerals industry and granite quarries.

One can roam and see a variety of Llŷn's special wildlife by using rights of way and access rights. Walking along the coastal paths provides an excellent opportunity to see and study the marine birds and grey seals whilst hares, farm birds and smaller creatures are to be found more inland. Also one can visit various habitats including marshes, coastal grazing lands and various heathlands.

A detailed assessment of the public footpaths was undertaken as part of the preparation work for the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan in 2005. This work included surveying paths to see whether or not they were open, the condition of the furniture, signage and level of use. Based on the survey, the paths were placed in categories in order of priority in order to programme future maintenance work.

Some paths and roads are suitable for people with mobility problems or wheelchair users. Due to the lack of information about suitable areas and improvements that could be made, a survey was commissioned by the AONB Service to assess Access Opportunities in 2008. The Report concluded that facilities and access could be improved on a number of sites - including facilities for the disabled.

Few bridleways are to be found in the AONB and possibly the reason for this is that historically boats or small ships were used to move from place to place, rather than horses. The bridleways are an important resource and according to legislation, bridleways are also open to cyclists.

Permissible paths - used by the public but they are not public footpaths, e.g. leading to wells or beaches.

Unclassified roads - have developed over time and they were originally based on footpaths and cart paths and they developed into important access roads to the villages and areas of Llŷn. Byroads and other small lanes have rights of way and they also contribute to the access opportunities that exist - a total of 43 of them extending for just over 18 kilometres long. Any changes?

## **Wales Coast Path**

Public footpaths are important in each area but here in Llŷn the Coast Path offers spectacular views. Over the recent years, Gwynedd Council, Natural Resources Wales and the North Wales Tourism Partnership have been working on developing the Coast Path in Llŷn which extends along the Peninsula. The path uses public footpaths, small lanes, permissive paths, beaches and open land. By now, the Coast Path runs almost entirely along the coast following the establishment of new coastal links. Also, work is ongoing, as part of the Coastal Access programme, to obtain additional sections along the coast.

A substantial number of people walk along the Coast Path in Llŷn and the area's businesses have benefited from this development. Until recently, estimates were being made regarding the number of ramblers, but nowadays digital devices count the exact number of ramblers. Unfortunately it is not possible to compare with the data in the previous plan. However, there is a baseline for future reviews.

In 2014, Nefyn Town Council received money from the Coastal Communities Fund to improve sections of the Coast Path between Nefyn and Morfa Nefyn so that it was made suitable for people with disabilities and young families. Also, the project will re-establish a historical 10 mile path between Nefyn and Llanbedrog.

## **Circular routes**

Circular routes are popular because there is a variety of things to see along the way and there is no need to have a vehicle so that you can return to your starting point. Of course, it is possible to draw up circular routes by following maps but there is an element of risk that a path or road will be closed thus forcing the walker to turn back.

In 2015, Gwynedd Council and a number of partners managed to obtain a grant from the Coastal Communities Fund to develop new and convenient circular routes, with links to the Coast Path. A number of these paths are to be found in the AONB and they are an opportunity to visit a number of interesting historical and nature sites. The paths which form part of the new circular routes have been upgraded as a result of the project and they are way-marked. More information can be seen at [www.visitsnowdonia.info](http://www.visitsnowdonia.info)

## **Access Lands**

As noted, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 provided new access rights to the public (with restrictions) on:

- open land, namely land including heathland, moorlands or dunes;
- common land (registered under the Common Land Registration Act 1965);

- any other type of land designated as 'access land' by the owner.

In terms of Rights of Way, the Act will improve current legislation by promoting opening new accesses and removing uncertainties regarding existing rights. The Arfon and Dwyfor Local Access Forum contributed to the process of defining land with public access.

## **Common Land**

Between 2004 and the present day, the changes in terms of the area of common land within the AONB was very minimal. The latest figure is 824.5 hectares. There are 30 common land sites in Llŷn and these are important in terms of public access and as a resource for informal recreation. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 gave access rights to registered common lands as well as to other open land. Common lands are also very important as a natural and semi-natural habitat and because of their nature value, many of the lands have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. A number of Llŷn's common lands are in the ownership of the National Trust. They vary in size and some units link together to create a substantial area, such as Yr Eifl. The other main common lands in Llŷn are Mynydd Tir y Cwmwd, Mynydd Rhiw, Y Foel Gron, Bardsey Island, Mynydd Cilan and Penarfynydd. Full details regarding ownership, size and grazing rights etc. can be found in the Common Land Register retained by Gwynedd Council.

Common lands are a very important access resource in the AONB and consequently, some of them are under considerable pressure from recreational activities. In the past, some common lands e.g. Rhiw, Mynytho have gone on fire during dry summers.

## **Trust Lands**

The National Trust owns many sites and lands in the Llŷn Peninsula.

The main public areas are:

- Porthdinllaen village and beach, Morfa Nefyn
- Whistling Sands Beach, Aberdaron
- Porth Meudwy, Aberdaron
- Porth y Swnt, Aberdaron
- Llanbedrog Beach

Also, the Trust owns coastal land and farms in Llŷn, including Porth Gwylan, Mynydd y Graig and Penarfynydd. Public access can be gained to some of these lands by prior agreement.

Since 1979, Bardsey Island has been in the ownership of the Bardsey Island Trust. It is possible to cross the sea to the Island by arrangement with the crossing service that runs from Porth Meudwy. Bardsey Island is a very special place due to its historical links, religious background, wildlife and marine birds and its tranquil and remote nature. It is a place that offers a unique experience and an increasing number of people visit the island and stay there for periods of time to escape from modern life.

Oriel Glyn y Weddw - The Oriel purchased the Allt Goch woodland near the Plas a few years ago and

has worked to clear and manage trees and re-open former paths that are now open and link up with the Coast Path.

## **Beaches**

Beaches where access can be gained to them are an important access and recreational resource for Llŷn. They contribute to the visual beauty of the area and provide an opportunity to enjoy and relax. There is a broad range of beaches to be found, some rocky and others with fine golden sand and dune systems can be found in some places. Sandy beaches such as Llanbedrog, Abersoch, Porth Ceiriad and Porthdinllaen are popular for sunbathing, relaxing, bathing and sports. On the other hand, some beaches are more rocky and wild and attract walkers, naturalists and fishermen.

The beaches or shores provide access to the sea. Local fishermen and residents keep boats on some beaches such as Trefor, Nefyn, Porth Ysgaden, Porth Meudwy and Abersoch. Many launch pleasure boats and personal water crafts from these beaches also and at times can be very busy and there is a risk of accidents. Some beaches are popular for special types of recreation - for example, surfing is very popular at Hell's Mouth whilst diving is popular in Porth Ysgaden.

## **A Place to Cycle**

There are many rural lanes in Llŷn that are suitable for cyclists as there is not much traffic travelling along them. These lanes can be clearly followed with an OS Map to the Scale of 50,000 or 25,000. The Access Opportunities Study (AONB, 2008) has shown that facilities to park and lock bicycles are to be found near many of the area's beaches and that there are opportunities to improve the provision in some areas.

Until 2009, there was no specific cycle path in the AONB. As a result of the work of improving the A499 from Aberdesach to Llanaelhaearn, also a dedicated cycle path has been provided by using sections of the former road and the verge of the new road. Bridleways can be used by cyclists, however, these are few and far between in Llŷn. There may be an opportunity here to raise awareness and show that these facilities exist.

A network of cycle routes using local roads has been developed by Gwynedd Council, the Wales Tourist Board and the Welsh Development Agency. An information pack was published and signage was installed in 2004. Two of these routes travel through extensive sections of the AONB (Route 1 - Mynydd yr Ystum, Route B - Garn Fadrun), and another route travels through a section of the AONB (Route C - Garn Boduan). At the time of reviewing the Plan, not much promotional work was being undertaken on these routes and some signage was missing.

The National Trust promotes routes from Aberdaron to three nearby locations (Whistling Sands, Mynydd Mawr and Plas yn Rhiw). These routes are marketed on-line and in a leaflet has been produced.

## **Travelling to, and within, the area**

The main roads leading to Llŷn are the A499 from the direction of Caernarfon and the A497 through

Porthmadog. Many use cars to travel around the area and visit various destinations, however, there are traffic problems in Pwllheli and in some of the villages during the busy holiday periods.

The Cambrian Coast Railway offers an opportunity to travel to and from the area by rail. The service follows the coastline to Dyfi Junction or Machynlleth and then connects to Aberystwyth or Shrewsbury and Birmingham. Rail is a more sustainable mode of travel that can assist in reducing vehicular traffic in the area. Full details regarding the service managed by ARRIVA can be found on the following website: [www.cambrianline.co.uk](http://www.cambrianline.co.uk).

The main Llŷn bus station is located at Pwllheli and buses travel to various different areas. A regular service runs between the main centres such as Porthmadog, Caernarfon, Nefyn and Abersoch and a semi-regular service between the villages along the main roads. Full details regarding the bus service can be found on Gwynedd Council's website or on: [www.cymraeg.traveline-cymru.info](http://www.cymraeg.traveline-cymru.info).

Coastal Bus - The Coastal Bus is a new service in Llŷn that runs a regular service between Nefyn, Aberdaron and Abersoch on specific days. It offers a good opportunity to walk along sections of the Coast Path and then catch the bus back or forward to the next centre. More details can be found on the following website - [www.bwsarfordirLlŷn.co.uk](http://www.bwsarfordirLlŷn.co.uk).

## **Key Issues**

### **Footpath and Rights of Way maintenance in light of financial cuts**

One of the main issues in terms of access is how to maintain public footpaths and other rights of way in light of substantial cuts in public spending. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan includes information about all rights of way in the area and places footpaths in different categories according to priority. Subsequently, emphasis was placed on maintaining the paths in categories 1, 2 and 3 in order to make the best of the restricted resources available. However, over the years, the budget has been reduced and further substantial cuts will be made in 2016-18.

### **Obstructions on paths and stock in fields where there are rights of way.**

Unfortunately, obstructions on public footpaths in the AONB are quite common and disrupt people's ability to walk and enjoy. Such matters can be difficult to resolve. Wires or gates placed across paths are most commonplace but it was recently seen in some areas that increased use is being made of electric wires to control grazing and that they are located near or across public footpaths. In such cases, awareness needs to be raised and landowners need to be informed of their responsibilities in terms of paths.

In some cases problems arise where cattle are found on lands where paths are located. There is a need to raise walkers' awareness of the dangers and to work with farmers to encourage them to avoid placing cattle, calves and bulls in fields where public footpaths are located.

### **Erosion and weather**

Coastal erosion has a substantial impact on the Coast Path in some places in Llŷn. A combination of

wet winters and storms causes erosion and instability in a number of places along the coast. The sedimentary parts of the land suffers most and during 2015 and 2016, substantial erosion has taken place near Llanbedrog, Hell's Mouth, Nefyn and Morfa Nefyn and in the Trefor area.

In some places, the Coast Path has collapsed into the sea or has been undermined to such a degree that it has had to be moved more inland. In order to do this, cooperation will be needed from landowners and resources will be required to pay for work and equipment such as gates, wires and signage.

### **Visitor pressure**

Excessive use of sites or paths can be harmful as it leads to erosion and wear and tear. This is not currently a major problem in the AONB but it could develop as a result of increased use.

In some areas in the AONB, there are pressures however as a result of parking on road verges due to the volume of tourists visiting popular destinations. The most obvious examples of this can be found near the public car park for Hell's Mouth, Porth Ysgaden and on the roadside of the B4417 at the foot of Tre'r Ceiri.

### **Dogs on public footpaths**

There is a responsibility on owners to keep their dogs under control when following rights of way. However, regular complaints are received by the Council regarding dogs running free and disrupting stock and gates being left open. This creates animosity and losses in some cases and it must be borne in mind that farmers are entitled to destroy any dogs that attack their stock.

### **Conflict between users on beaches and on the sea**

The area's beaches are one of its main attractions and some of the beaches can be very busy during the summer. Various activities take place on beaches - sunbathing, playing games, fishing, boat launching, etc. At busy times, conflict between users is a problem, in particular between those who wish to launch boats - with vehicles or tractors - and other beach users.

Conflict can also develop between those who bathe and enjoy the beaches and those who use personal watercraft and speedboats. Gwynedd Council's Maritime Service is acting to control this by licensing and setting limits and monitoring the beaches, however, the noise of these watercrafts can disturb others. Recently, the Marine Ecosystems project, which has evolved from the work of Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC has launched a new Marine Code to provide guidance on how to respect marine environment and wildlife and other users.

### **Lack of opportunities for some groups**

Although there is a good provision of facilities to roam and enjoy the area, there is a lack of resources for some groups specifically:

- Horse riders
- Cyclists

- People with mobility disabilities

The Access Opportunities Study (2008) looked at issues such as how convenient the access was and whether or not disabled people could reach the beach. Also, attention was given to the provision for bicycles, car parks and the bus service. The report also suggests improvements to facilities in specific areas.

## **Traffic**

During busy holiday periods, the traffic flow is heavy through the town of Pwllheli and the villages of Abersoch, Llanbedrog, Nefyn, Morfa Nefyn and Aberdaron. This disrupts the life and work of local people and the enjoyment of visitors and increases air pollution levels. It is believed that consideration needs to be given to measures to mitigate the situation - measures such as promoting alternative modes of travel, creating new cycle paths, looking to improve traffic flow through Pwllheli and parking management.

## **Lack of information regarding the designation and environmental benefits**

Over the years a lot has been done in an attempt to raise awareness regarding the AONB's designation in general, the Llŷn AONB and the various characteristics of the area. The AONB Service has contributed articles to the local press, given talks and attended events, created a website and published an annual magazine.

Nevertheless, the impression one gets is that the levels of information amongst local people and visitors are relatively low - regarding the designation itself and also regarding the environmental benefits (ecosystem services) being provided. Certainly, there is room to improve this and attempt to get people to see the benefits of the designation and what is being provided by the natural environment. In addition, it is believed that there is an opportunity here for people to support and contribute more directly by means of practical work on projects from the AONB service.

## **Policies**

### **MP 1. MAINTAIN, PROTECT AND PROMOTE KEY PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY IN THE AREA AND ENSURE THAT THEY ARE AVAILABLE FOR USE WITHOUT OBSTRUCTION.**

Rights of way are an important resource for local people and visitors to the Llŷn area to roam, enjoy and keep healthy. The AONB Service will encourage and assist Gwynedd's Rights of Way Department, Community Councils, landowners and organisations such as the National Trust to maintain and retain rights of way in the area. It is realised that this will pose a greater challenge in the future as a result of the financial squeeze on Local Authorities.

Also, the AONB Service and partners will object to any proposal to close, or place obstructions, on any right of way. Cattle on lands with rights of way can cause concern to the public and there is room to work with farmers and the Unions in an attempt to raise awareness about this as well as educate people about closing gates and controlling their dogs.

**MP 2. PROMOTE MAINTENANCE WORK ON THE COAST PATH IN THE AONB AND CREATE NEW COASTAL LINKS.**

The Wales Coast Path was launched in 2012 and since then a number of new coastal sections have been added in Llŷn, such as the areas of Cim Abersoch and Bethlem, Llangwnnadr. Some sections (Pistyll, Trefor?) are yet to be done and the AONB service will support efforts made to include these additional sections. Also, support is offered towards the maintenance of the entire path and its promotion amongst local people and visitors.

As noted when discussing the hot topics, erosion along the sea-cliffs has disrupted the Coast Path in some areas. It must be accepted that this is inevitable as a result of the nature of the land, wet winters and storms. What will need to be done will be to monitor the Path closely, identify problems early and be prepared to alter the path / create new sections, if required.

**MP 3. PROMOTE THE USE OF LOCAL ROUTES THAT ARE LINKED TO THE LLŶN COAST PATH.**

In 2015/16, a number of local routes were developed as part of a Gwynedd Council project that received funding from the Coastal Communities Fund to create 18 routes that linked with the Wales Coast Path. A number of these routes are in Llŷn, and provide an opportunity to see interesting sites close to the coast. It is proposed to promote these routes as they provide an opportunity for local people and visitors to keep fit and see and learn about interesting natural and human features at the same time ([www.visitsnowdonia.info](http://www.visitsnowdonia.info)).

**MP 4. IMPROVE THE PROVISION FOR USERS, INCLUDING HORSE RIDERS, CYCLISTS AND THE DISABLED.**

There is a good provision of rights of way and open access land in Pen Llŷn; however, there is a lack of access opportunities for horse riders, cyclists (specific cycle paths) and the disabled. Recently, a Nefyn Town Council project has improved facilities for the disabled by placing a hard surface on a path at the top of the hill between Nefyn and Morfa Nefyn. It is aimed to make other similar improvements, as well as improve opportunities for horse riders and cyclists.

**MP 5. MANAGE TOURIST PRESSURES IN SOME SPECIFIC AREAS IN THE AONB BY MEANS OF MEASURES SUCH AS MANAGING NUMBERS, TIMING OF EVENTS, IMPROVING FACILITIES AND EDUCATING THE PUBLIC.**

Excessive pressure from users and visitors can have a negative impact on sites and locations in the AONB. Currently, this is not a major problem in the AONB, but it does exist in some areas as noted earlier. By means of various measures, it is aimed to control and reduce the problem, or ensure that it does not develop into a problem.

**MP 6. SUPPORT EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF BEACHES AND JETTIES IN THE AREA AND MAINTAIN THEM TO A HIGH STANDARD.**

Some of the area's beaches are very popular during the school holidays and a large number of

people use them for different activities such as fishing, sunbathing, water-sports, etc. It is aimed to promote reasonable use of the beaches and avoid conflict between the various users. It is also important that the beaches are well maintained by preventing littering, dog control and preventing people from driving vehicles onto the beaches, apart from when they are launching boats under supervision.

**MP 7 PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE MODES OF TRAVELLING TO THE AREA AND IN THE AREA.**

Promoting sustainable modes of travelling to the area and around the vicinity can be beneficial in many ways. It can assist to reduce traffic congestion in Pwllheli and in some of the area's villages, a way for people to keep fit by walking or cycling and also a way of reducing air pollution. Therefore, the AONB Service will promote cycling, walking and using buses and the Cambrian Railway.

**MP 8. RAISE AWARENESS AND INCREASE APPRECIATION OF THE AONB DESIGNATION, THE AREA'S SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS THE MAINTENANCE, PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE AONB.**

Although a lot has been done to raise awareness of the designation since establishing the AONB service in Gwynedd Council in 2003, it is believed that there is more to be done. Often, local people and visitors do not know that Llŷn is one of only five AONBs throughout Wales and that this gives the area a special status that we need to be proud of. The designation can be a good opportunity for businesses to market their products or service. Also, in an attempt to nurture interest and ownership, it is aimed to provide more opportunities for people and children to contribute to the work of the AONB, including volunteer work such as working on environmental projects.

**MP 9 RAISE AWARENESS OF THE BROAD RANGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE AONB AND THE INTERESTS OF THOSE SERVICES IN TERMS OF THE ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.**

Increasing emphasis is being placed on the benefits that the natural environment is providing for society - another term for this is ecosystem services. These benefits are divided into four categories:

- Provisioning Services – products such as food, fibre and medicine
- Regulating Services – water purification, maintaining air standards and climate regulation
- Cultural Services – well-being by contact with nature and education
- Maintenance Services - processes that are required for other services such as soil formation and nutrient rotation.

In collaboration with others, the AONB Service will raise awareness of these benefits and their importance to society, the opportunities that exist and the need to maintain and protect them for the future.