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Swyddfa'r Cyngor
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Dear Councillor Jones,

Many thanks for your letter dated 6th August 2026, regarding the motion which was adopted at a recent meeting of Cyngor Gwynedd on the treatment of Welsh landscape place names on Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping.

We recognise the deep cultural, linguistic and historical significance of Welsh place names and welcome the opportunity to explain OS's approach.

Whilst OS is the national mapping service of Great Britain, it is not the authority on place names. Our remit, as defined within our public task, is to collect a consistent, definitive and authoritative geography of the country, describing both physical and human aspects of our landscape. That includes in-use descriptions, proper names/postal numbers of buildings, places and features which it then makes available through its products and services across Great Britain, regardless of language.

When undertaking this work, we make enquiries and consult appropriate authorities in order to establish, with as much authority as possible, the most suitable name, form, and spelling for all places shown. This is important with names of geographical features in the natural environment where there may be no recognised owner, unlike in the built environment.

Sometimes more than one name is in use for a single feature, and in cases where the use of two names is sufficiently prevalent it may be necessary to record and/or portray both.

The Welsh Names Policy (https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/cymraeg/polisi-enwau-cymraeg), last updated in 2024 with the support of the Welsh Language Commissioner, reaffirms this approach. It commits OS to upholding Welsh language legislation and to ensuring that Welsh and English names are treated on an equal basis in cases where both are demonstrably in active use.

OS draws on established Welsh language forms, historic references, information from authoritative bodies in Wales, as well as on the ground evidence gathered by OS surveyors. This ensures that longstanding Welsh names form a core part of our geographic database wherever the evidence supports them.

OS cannot decide by itself to change a name. Any changes that are made are usually as a result of changes made by either authoritative bodies or when a name falls into disuse and another name comes into use. This also means that OS cannot unilaterally replace one name with another, nor in cases of dual or bilingual names, choose by itself to remove one name over another if both names are in use. OS also has no authority to either inform or compel owners of properties in the built environment to amend a place name, even in those cases where an inaccurate name may have been registered.

When an English name appears alongside a Welsh name, this reflects evidence that both forms are in recognised contemporary use. OS does not translate names from one language to another, nor does it invent English versions where only Welsh names exist.

OS also has a duty to ensure its products remain usable for the public and emergency services. Reflecting names that are demonstrably in active use helps maintain clarity and supports responders who rely on widely recognised and unambiguous naming to navigate safely and efficiently.

OS continues to work proactively with authoritative Welsh bodies to ensure that Welsh names are represented appropriately. We have supported recent work (https://eryri.gov.wales/the-national-park-authority-the-school-of-welsh-at-cardiff-university-and-the-welsh-language-commissioner-work-in-collaboration-to-standardise-a-list-of-eryris-lake-names/) to adopt a number of standardised Welsh place names for lakes within Eryri National Park, ensuring they are captured in our database. This is the type of evidence based, collaborative process that helps secure the proper recognition of Welsh names in our mapping. Following consultation with the National Park we have already added Coed Cerrig y Frân and Llwybr Gwregys to our data.

Evidence suggests that the majority of naming changes over the last decade have been associated with the addition, improvement and standardisation of Welsh names with relatively few changes involving names containing English language elements.

Please note that not all names captured by OS appear on every mapping product. For example, on paper maps, limitations of scale and space require careful prioritisation to maintain readability and navigational usefulness. This is done in line with best practice and cartographic principles.

When concerns are raised about specific place names, OS investigates them with the Welsh Language Commissioner, National Park authorities or other appropriate bodies. In all cases we would need to ensure there was sufficient evidence that the name is a) in current use and b) requiring an amendment. As stated in our policy we will not accept any one individual's interpretation when considering Welsh names where there may be a conflict of spelling or version.

Where authoritative evidence confirms that a different form should be recorded, OS updates its mapping accordingly. Digital products can be updated rapidly, while paper maps follow the scheduled print production cycle.

While OS strives for accuracy at all times, it does recognise that errors may occur and these can be highlighted through the following contact page: Errors with OS mapping | Contact us | OS (https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/contact-us/error).

I hope that the above information helps to provide clarification around our role. Please be assured that Ordnance Survey shares the objective of ensuring Welsh place names are accurately recorded and appropriately represented, and we remain committed to continuing our work with Welsh authorities, the Welsh Language Commissioner and local communities to maintain and improve the representation of Welsh names across our products and services.

Kind regards,

Cerys Head
Customer Service Advisor
Ordnance Survey