



WebEx hosted Meeting of the Conservation and Access Committee, 19 February 2016

MINUTES

Present: Andrew Hinde [AH] Convenor / BCA Conservation & Access Officer

Constituent Body Representatives:

Chris Binding [CB] ACI
Paul Hardwick [PH] BCRA Conservation Officer
John Hine [JH] NAMHO
Wayne Sheldon [WS] DCA Treasurer
Les Williams [LW] CSCC Conservation & Access Officer
Kay Easton [KE] CNCC conservation Officer

Plus the following non-voting observers:

Tim Allen [TA] BCA CRoW Liaison Officer
Bob Mehew [BM] BCA CRoW Liaison W.G.
Jenny Potts [JP] Recorder / DCA Hon. Sec.
Christine Wilson [CW] DCA Conservation Officer elect

1. Convenor's Welcome:

Andrew Hinde welcomed all the meeting participants and introductions were made all round.

2. Apologies for Absence:

2.1 Apologies received from:

Stuart France [SF] - Cambrian C. C.; Tony Radmall [TR] - ASCT; Rupert Goddard [RG] - DCUC;
Fleur Loveridge [FL] - PDCMG; Emma Porter [EP] - BCRC.

3. Minutes of last C&A Meeting, 22 November 2014: *(Previously circulated.)*

(At this point, 10 minutes after the meeting started, a power cut affected Great Hucklow; JP, WS and CW were off-line for several minutes until power was restored. Subsequently it was discovered that, as Gt. Hucklow was signed on as 'managing' the meeting, the audio recording of the meeting ceased at the point of the power cut and only the first 10 minutes are recorded.)

That the Minutes be taken as read and that they be accepted as a correct record. Agreed nem con.

4. Matters arising from the Minutes of the last C&A Meeting.

None.

5. Bats and Cavers - the perceived conflict. *(See Appended papers.)*

5.1 AH explained the need for close liaison between Caving Councils and local bat groups to avoid any problems with statutory bodies. AH offered help in establishing links with local bat groups.

5.2 BM referred to Alyn Valley Woods & Alyn Gorge Caves SSSI, a location known for its bats and the new swallow hole and the intent by NRW along with Denbighshire CC to install a grill and regulate access. The link is <http://www.aditnow.co.uk/Community/viewtopic.aspx?t=11490&pid=1>

5.3 Noted that SF referred in his report to different approaches re. protection of bats to a number of bodies in Wales.

5.4 AH suggested that a statement should be drafted re. liaising with local bat groups and clarifying issues of concern following the recent statements. BM offered to produce a first draft, which AH could then discuss with SF; LW was also willing to liaise on this.

ACTION: BM, LW, SF

6. Statements to ACBs and Landowners from BCA on Section 26 directions and other CRoW matters. *(See appended papers.)*

6.1 There was general approval of BM's statement on section 26 issues and the system for obtaining a Direction under Section 26 of CRoW.

6.2 TA spoke to his document: Advice to ACB's ... etc., and queried the response by Linda Wilson, who was not involved in the original invitation to the meeting. JP had already commented on her response. He noted that there had been no intention to cover conservation in his original draft as he felt that this issue was fully covered elsewhere and his suggested guidelines referred only to CRoW.

6.3 CW raised concerns that the CRoW issue could cause problems for instructed groups. CB said that advice suggests that instructed caving does not constitute "commercial activity" (which refers to show caves) but rather that we should refer to "instructed", "educational" or "professional" caving, i.e. NOT "commercial activity". BM noted that there is some help on this topic in law and the way that the CRoW Act is interpreted. CB said that NRW had stated that "instructed" and "cave leadership training" did not constitute "commercial" caving. TA agreed that this does need to be clarified with cavers and BCA in due course rather than left to DEFRA to rule on. BM suggested that no-one should approach DEFRA or NRW



for the time being until BCA had an agreed position. BM would seek out relevant statements by DEFRA and NE and make sure that ACI are made aware of them.

ACTION: BM

6.4 BM suggested that there should perhaps be a mention of conservation in the Advice on Access document to ensure that there is a requirement for conservation issues to be addressed. CB noted that there is a mention of signage re. conservation later in the agenda.

6.5 AH noted that everyone present appears to be happy the first draft of TA's document and he would now produce a second draft incorporating comments from the meeting.

ACTION: TA

6.6 BM asked for a volunteer to help with an addition on conservation in his paper - JP and CW agreed to do this.

ACTION: JP, CW

7. Appropriate use of conservation signage in and around caves.

(See appended papers)

7.1 CB brought forward the issue of signage in caves to bring forward the conservation message. CB is seeking approval for a national conservation signage in British caves. (LW noted that a CSCC meeting had voted against this but that CB had not been present at the meeting to explain his ideas.) CB feels that club websites and general club materials do not mention conservation at all and there is no guidance for non-club cavers who may visit open caves which have no access conditions, locks, etc.

7.2 PH said that there is a scientific value in caves, which is not necessarily evident, even to experienced cavers.

7.3 CW said that conservation signage in Derbyshire is usually associated with taped off areas. She felt that there would always be someone who will ignore all signs. She also felt that a sign should have a positive and brief explanation of the reason why you should be careful, rather than just the negative: "do not".

7.4 TA was generally in favour where this type of signage is appropriate. He is also in favour of some short conservation videos on U-tube which would attract attention of cavers to the issue. He also pointed out that SSSIs on Mendip have written into their conditions that caving is not damaging.

7.5 LW commented that CSCC are not in favour of signs inside caves but might be persuaded that they are acceptable outside caves. He also felt that explanatory text might be acceptable.

7.6 CB said he is rarely able to attend CSCC meetings at a weekend so is not able to present his arguments in person. He suggested that while most cavers would probably act sensibly, a sign creates peer pressure on the one member of the party who might do damage.

7.7 CW felt she could not support general signage but felt that it might be appropriate in some caves very easily accessible for casual visitors who are not even cavers, such as caves and mines next to footpaths - it may work in some sites and not in others. She suggested that a nationally recognised system, which could be applied locally if appropriate, might be helpful.

7.8 JH referred to some mines being visited and trashed where appropriate signs might be helpful in reducing the problem.

7.9 BM referred to BS ISO 3864-3:2012 entitled "Graphical symbols. Safety colours and safety signs. Design principles for graphical symbols for use in safety signs" - he felt this should be worth checking.

ACTION: BM

7.10 BM also mentioned an inherited policy statement from NCA of not placing signs in caves - LW confirms it refers to memorial plaques inside or at the entrance to caves rather than conservation signs. TA suggested that memorial plaques are quite different to conservation advice signs.

7.11 AH suggested that regions could do an audit of signs already in use in caves. CB feels that an audit of signs will simply delay action - default should be that signs are put in, where appropriate.

7.12 CB agreed to produce a draft of an advice note for regional councils which could be put to the C&A Committee for general agreement.

ACTION: CB

7.13 AH suggested that it is important that caving regions are on board with this rather than be upset because it goes ahead without them knowing about it. BM agreed that there should be work beforehand, before going to place signs, rather than risk delays, as has happened before where there is very lengthy discussion stopping all action, sometimes taking years, before anything happens.

8. Funding conservation projects. *(See appended document.)*

8.1 AH has circulated a paper on funding. He feels we can do more if we apply for match funding for projects.

9. BCA Caving Codes.

9.1 AH said that codes already agreed by BCA are all finalised and are ready for printing as soon as someone is available to do the artwork and printing. LW suggested that Jerry Wooldridge would be appropriate person to oversee this. Once a print-ready .pdf file is available there are various options available for printing (someone like Dave Gibson of BCRA might be able to advise). It was noted that there should be a weblink on the printed material to direct people to the BCA conservation website for further information.



10. Regional round up including difficult case reviews.

(See appended document from SF referring to the Ogof Draenen / Drws Cefn issue.)

- 10.1 AH said that SF's statement of the issues relating to the Pwll Ddu activities is grossly inaccurate and it implies BCA was somehow at fault. AH stated that in his view the issue is now between SF and NRW. It was noted that this is a regional matter.
- 10.2 BM stated that the draft PDCMG minutes for June 2015 record a voted motion on page 3 that,
"we proceed with closing Drws Cefn to meet the landowners wishes; that mediation as requested by CCC proceeds as long as no proviso that current closure is stopped by this mediation";
 and that Stuart France was recorded as being present as an observer at this meeting. BM commented that others may wish to draw their own conclusions from these facts.
- 10.3 TA felt that reinforcing this in the minutes of this committee may be counterproductive.
- 10.4 JP pointed out that SF had insisted in the past that this was a matter for CCC, itself a "national body", and not a matter for BCA.
- 10.5 TA noted that it is open to any individual to take legal action and call for a judicial review.
- 10.6 LW pointed out that SF is accusing AH, in other words BCA, of being duplicitous and he felt that AH should defend himself. AH said that he has already contacted the BCA Secretary re. this matter. There seems to be some confusion between SF's actions as an individual and his post as CCC Conservation Officer. There was concern that there is a real risk that the landowner may close the cave altogether.

11. Any other Business.

11.1 Caver Training issues:

CB said that the NRW weblink states that not-for-profit training is not considered to be "commercial".

11.2 Conservation material on Club websites:

BM suggested that caving clubs should have material available to put up on their club websites to try to ensure that their own members are aware of the issues. AH suggested that the new Caving Codes should provide material and CB suggested that the caving clubs be asked to put the material on their websites. BM pointed out that there is a different type of format required for printing and websites and this should be taken into account.

11.3 Thanks:

AH thanked everyone for turning out for this meeting. 11 people took part at 6 different venues with 8 of them travelling to a regional location. Thanks were due to BM for setting up the WebEx software before this meeting. It was generally felt that it worked quite well despite there being a few minor problems.

11.4 Advice to ACB's document:

TA would be producing a more substantial document and it was agreed that this can be dealt with by email and the document can be circulated for comments. (See also 6.5 above.) **ACTION: TA**

12. Date of next meeting.

12.1 It was agreed not to set a definite date at this point as we will maintain contact by email but a meeting can be arranged in due course if the need arises.

The meeting concluded at 9:30pm.

J. Potts, Recorder

APPENDED TO THESE MINUTES AND FORMING PART OF THEM ARE THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS:

- Item 5: Bat conservation Trust, Bats Underground
 NE Bat Wiki: Bat Mitigation Guidelines
 Comments sent in by BCRA and DCA
- Item 6: Advice to ACB's on CRoW and related matters
 Applying for a Direction under Section 26 of CRoW
 Comments sent in by Charterhouse ACB and DCA
- Item 7: Statement from Chris Binding re Caver Education & Cave Signage
- Item 8: Funding Cave Conservation
- Item 10: Notes From Cambrian Caving Council (Refers also to items 5: Bats; 6: Advice to ACB's; 7: Signage.)
- Additional Item: Email sent by Tim Allen after the C&A Meeting to all on the C&A Addressee List