

# NEWBOROUGH FOREST AND WARREN – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LIAISON PARTNERSHIP

## INTRODUCTION

### **What is the Liaison Partnership, and how did it come up with these recommendations?**

The Liaison Partnership was formed in 2005, because of concern about the future management of Newborough Dunes and Forest. The partnership includes about 50 people who represent local residents, local and voluntary groups, as well as organisations such as the Newborough Community Council, Forestry Commission, the Countryside Council for Wales and Anglesey Council. The Partnership has always been open to all individuals who have an interest in the site and its management.

The Partnership agreed an initial aim, which was:

***“to work together with all those interested in the design, management and use of the Newborough Forest and Warren Area to enhance its environmental, social and economic value in the long term”***

One of the important tasks for the partnership was to gather and present views which would help shape a new Forest Design Plan for Newborough Forest. It was also keen to look at other issues and ideas that would be relevant to the management of the wider site in future.

The Partnership's initial work built on views gathered in the public consultations held during 2004. Task and Finish Groups were set up to look at issues and ideas under different themes: Habitats and Species, Community Involvement and Strengthening Partnerships; Recreation and Access; Economics; Transport and Access and Education.

These groups, and the Liaison Partnership as a whole, have explored many ideas and have gathered additional information to help influence the future management of the Newborough dunes and Forest. However, more work needs to be done in future on most of these issues.

The members of the Partnership tried to keep other people informed through face-to-face updates, press releases, information on the notice boards and in folders left in local post offices. The Forestry Commission website includes full details of the Partnership's activities and discussions.

In September 2006, the Liaison Partnership consulted widely on its draft recommendations. These were made available on the website and in local shops in the area. A 'full' questionnaire and newsletter were sent in to

- all residents in Rhosyr Ward
- all who left their contact details in the last round of consultation
- all key fob holders

They were also

- available in the post office and PJ Institute
- available from the Forestry Commission Wales website
- handed out at the Newborough Festival on 17<sup>th</sup> September.

To reach as many people as possible, and to raise interest in the future of the Forest and Warren, a festival was held by the Partnership on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2006 and approximately 500 people visited the festival site. In addition to a range of activities, a 'short' questionnaire and children's versions of the questionnaire were handed out alongside the longer version. In total almost 500 questionnaires were returned.

### **What will happen to these recommendations now?**

The Newborough Liaison Partnership is formally presenting the recommendations to Forestry Commission Wales and the Countryside Council for Wales. It asks these organisations to take these recommendations on board when planning the future management of these areas, and to be consulted as the detail of proposals and the Forest Design Plan are developed.

The Partnership also recognises that the recommendations go further than the remit of FCW and CCW, and would like to encourage others to help build on the recommendations.

The recommendations are therefore being sent to all those who have expressed an interest to date in the hope that people and organisations will want to take up some of the ideas, and to report back on their ideas in March 2007. The Partnership also agreed the following timetable:

Dec	FCW and CCW consider the recommendations  Other groups may start to consider how they want to take recommendations forward (Note: to report back on progress at March drop ins)
Jan	FCW/CCW report back to the Liaison Partnership on the brief, and Partnership gives comments.  Liaison Partnership considers future involvement, including presentation from Abergwyngregyn
Feb	FCW does Forest Design Plan
March	Drop in sessions on the Forest Design Plan Opportunity for others to display their plans/progress against the recommendations. Also opportunity to recruit people into action groups (or whatever will take forward the work)
Date?	Decide about/set up action focused group(s) to turn recommendations into action, and keep pressure on progress etc
Date?	Firm up design and Submit Forest Design Plan
Date?	FCW/CCW/other partners produce: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- information plan</li><li>- interpretation plan</li><li>- access plan</li></ul>

## CONCLUSIONS OF THE LIAISON PARTNERSHIP

It is clear that people love the Newborough forest and warren area, in particular:

- the beauty and tranquillity
- the scope it offers for recreation in all weather conditions, with sheltered and open areas and walks; the mountain vistas, the character of the pine forest, the proximity and contrast of the dunes, sea and forest
- the varied wildlife and geology and
- the large area available for public access, with many walks and paths.

However, economic, social factors and environmental influences such as climate change mean that change is natural and inevitable in the area. Change can be positive if it:

- contributes to the social, environmental and local economic value of the area (ie if it is sustainable).
- takes account of what is publicly acceptable, respecting and adding value to the unique character of the area, and existing rights and access
- is based on evidence of what works and
- contributes practically to the education and enjoyment for all physical abilities, ages and interests.

Because of the range of different interests in the area, there isn't a single clear direction for future management of the Newborough forest and warren that would suit everyone. People attach different values to various habitats and species; there are differing views also about the suitability of various recreational uses and ways of managing these to avoid conflict. There are also contrasting views about the implications of increasing economic activity in the area, about aesthetics and about the likely impact of long term changes in the landscape.

The set of recommendations developed by the Liaison Partnership can only be general. Detailed decisions will need to be made about future management operations and these should involve those that are likely to be most affected. **There should also be detailed monitoring of any change:**

### **Practical recommendation:**

- o Establish and sustain a monitoring programme to determine the effects of any change on landscape, geology and soil conditions
- o Ensure that public opinion about aesthetics are considered in the any testing or pilot projects.

## **THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LIAISON PARTNERSHIP**

### **A. Encouraging people's enjoyment the forest and warren area – improving access and recreation while keeping some areas 'wild'**

#### **A.1. Maintain the access and recreational uses that are currently permitted and accepted on the site and improve them where possible**

##### **Practical recommendations to consider:**

- Improve footpaths and circular routes e.g. provide an all ability access route (boardwalk) to the beach from the main beach car park and between main car park and residents car park; create a circular boardwalk route or elevated platform onto the Cefni saltmarsh from Malltraeth car park/Anglesey coastal path; create an additional route from Hendai picnic area to provide elevated views. Ensure that a range of different types of path are available to create different kinds of experiences for different kinds of users, and so that some areas are left more 'wild'
- Provide better information and maps of routes from all car parks/access routes
- Consider constructing a car park and boardwalk to enable disabled visitors to get access to a viewpoint (10-15 cars)
- Explore the possibility of improving access across the warren to create more circular walks (but again without opening up the whole area to too many visitors) and to provide a coastal path between the forest and Traeth Abermenai
- Investigate the most appropriate 'status' for the beach. Although the Blue Flag award brings benefits to the site (e.g. resources for beach wardening), it may also have drawbacks (e.g. its association with 'resort type' beaches and implication for visitor management). Other awards (such as Rural Beach Award) may be more appropriate for the site.

#### **A.2. Minimise conflict between different users and safeguard the special character of the area**

##### **Practical recommendations to consider:**

- Consider 'zoning' of the area to help minimise conflict between users. Combine this with issuing permits for activities which have a high risk to public safety and cause conflict e.g. kite bugging, mountain biking, horseriding, husky teams, orienteering, motorised vehicles etc.). The natural reserve area (see D.2) should be a zone in its own right.
- Establish an active wardening service (especially at weekends) with an educational and enabling style in addition to its regulatory role and which will also aim to strengthen community links (see B.2)
- Communicate the 'rules of the forest, the warren and the beach' to the general public by use of clear and unambiguous information boards for all users of the sites
- Consider creating additional parking space at Malltraeth car park to allow for horseriders, if this can help avoid confrontation and if damage to paths (from increased level of horse use) can be prevented

- Create opportunities for orienteering, initially in selected parts of the forest only (and done in a way that minimises any damage to trees and that leaves some areas of the forest quiet/unaffected).
- Create mountain biking opportunities in selected areas of the forest (e.g. Parc Mawr) and along forest roads
- Allow organised and managed (non polluting/quiet) use of vehicles to enable less able people to gain access to selected parts of the site e.g. groups of children escorted by FC or CCW staff
- Get involved with all activity groups to build their understanding of acceptable ways of using the area without causing difficulties to other users. This could include zoning different activities.
- Explore whether a Pony and Cart Facility could operate commercially under the terms of a licence – in a way that is carefully managed and avoids conflict with other users.
- Identify and trial appropriate dedicated and carefully managed BBQ areas within the site (car parks) to see if it can reduce fire risk and antisocial behaviour (as it has elsewhere)
- Continue to ban dogs from the beach between the main car park and Ynys Llanddwyn from May – September, so that children can enjoy the beach safely. Better signage and information, and tighter enforcement is required to ensure this works.
- Continue to exclude motorised vehicles including quad bikes, motorbikes, 4x4, tractors and vehicular access to launch boats (because of impacts on other site users, wildlife disturbance, habitat disturbance/damage, erosion of footpaths and spoiling the tranquil view).

## **B. Involve the local community and improve partnership working between organisations**

### **B.1 Increase interest in and use of the area by local residents**

#### **Practical recommendations to consider:**

- Investigate the scope (including consideration of viability, safety and non motorised access issues) for using the Structures at Pilots Cove for the storage of small non-motorised boats / canoes - for use as part of organised recreational activity for youngsters in the village.
- Organise interpretation and education activities to increase understanding of both the forest and the warren
- Investigate the potential use of the Forest and Warren as a local training and career development initiative, relating to environmentally sensitive harvesting, processing and use of local timber and development of ecological and visitor management skills. This would need to be non-polluting and not damage the forest
- Have a family orienteering trail (similar to the one at Beddgelert), in some parts of the forest (and done in a way that minimises any damage to trees and that leaves some areas of the forest quiet/unaffected).
- Keep residents and visitors regularly informed of site-related topics and activities. This could be done, for example, through an annual newsletter, a dedicated website, local papers and by site wardens and volunteers.
- Organise education and interpretation activities to increase understanding of both the forest and the warren

- Improve local and visitor knowledge of access routes and facilities at Newborough, in away that is compatible with maintaining the quiet, wild nature of the area.

## **B.2 Build stronger local partnerships between organisations, communities and individuals**

### **Practical recommendations:**

- Explore how the Liaison Partnership and the community want to keep informed and involved in the management of the site (forest, beach and warren), including the possibility of producing a newsletter for local/wider distribution
- Investigate the potential to get local people and wider interests involved in the management of the forest and warren, especially at weekends. For example, through a joint wardening scheme between organisations and through new volunteer initiatives. This could create employment and volunteering opportunities for local people; it could allow beach activities to be managed/regulated more effectively and could help deliver educational/interpretation programmes.
- Explore new ways for organisations and interested parties to work more closely together. For example, having a joint management scheme for the whole site, or by developing practical projects for the whole South West corner of Anglesey.

## **C. Increasing local economic benefits from the Forest and Warren**

### **C.1 Ensure more income goes to the local community and residents by creating suitable new activities, services and facilities that encourage people to visit more and stay longer.**

#### **Practical recommendations to consider:**

- Look into the feasibility of a small scale/low key visitor centre with or without a café, Educational facility, Information centre, Warden Refuge (for example as required for viability). As the consultation demonstrated less support for a café than for a visitor centre, any feasibility work would need to demonstrate why a café may be required and how it could be run to minimise litter (eg drink/eat in only).
- Assess the viability of developing and maintaining arts workshops and eco-tourism (eg look to other initiatives such as the one run recently by Menter Mon last year). This could be linked to any visitor centre in the locality
- Investigate ways for local people to supply goods and services without commercialising the site – e.g. for warden services, litter collection, forest management, facilities maintenance and other small, local and appropriate commercial ventures.
- Explore the potential for both the small scale primary and secondary processing (as well as harvesting and use) of local wood in the area and the potential for a Wood Fuel System for Community Heating. But do so in a way which builds on and answers any local concerns (eg pollution, noise) that have been raised
- Explore the potential for an orienteering course and /or an aerial rope course – subject to location of facility, impact on other users and operating agreement with landowner
- Ensure Parking and Traffic Related Measures are considered as a key part of any changes or developments in the area, including considering whether how better signing could ensure tourists spend more money/time in the village. Find ways to encourage more facilities in the village to attract and hold people and recognise that poor access means poor facilities and vice versa.

- Undertake a needs assessment for opening the existing extension to the Church (Beach) road car park and then consider future options, bearing in mind that this site is subject to a 25 year lease to Llys Rhosyr
- Undertake a needs/impact assessment in relation to raising the long standing limit on the beach car park capacity (without compromising the bunded areas), and assess the value of pursuing this option in terms of preventing congestion, illegal parking, stress and abuse of staff.
- Improve the advertising and marketing of access routes and facilities at Newborough
- Consider how to manage the barrier in the long term both for local income generation and to control vehicle numbers. Explore how additional income from the barrier (e.g. through raising the key fob fee) could be used to benefit the local community. Ensure that the distinction is maintained between visitors and locals, with no increase in charge for the latter
- Explore the potential to use the site for small, local and appropriate commercial ventures such as the pony and cart 'taxi'

## **D. Improve the landscape, geology and wildlife**

**D.1. Integrate the forest, warren and beach where possible by blurring the edge between the forest and the dunes. It would improve aesthetics and could be beneficial to wildlife. It may be possible to shift the focus of the forest landward.**

### **Practical recommendations to consider:**

- An undulating edge between the dune and forest seems to be the most promising option, although the way of achieving this will need to be agreed. Existing access should be maintained, irrespective of the method selected to create this effect. Gradual, small scale operations, could lead to improvement in the condition of the sand dunes, whilst keeping woodland habitat for the forest wildlife and for the enjoyment of visitors. Tree removal shouldn't lead to reduction of forest by stealth.
- Any removal of trees on the shoreline (required for example, for safety reasons) should not result in a new linear tree-line. The line of removal could, for example, follow contour lines and should take into account locations of assets, such as car parks, as well as landscape considerations. The unique visitor experience currently provided by the access along the road to the residents car park should be maintained as it provides an easy safe route. The detail of future forest landscaping would need to be worked out bearing these issues in mind
- Any dune habitat restoration (e.g. grassland, slack or heath), should fit in with the natural pattern of sand dune zonation and should not happen in small isolated pockets.
- A possible option is to shift the focus of the forest landward. In principle, and subject to landowner consent, tree planting on adjacent land could enable the total area of the forest to be maintained while benefiting the warren, maintaining the unique link to the coast and improving the linkage between woodland throughout Anglesey. Find out whether land owners around the forest and warren would be interested in creating habitat on their land (some might be suitable for forest, some for dune)
- Over the next five years, reduce the uncertainty over the viability of the red squirrel population, both in Newborough and in Anglesey as a whole.

**D.2 Forest management should promote mixed woodland with open glades, as well as integrating forest, dunes and beach as in D.1**

### **Practical recommendations to consider:**

- The forest should be managed under 'continuous cover forestry' – this allows 'coupes' (or patches of forest) of up to 5 hectares to be felled (maximum limit allowed without FC licence). Coupes should be discrete rather than contiguous (ie gaps in time between any coupes). Establish how much continuous cover and small scale felling could be most effectively managed. Investigate techniques for small scale felling and extraction.
- Forest glades, which can provide good habitat for wildlife that live at the edges of forests, should be allowed to regenerate over time - either naturally or through replanting. The number, distribution and extent of glades should be discussed in further detail
- The mix of trees, and the distribution of different species, should be discussed in further detail. For example, Scots pine will not grow well in the poor soil at the front of the forest but could be planted at the back.

- o The approach to felling, and to the management of felled areas should be discussed in further detail. These discussion should include the following: what % of trees over a certain should be felled; how should small scale felling be carried out; how much total clear fell should be allowed over the next 5 years; how much clear fell area should be converted into glades or replanted.
- o Manage *at least* 10% of the forest as a “natural reserve” (this describes a management system that does not interfere with natural processes). The reserve should be in one block, although if possible, different soils should be tested in order to decide the most appropriate location to develop the natural reserve. Further clarification required re: implications for public access. The impact of such management on public access would need to be considered.
- o Explore the potential for the forest as a carbon sink or carbon fixing initiative to help mitigate against climate change. Clarify what this would mean in terms of forest management
- o Understand more of the hydrology in order to help make decisions about the way the forest and warren are managed in future. Raising the water table by changing existing drainage should be explored with relevant land owners. Investigate how glades might influence the level of water in the soil and what size and distribution of glades is most likely to lead to environmental benefits
- o Explore the potential for the forest as a ‘carbon sink’ or carbon fixing initiative, and whether it would be compatible with other recommendations (eg if to fix carbon there needs to be a higher proportion of younger trees).

### **D.3 Awareness should be raised about the special geology of Newborough**

#### **Practical recommendation:**

- Investigate the possibility and level of interest in developing a geological trail, which encompasses the sand dune landforms as well as some of the rocks which are exposed on the shore and in the rocky ridge within the forest, but in a way that ensures the geology itself isn't damaged.

## F: Options which were rejected by the Liaison Partnership

As a result of discussion and feedback from the consultation, the Liaison Partnership considered and rejected the following options:

- Deforestation of the whole forest, or felling patches larger than 5 hectares at one time (because of the impact on existing neighbouring forest habitat and specific species)
- Fully commercial operation of Newborough Forest (the Forestry Commission must manage it for delivery of broader objectives)
- Allowing access to all motorised vehicles to include quad bikes, motorbikes, 4x4, and tractors, including vehicular access to launch boats (because of the impact on other site users, wildlife disturbance, habitat disturbance / damage, erosion of footpaths and spoiling the tranquil nature of site)
- Private, unregulated commercial use of the forest, beach and warren (due to the potential for conflict between different uses)
- Afforestation of the whole dune system (because of impact on the Special Area of Conservation)
- High cost/remote visitor centre (due to concerns re: use and long term viability)
- Opening of bothy – costly to build and maintain, open to vandalism, risk of litter, fire and sanitation problems
- Unlimited mountain biking – potential conflict with other users and with forestry operations. Also potential damage to sensitive habitats
- Camping (because of fire risk, potential damage to sensitive habitats, litter)
- Removal of car parks, roads etc (because this would have a negative impact on access to the area)
- Using the residents car park for disabled access (because of concerns expressed during the consultation about possible 'abuse' of the system, administration difficulties, access being better from elsewhere and changing the nature of the area)
- Passing management of the key fob system to the community as a contract (rejected by the consultation).