



**Minutes of the meeting of NSA - WCF
23rd January 2017
at FUW offices Builth Wells**

In attendance:
Phil Stocker NSA CEO

Apologies: Jeff Gwillim, Diane and Ted Williams, Kate Jones,
John Jones, Neville Powell, Brian Barney, Eric Davies, Tom Evans,
Julia Davies.



Present:

Edwin Harris, John Staley, Graham Jones (egwisilian common), Bernard Fox, E Jones, Diana Samuel, Sara Warman, Tom Roberts, Mike Strange, Edwin Roderick, Dyfrig Morgan, John Morris, Maureen Lloyd, Joanne Harper, Dai Gatehouse, Johnny Davies, DB Williams, Dilwyn John, JJ Morgan, A Davies, W Emlyn Morgan, RJ Thomas.

1. Notes of previous meeting and matters arising

Edwin ran through the minutes of the last meeting and the following points/decisions were made:

Ref. item 5 in the previous minutes - it was agreed that attendees of the forum must be rights holders. They may represent right holders too but must be rights holders in their own right. Individual commons graziers are also welcome to join NSA WCF and it was suggested that a declaration must be made if someone has joined as an individual rather than a commons rights grazier group.

ACTIONS:

1. Change the constitution accordingly and present to forum at next meeting
2. NSA should record forum members as representing commons or as individuals members

Ref. item 1 and 4 in previous minutes Ieuan Morgan not recorded as being present – and where he is referred to in item 4 his name is spelt incorrectly

Missing from Minutes – Tom Evans was present and stated he should stand down as he was due to retire. This should be recorded but also that the forum unanimously agreed he should be retained as an honorary member and receive invites to meetings.

ACTION:

1. Amend minutes accordingly

Matters Arising

Phil Stocker explained why John Thorley could not be made a President. The forum accepted this and it was proposed that he be made an honorary life member of WCF. All agreed.

ACTION: Add John Thorley's name alongside that of Tom Evans to become honorary life members of WCF.

Item 6 on previous minutes – the state of commoning in Wales.. The forum thanked Kate Jones for her feedback on the above report. The feedback was read out and is attached in full in Annex 1. Comments made by the forum revealed that few of the commons present actually received the survey – there is concern that only Glastir commons received survey forms – of those present (20) only 3 actually received the forms. It was noted that there should not be a problem with the WG in communicating with commons because all are registered.

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ACTION : Edwin offered to write to WG and Defra to criticise the report. Letter needs to recognise that WCF is established and should be recognised.

Item 7 in previous minutes (AOB) Neil Hamilton has met with Edwin Harris. Edwin is writing a report to present to Neil Hamilton and will share this with the forum. After discussion it was agreed that WCF view is that food and farming policy should return to Westminster and should not be devolved at all. Edwin along with David Gatehouse Dilwyn John and John Staley have met Neil Hamilton.

ACTION: Edwin to write a detailed report on commons on behalf of NSA WCF to WG and Defra. The communication needs to recognise that WCF is established and should be recognised. After discussion it was agreed by members that Edwin write a report to present to Lesley Griffiths and Neil Hamilton and the leaders of all parties.

Phil reported that he had a meeting scheduled with Lesley Griffiths in March and it would be good for a representative of NSA WCF to attend along with the Chair of NSA Cymru. Johnny Davies proposed that Edwin should attend this meeting.

ACTION: Edwin to be invited to the Lesley Griffiths meeting in March to speak on commons issues Edwin stated his dissatisfaction with Helen Breakwell's performance regarding the Minutes of meetings. He stated that he and John Staley never received the minutes until a few days before the following meeting which was not good enough and didn't give time for any actions to be followed up.

ACTION: PS responded by apologising and that he would find a way for the secretarial support to be improved.

2. TB consultation

The WCF response to the WG TB consultation was printed, circulated and discussed. It was asked why we need Spanish vets for TB testing and concerns were made over difficulties with communication and also knowledge of the area concerned.

ACTION: PS to write to WG Chief vet and make the case that there would be value in using local vets that have knowledge of the area. Come at it from a positive viewpoint and not a negative one.

All were in favour of the response to the consultation.

A comment was made about local ex badger vaccinators now currently mapping all badger setts, and why this would be the case?

3. Eglwysilian common

The location of this common is above Nelson, and over Caerphilly. Following the previous meeting NSA WCF wrote to the WG asking for clarification over the actions of the new owner/Lord of the Manor, a Mr Terry Jones. It was reported that since our last meeting and letter a further 60 acres has been ploughed since our last meeting by Terry Jones and sewage sludge was being spread extensively on common land.

Forum members agreed that there is a category of commons ownership that gives Lord of the Manor rights where someone owns the common but doesn't/ can't have grazing rights, and another category where it is possible to have freehold ownership of a common and own all the grazing rights. Irrespective of which category common land is still protected and cannot be improved unless the proper approvals have been requested and granted.

Eglwysilian common is a registered common with rights holders and the owner is Lord of the Manor. It is felt the owner is getting around the law by setting up a separate company that either owns the common or grazes the livestock. There are now 2 parties to the common ownership – the owner, Terry Jones, is pushing all other graziers off the common using a variety of threatening tactics and improving it by ploughing. He has also spread hundreds of tonnes of sewage sludge on it, and put in two new roads on an ancient monument. The Council has already taken him to court but he continues to flounce the law.

The WCF felt that this case raises the most important issue that has ever come before the forum – and it could affect the future of many commons in Wales. It was added that if not stopped it could well finish traditional communing practice in South Wales.

The letter NSA WCF sent to Spencer Conlan was read out as well as the response we have received from WG. It is clear there is a formal investigation going on and we have been informed we will be informed in due course. However, it does appear that further damage continues in spite of this.

There are concerns that approval has been given by NRW to spread sewage – but it was also accepted that permission may not have been granted, or it could have been granted for the landowners in by fields and then permission abused.

ACTION:

1. PS to send a further letter to WG saying that since our letter further damaging development works have been done and sewage sludge is being applied. Action needs to be taken immediately to prevent any further works being done.
2. PS to raise with Andrew Slade in meeting the following day. Also keep Brian Pawson of NRW in the loop.
3. A further letter to be written and sent to Andrew RT Davies and Diane McCrae from the NRW Board. This letter to also be sent to AMs within a 20 mile radius of the common. Wayne David is MP for Caerphilly

The forum discussed potential press work on this subject but on balance agreed that so much is going on in the background that it makes it difficult. NFU and FUW are both involved legally with this case. It was also suggested we could involve Simon Weston as a celebrity – he was on BBC Countryfile recently. Following this discussion it was agreed that the only place this can be dealt with is in court.

ACTION: WCF members to use Facebook to spread messages about Eglwysilian common. We should take our lead from Graham Jones regarding any greater publicity.

4. Update from Brexit meetings

Phil ran through the NSA Brexit position that is attached separately.

There followed an enthusiastic discussion with a range of views. No actions or position were/was recorded.

5. Late basic payments and ag env payments to commons farmers

Phil Stocker raised the issue of many commons farmers in England having payments delayed and no statements. He asked whether the situation was the same in Wales but apart from people not being clear what they may have been paid for everyone seemed happy and didn't want to discuss this topic further.

6. Aims for next 12 months

Nothing was agreed other than to run a similar annual members meeting, along with normal AGM type elections, as last year. Include a speaker/s and site an interesting site visit if possible.

7. NSA Welshsheep

It was reported that NSA Welshsheep is on 16th May 2017 at LLwyn Bedw, Talybont on Usk. Full details in Annex 2 below.

AOB

It was suggested someone should consider scheme to provide free dog wormer for dog owners. A request had been made by Helen Barnes – FWAG to attend WCF meetings. This was an offer that was rejected by the forum.

ACTION: Edwin to inform Helen of this decision

Date of next meeting to be arranged

Meeting closed at 16.00 hrs

Annex 1

Initial impressions of the report, was that it was a draft, rather than a fit for publication report. Numbering of charts and diagrams did not correspond with the discussion, axis on the graphs were inappropriate or were contradictory to the graphs intended purpose and title.

The intention of the report was to look at the problems facing commons and there was discussion on the number and size of commons in Wales. This was interesting as the majority of commons were small in size, a significant proportion I would speculate where village greens. However I disagreed that the report authors could then extrapolate the land area each grazier was responsible for by dividing the common's total area by number of graziers. In reality the land area is linked to the rights/animal's grazed.

The report also looked at the age of graziers and succession/ new entrants and made valid points about the age of graziers being high, I suspect succession is linked to business succession. However I would speculate if they had asked questions differently they would have identified that sons, and other family members were involved at gatherings etc.

Where I did find concerns was with the basing of the report on questionnaire returns. The authors said that the questionnaire had been sent to grazing associations through common development officers. As the secretary of two grazing associations, I can say that I did not receive a questionnaire. This aside there was discussion in the report concerning who was an active grazier, and allocations of remuneration. I think that the CDO's only distributed the questionnaires to commons currently in Glastir agreements and therefore there is a dangerous agenda here of excluding graziers rather than being inclusive and developing strategies to encourage new graziers onto commons. Secondly, in the conclusions of the report, there was mention of the creation of an organisation for commons in Wales with the agenda of disseminating information. There was no mention of the WCF, I think that this needs addressing as the WCF has the potential to provide unbiased information to graziers across Wales, although I have concerns here that they are looking at the model in England with common councils, where the views of the graziers are under represented in comparison to other interested parties. However, even within the sample who responded to the questionnaires, the report found that respondents felt one fit, does not suit all with environmental agreements and that going forward any future agreements had to be more adaptive to outcomes.

These are my recollections, as I annotated the report that John gave to someone in the last meeting. Can I please send my apologies for the meeting tomorrow.

Kind regards

Kate

Annex 2

NSA Welsh Sheep 2017

Date: 16th May 2017

Location: Llwyn Bedw, Talybont-on-Usk, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7YT

A traditional tenanted farm with spectacular views over one of the largest reservoirs in South Wales provides the setting for NSA Welsh Sheep 2017, to be held on Tuesday 16th May 2017. The farm lies in the heart of the Brecon Beacons, with grazing stretching towards Pen y Fan and extends to 1,000 acres.

It is the home of Stephen and Lisa Williams and their son Luke who at 21 is the fifth generation of the family to farm at Llwyn Bedw, Talybont-on-Usk, Brecon. Stephen's father Godfrey is also heavily involved with the running of the closed flock of 3,500 sheep and the herd of 70 suckler cows.

Godfrey, who established a successful contracting business before returning home to farm in 1981, was born the year that Talybont-on-Usk was flooded to supply Newport with water. His grandfather John Williams was allocated what remained of the farms in the valley after losing his own to the reservoir.

The farm, now rented from Dwr Cymru, comprises 1,000 acres under fence and the family enjoy hill rights on 900 hectares (3,000 acres) of Buckland Common, stretching from Aber village to Torpantau. The sheep comprise 3,000 hefted Talybont type breeding ewes (Welsh x Cheviot) and a downland flock of Charollais x Talybont type ewes.

Stephen says: "We introduced the Charollais to have an earlier selling lamb – we start lambing in the first week of February and finish on 1 May. We lamb them in different batches, beginning with the Charollais lambing indoors. They will have been put to a Texel ram.

"Then we lamb the older ewes, in lamb to a Charollais. We lamb those with twins indoors and the singles out. The 2,000 hill ewes begin on 1 March and all lamb out, but off the hill."

The family are passionate supporters of the livestock trade, with the Charollais x lambs selling at Talybont-on-Usk or Brecon Market from the end of July at 30/32 kilos liveweight and the hill lambs following from the end of August until late November. Any slower finishing lambs are sold at Christmas in Penderyn.

The closed flock system involves the family breeding all their own rams, keeping sixty or so each year. The Talybonts are a hefted flock, kept separate and put to a Charollais ram. Their ewe lambs are kept as replacement Charollais x ewes, which then go to a Texel to produce for the early market.

The family are looking forward to NSA Welsh Sheep 2017, although since they don't turn the cattle out until 1 May, it will be a bit of a rush 'to get sorted'. They take pride in keeping the farm tidy and enjoy sharing their experiences with visitors and so any preparatory work can be done beforehand.

Stephen is keen to demonstrate to the general public the part that farmers play in creating and conserving the National Park. He feels there are too many misconceptions.

He says: “The perception people tend to have of this area in the Brecon Beacons National Park is that the National Park does a lot environmentally, but it’s we who are the custodians of this valley. We look after the rights of way, the gates and a great deal more.

“We deal with people on daily basis. The countryside looks the way it does because of farmers. The sheep are the best conservation tool you can have and we really want the public and see how we operate”.

For Godfrey it’s an opportunity to take pride in the part he has played in taking the farm forward. His contracting business, based at his Rhigos smallholding, involved long, hard, hours, including a spell in Aberfan helping to clear the spoil following the tragedy fifty years ago.

He recalls that when he was a child in 1947, 3000 sheep out of 7000 were lost in the long, hard winter. There was no way of finding them – he saw birds encased in ice, horses dying against the wall, and recalls cutting down ivy for the surviving animals to eat.

He’s confident about the future. Brexit will bring changes, but the family is confident that UK lambs are the best in the world and hope that the Government will recognise and value the work farmers do for the countryside and for the balance of payments.

His grandson, Luke, is settled back at the farm, after spending a year on a sheep station near Melbourne. He enjoys working as part of the team with his father, grandfather and mother Lisa, who Godfrey says is ‘the best shepherdess in the area’.

Note: NSA Welsh Sheep is on Tuesday 16th May 2017 at Llwyn Bedw, Talybont-On-Usk, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7YT

Notes to editors

- Media Contact: Gaina Morgan
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- As an organisation the National Sheep Association (NSA) represent the views and interests of sheep producers throughout the UK, receiving tremendous support from everyone connected with the industry. The NSA is funded by the memberships of its sheep farmers. Together with the many industry related activities it is involved with, it aims to ensure that it plays a key part in every aspect of the sheep farming sector.
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