



Ogof Ffynnon Ddu Cave Advisory Group Minutes of Meeting 8th December 2019

Immediately prior to the commencement of the formal meeting, the Chairman introduced Fred Levett, SWCC President, who gave a short introductory presentation explaining the background to the formation of our group and his personal hopes for its future. The formal meeting then commenced.

1. Chairman's opening comments

Paul Meredith introduced himself and then invited each of the other persons present to explain their role and background.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Julian Carter (SWCC Fixed Aids Officer), Iestyn Evans (NRW Officer responsible for the OFD NNR) and Paul Dummer (Cave Warden).

3. Chairman's Report

The chairman stated that he believed his role effectively commenced from this meeting, so he had nothing to report.

4. Hon. Secretary's Report

Bob Hall (BH) stated that, as with the chairman, his role only commenced with this meeting, so his only actions had been to circulate meeting papers.

5. SWCC Permit Secretary's Report

Gary Vaughan (GV) reported that the process of issuing Annual Permits for 2020 was well underway. There was then a request from the floor for a brief outline of how the permit system functioned which GV then provided.

Christina Byrne (CB) asked what the process might be if a request was received to allow digging on the surface, to which GV replied that surface activity fell outside the remit of the Memorandum of Understanding between SWCC and NRW. Any such request would need to be discussed with NRW.

6. Conservation Officer's Report

Dave Dobson reported that the ongoing programme of improved taping and cleaning continued with the help of Andy Dobson (Cave Warden) and Brian Clipstone (Former NRW Voluntary Warden).

7. Fixed Aids Officer's Report

Julian Carter was not present to report. A brief written report is to be circulated.

8. Natural Resources Wales Report and/or Business

CB explained her role as NRW Geologist with responsibility for cave features across the whole of Wales. Ken Perry explained his role as having responsibility for the whole of the OFD and Pant Mawr SSSI area.

9. Recruitment of Cave Wardens

BH ran through some of the main points in the discussion document circulated prior to the meeting, particularly the need to establish a rolling programme of recruitment and the associated need for flexibility in the duration of tenure.

There ensued a brief but wide-ranging discussion which homed in on the idea that before recruitment began it might be valuable to run a 'workshop' day or weekend to introduce interested individuals to what the role of Cave Warden entailed.

The following **proposal** was then put forward:

The OFDCAG recommend to the SWCC Committee that they set up a Cave Warden Workshop as soon as practicable and that SWCC members and members of Annual Permit holding clubs be invited to apply to attend. (Prop. BH, Sec. Nicola Pearce (NP))

[GV then raised a point of order, making the request that motions be formally voted on and the vote recorded. There was then some debate as to the need to record anything other than 'Carried' vs 'Not Carried'. A vote was then held with 3 votes in favour of recording the numbers voting, 8 abstentions and 1 against. It was thus decided that henceforth the numbers voting on any proposal would be recorded.]

The proposal (in italics above) was then voted on with the following result:
11 For, 1 Abstention, 0 Against, **Carried**.

Action: BH to Write to the SWCC Secretary conveying this advice.

BH pointed out that the SWCC had received three applications in the first round of the appointment process and that the unsuccessful applicant had been invited to remain available for the next round. It was agreed that BH should write to her to keep her informed of progress.

There was then some discussion about how applications might be 'filtered' or 'sifted' and it was suggested that it would be appropriate for OFDCAG to perform this role.

The following **proposal** was then put forward:

The OFDCAG consider all applications to become a Cave Warden and normally forward to SWCC committee recommendations equal to the exact number of Wardens required. (Prop. BH, Sec. GV)

This was voted on with the result being: 10 For, 2 Abstentions, 0 Against, **Carried**

There was further discussion on the possible need to have some 'personnel specification' to guide the filtering process. CB made the point that we needed to develop a level of openness in defining what is required to be a Cave Warden so applicants understand in advance what qualities, skills and experience may be expected of them. This led to the following **proposal**:

That a working group be set up to develop the Cave Warden selection process with the requisite procedures and documentation, and that this be done as soon as practicable. (Prop. GV, Sec. NP.)

This was voted on with the result being: 10 For, 2 Abstentions, 0 Against, **Carried**

It was agreed that **Clark Friend would coordinate this group** and the other members would be Vince Allkins, David Phillips, Allan Richardson and Nicola Pearce.

10. Allocation of Columns Duties for 2020

01/01/20: Vince Allkins

12/04/20: Andy Dobson

10/05/20: Clark Friend

24/05/20: Andy Dobson + Nicola Pearce

30/08/20: Defer to summer meeting.

BH to write to Paul Dummer to invite him to join an experienced warden on one of the above weekends.

11. Cave Management Plan

Attempts have been made in the past to implement a Cave Management Plan during the period 1997 -2000 when CCW was the statutory authority. No documents had yet come to light to suggest that a plan was presently in place. This matter was left for NRW to respond to in due course.

12. Possible review of safety advice given in various documents presently used in relation to access, permit applications and elsewhere. (examples of this advice were supplied prior to the meeting.)

BH explained that the present advice had its origins in the response of SWCC and the, then, OFDCMC to the deaths of two cavers in the OFD 2 streamway 40 years ago and the outcome of the ensuing inquest. It was felt that the advice was outdated and in particular did not explicitly mention how parties in difficulty might get out of the streamway expeditiously. This led to the following **proposal**:

That a working group be set up to develop what advice is given and how it is communicated to visiting parties. (Prop. GV. Sec. Allan Richardson (AR).)

This was voted on with the result being: 10 For, 2 Abstentions, 0 Against, **Carried**
It was agreed that BH would lead the group and the other members would be Tom Partridge, David Phillips, Clark Friend and Nicola Pearce.

13. Consideration of any possible recommendations we might wish to make regarding minor issues with the Terms of Reference and related documents.

Four issues had been flagged up in a discussion document circulated prior to the meeting.

- i) Statements in Sections 1 and Section 9 of the ToR would be in conflict if the MoU between SWCC and NRW was viewed as confidential. SWCC and NRW are to be asked to clarify their view on the confidentiality or otherwise of the MoU.
- ii) The ToR makes no mention of the possibility of co-opting anybody onto the OFDCAG. It was pointed out that this might prove useful in the future if specific expertise was needed. It was agreed to ask SWCC and NRW to consider this.
- iii) The ToR explicitly states that 'ex-officio' members are not automatically made Cave Wardens. It was suggested that that same rule should apply to the Chairman and Hon. Secretary. This too to be put to SWCC and NRW.
The above three matters were treated as a **proposal en bloc** (Prop. AR, Sec. NP) and carried **Nem Con**.

Item 13 cont..

- iv) Arising from the earlier discussion on the recruitment of Cave Wardens two changes to the ToR were considered desirable. These form the substance of the following **proposal**:

That the OFDCAG recommend to SWCC that they discuss with NRW a change to increase the maximum number of wardens from 10 to 12, and secondly to consider a change to the wording such as would allow more flexibility in the duration of the tenure of wardens up to a maximum of four years. (Prop. BH, Sec. AR.)

Carried Nem Con

Action (i to iv above): Bob Hall to write to SWCC suggesting these matters be raised with NRW at the forthcoming biannual meeting.

14. **OFDCAG digital interfaces.** (Background document previously circulated.)

After a brief but inconclusive discussion, it was agreed to defer this item to a later meeting.

15. **Any other business if time permits.**

- i) Keith Goodhead, representing Cave Rescue stated that he was apologising in advance that SMWCRT would only send a representative if agenda items made this necessary.
- ii) There was presently an issue with the steel security door on Top Entrance, but repairs / modifications were in hand.
- iii) Ken Perry stated that he would be the lead person in NRW to approach in the event of any request that might be construed as a Potentially Damaging Operation. He further pointed out that NRW had just four months to respond to such a request. There was then some discussion over the possibility that SWCC might then be put in the position of making a judgement as to what might or might not be considered a PDO. Such a decision would normally fall to NRW. It was agreed that GV as Permit Secretary and Ken Perry for NRW would work together to develop a flow chart setting out how the process would work.
Action: Gary Vaughan and Ken Perry.
- iv) CB asked for some clarification regarding the Gower caves, Llethrid Swallet and Tooth Cave. It was explained that whilst these fell within the scope of the MoU they did not fall within the remit of OFDCAG.

16. **Proposal** that the next meeting be on Sunday 31st May 2020, “**the Summer Meeting**” and the subsequent, “**Winter Meeting**”, be on Sunday 6th December 2020.

The first date was agreed – 31st May 2020 for the Summer Meeting.

It was agreed to move the date of the Winter Meeting to Sunday 8th November.

Bob Hall

Hon. Secretary 11/12/19 (Revised 31/12/19)