# Pwll Du Cave Management Group

Minutes of the meeting held virtually via Zoom on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> Dec 2021 commencing at 7.30pm.

#### Present

Les Williams (LW)
Sue Mabbett (SM)

Chair Secretary

Grant Hartwright (GW)

Hereford CC Treasurer / UBSS

Clive Owen (CO) Josh White (JW)

Conservation officer / Aberystwyth

Chris Densham (CD) Peter Smith (PS) Rich Smith (RS)

Trustee / OUCC Rep Biological Recorder. Webmaster / BEC

Dan Thorne (DT)

Permit Secretary / Gagendor

Frank Tully (FT)
Martin Hoff (MH)
Ali Garman (AG)
John Stevens (JS)
John Sheehy (JSh)

Wessex CC South Wales CC Draenen Diggers Survey Officer Gwent CC

Steve King (SK)

Shepton Mallet CC

Stuart France (SF)

Cambrian CC (CCC Conservation Officer)

Christina Byrne (CB)

Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

## **Apologies**

Chris Howes, for Morgannwg CC, Chris Seal (CS) Chelsea SS, Rich Hill (RH), Gagendor (DT representing Gagendor), Barry Hill, Hereford CC (GH representing HCC).

#### 1. Opening Remarks

LW welcomed everyone present, and noted it was now just past 7.30pm so the meeting should commence. CD had kindly set up the meeting, SM asked if he could record the meeting. CD after some advice started recording the meeting. It was recommended that people turned off their videos to minimise band width and help ensure we all stay on line.

# 2. Minutes from Previous Meeting On 30 Jun 2021

# 2a. Approval of Minutes from last meeting

LW questioned if anyone had any corrections for the minutes. SM commented she had completed all corrections previously identified by SK, RH and FT. No further corrections were identified. The minutes were proposed to be accepted by CO, seconded by AG, there were 0 against, 0 abstentions therefore all present were in favour of accepting the minutes as a true record of the last meeting. As in June 2021 SM will arrange for signature from LW on these minutes to confirm true record.

2b. Matters Arising from the Minutes not covered elsewhere in the Agenda

DT had question re- whether any response on the request from Rick Hill for access to the cave for Cave Leadership assessment had been forthcoming. SM had contacted the landowner Peter on couple of occasions, including with an offer of assistance to answer any queries from RH and the BCA conservation officer. SM had not had a reply so far, she will give full report in her secretary's report. All other matters will be covered in the meeting.

# Updates on Key Activities since the General Meeting in June 2021 3a New Entrance Policy –

SM shared screen to show the amended version of the new entrance policy, the amended version is copied below:

Draft Policy (as of 01/12/21) - for circulation to PDCMG clubs / CCC for comment, discussion at their committees.

Ogof Draenen is one of the largest cave systems in the UK and may warrant more entrances to facilitate further exploration, discovery or research. At the same time there is a need to consider many other factors before adopting any entrance as a recommended route. This policy states PDCMG's approach to adopting any new or additional entrance as one that the PDCMG helps manage or recommends for use.

Each entrance will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the PDCMG Committee and a recommendation will be put forward to the PDCMG member clubs for a final vote (e.g. at a general meeting, or EGM). The PDCMG Committee's recommendation will based on consideration of the following factors,

- location in relationship to surface features and entrance accessibility.
- location inside the cave in relationship to other entrances.
- conservation needs in respect of the area inside the cave that the entrance facilitates access to.
- the benefits of the entrance to promote further exploration, surveying, discovery and other research activities
- other potential benefits or detriments of the entrance (e.g. loss of wilderness)
- the views of the landowner(s) if known on which the entrance is located.

The Committee may announce an interim policy on a new entrance until a vote has taken place. The membership final vote shall take place on or before the next scheduled PDCMG meeting. The PDCMG Committee will publish its recommendation to member clubs ahead of that vote along with the entrance proponents' response and reasoning for proposing the entrance. Voting is based on 1 vote per PDCMG member club.

Should an entrance be recommended and/or accepted for adoption, the PDCMG will approach the landowner(s) where necessary and if applicable any regulatory body for permissions.

Should PDCMG membership vote not to adopt an entrance, then PDCMG will request that its membership and the wider caving community do not use that entrance. It does not automatically follow that an unadopted entrance will be closed by PDCMG; there could be good reasons why an entrance must remain open, in which case PDCMG will look at what alternative measures can be taken to discourage its use (e.g. remove / not support fixed aids on that route). Ultimately any decision to close an entrance lies with the landowner(s) and/or a regulatory body. PDCMG will if requested advise landowner(s) and if applicable regulatory bodies on the best options for unadopted entrances.

The decision on whether any adopted entrance needs a gate / barrier will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Should a gate be required then access will be granted to all bona fide cavers as per current access conditions.

CS apologised for being unable to attend the meeting. For the above updated policy, the changes inserted into draft policy sent out in July are in blue. He hopes he has addressed CD's point on wilderness and landowners being consulted. He realised the temporary option for any new reported entrance had the possibility to become permanent so he has been more explicit about voting and timing following feedback (e.g. a temporary Committee decision could have in theory become semi-permanent if no vote was called by PDCMG) so he added a time limit plus ensuring both sides are put to member clubs. This will prevent the new entrance becoming permanent by default.

CS commented he hadn't had much feedback (only 3 clubs), as only three clubs got back with minor clarifications, SM is assuming we are ready to organise an EGM following these minor clarifications. SF asked which Clubs had contacted CD and whether they were supportive or not. CD's e-mail did not say which Clubs had got back to him; SM reported CD had got back to CS, representing OUCC, and SM believed CS had feedback from CSS members. SM was aware Morgannwg asked for some clarification, but his e-mail did not state which. LW asked if this is something we should know or not? SM did not believe it was that critical, but SF believed in democratic process we should know who is influencing the policy. SF wanted to

know if changes only came from Clubs, and did any comments come from the PDCMG executive (committee). SM confirmed no comments from the committee. SM stated we are not making a policy decision this comes when we have our EGM. SM can ask CS which Clubs commented.

DT had not seen this draft policy, nor was he aware of his Club (Gagendor) receiving it as there had been no discussion within the Club. SM said it went out directly after the last meeting. RH was at that meeting for Gagendor and he did not contact SM stating he had not received the e-mail. DT was surprised not to have heard anything. SM offered to send out the latest version and remind them they were given to the end of September 2021. SF commented CSS members had heard nothing about this draft proposal. SM commented it was sent to committees of Clubs to discuss. SF commented SM was not to blame for the lack of discussion in CSS. DT commented he was on Gagendor committee and had heard nothing. SM commented it had gone to all PDCMG committee members. SK commented he received the email with the draft policy on 16:50 on 1st July 21.

JS commented, PS and himself had brought up the matter of an entrance on open access land that has to have, say, an entrance being open or shut. JS believed if the entrance was on open access land the entrance has to be permitted, and in this case it would not just be land owner or committee who makes the decision. LW said this feedback needs to go back to CS. CD is happy that his feedback is made public, he took some things on board. The policy seems to state new entrances can be dug then permission sought, in law you have permission before doing something, e.g. planning permission for house, this wasn't included. LW commented if try include all words from everyone, the document becomes too large and unwieldy so some things have to be shortened. CD said he was just adding that some of his feedback was not included, he is happy for all his comments to be made public. As CS is not present we cannot ask about the feedback he received.

DT said he had found the e-mail, but thought it did not make it clear that comments to this draft were requested. It was only the last paragraph of the e-mail that asked for comments. SM said she would send it out again shouting the request for a response by using bold and capitals.

SM commented we (CS and PDCMG) are trying to mediate and facilitate a situation with a wide range of opinions, we also have other entrances already present. If someone has popped out from a dig in the cave then once that new entrance is created it is not necessarily easy to close. We are trying to mediate and find a middle ground, and SM is making assumption (on CS's behalf) that this is the reason we are not asking for permission before digging a new entrance. Also CS may believe that the current wording is sufficient to cover all the points raised, e.g. it states regulatory bodies should be consulted on entrances, CS may feel this is sufficient to cover Open Access land issue raised by JS.

LW rounded up this discussion asking that SM send out another request for comments and we will ask CS to respond to those asking for changes as to why some requested changes were not inserted or worded differently. She will also ask CS to circulate the comments received, so there is no allegations of secrecy.

**Action SM** to recirculate the request for comments on the draft entrance policy to Club Committees, this time using capitals and bold to emphasise the need for a reply / response from Clubs.

## 3b Progress on updating Access Agreement including setting up Ltd Company

After the last meeting e-mail exchanges occurred between three proposed directors (CS, CD and Tim Long) of the Company Ltd by Guarantee. With CS and TL not present, CD commented he had not progressed anything further. He believed it was with CS to progress, as it was CS who did not wish to become trustee. SM commented the decision to use the Company Ltd by Guarantee option occurred a couple of meetings ago as no-one was willing to be a new trustee. A Company Ltd by Guarantee is method used by Charterhouse (Mendip) and CAL (Cave Access Ltd), and we are progressing with this option.

SM commented from these discussions it is obvious we will need to update our constitution. SM asked if LW had chatted with Ursula since last meeting. LW had not been in contact, but Ursula is likely to be willing

to advise us on the matter. Ursula had advised / assisted with Charterhouse setting up their Company Ltd by Guarantee. SM had sent an e-mail just before the last meeting but had not sent anything since. Last meeting, SM thought the proposed directors would discuss the matter with Ursula. SM believed we need to ask Ursula for advice on how to update our constitution. SM also believed TL, a current trustee, wanted the directorship to offer the same controls as he had now as a trustee.

SM offered to send an e-mail to Ursula to ask for advice on how we update the constitution, she will include a copy of the current constitution, ask if we have to use individuals as directors, and if we use individuals as directors how do we ensure those individuals do not act against the wishes of the PDCMG. SF advised we adopt articles and constitution as offered by Companies House as the cost is £50, and that we do not try and make our own variation. SM commented this is what she meant by asking advice on the constitution. SF suggested the law has updated since Charterhouse and CAL were set up. LW is sure Ursula will advise us as to what is needed currently.

Action SM to e-mail Ursula to seek her advice.

#### 3c Update on PDCMG Website

We had a problem with domain for the PDCMG website and the website was taken down and this was identified in early September. SM contacted RS, who identified the problem as related to paying the fee for the domain name. Contacting Tim Long (TL) who held domain registration took a few weeks before a response was received via Facebook. At the time contact was finally made to re-register, another company had squatted on the registered domain, demanding payment to release. A decision was made to progress with a new domain: pdcmg.org. RS had worked with BCA who had registered this new domain for PDCMG, and worked with BCA to successfully resolve the website issue, and RS remains responsible for technical contact. LW wanted to be reassured we would not lose control of the website. The BCA technical team had assured it had systems in place to ensure we kept this new domain. RS has uploaded all content to the new website. The last action is to check e-mail links/ forwarding from website, DT sent an e-mail to himself from the website confirming it was working.

SM, LW and CD wished to thank RS for all his hard work in sorting this issue and ensuring the PDCMG website is up and running again. SM passed on the thanks of everyone for his hard work on this issue resolution.

#### **4 Officers Reports**

#### 4a. Secretary

The secretary's report is very short and is below.

The Covid pandemic continues to affect our lives both at work and socially, the fact we cancelled our planned face to face, highlights the issue with the on-going pandemic. Since the last meeting I sent all requests to Peter, the landowner, this included the offer of assistance to discuss access for cave leader qualifications, (request originally from Rick Hill) and a request from Peter Smith for access via various entrances for bat surveys. I have not had a reply from Peter on these matters.

I also sent Peter copies of our approved minutes and the draft minutes from the last meeting.

I sent out the bat report received from Stuart France as requested at the last meeting, with a copy going to RS to upload onto the website.

I circulated the new draft Entrance Policy and I am aware some clubs did get back to Chris with some comments and suggested clarifications, unfortunately I received last minute apologies from Chris for tonight's meeting so he is unable to comment on these replies.

Finally, I have investigated the status of SMCC, they are key holders only. There were two requests made by the meeting for SMCC to go back to full membership, the last one in 2016, but they had declined. At this

time they were concerned about the impact of the CROW Act and potential liabilities. This means SMCC cannot vote on key decisions for policy changes etc., however voting to confirm accuracy of minutes is acceptable.

SK confirmed at the meeting that SMCC do not currently wish to become members of PDCMG but simply wish to remain key holders. However they are keeping their position under review.

**Action SM** to follow up on both requests, for access for cave leader assessments and access via other entrances for bat surveys, with the landowner.

#### 4b. Treasurer

CO reported there had been no transactions on the account since the last meeting. The sum in the PDCMG account remained at £585.17.

#### 4c. Permit Secretary

The entrance gate remains unlocked since the latches were ground off. Dan had sent out requests to mend the entrance gate on site, but with no success. Although the gate remains in place there is no attachment points for the padlock.

There had been couple of requests for keys but no keys were sent as no lock was present.

The log books had also been repeatedly stolen. LW could not understand why people wished to steal the log book. DT also did not understand why someone stole the log books; from last meeting minutes DT noted the cave counters installed by SF had been damaged / removed. Again why this was done as it seems pointless? There is another log book in place but with very few entries at present which indicated very few were using this entrance. The information from the current log had been collected by AG when he went to check the fixed aids. This has been recently sent to DT, who will circulate it after the meeting.

DT stated the problem was the gate was fixed into the hillside, so it would take a lot of work to remove and fix the gate. SM suggested a new gate was purchased, however this would probably empty the PDCMG bank account. SM asked AG to comment on removing the gate/ repairing gate.

LW commented the entrance gate is out of sight, so it is likely to be damaged again with an angle grinder taken to it. Once the gate is repaired, LW suggested we made the padlock sacrificial, by using a cheap padlock, in the hope that future attacks will only remove the padlock and not the connecting points for the padlock. DT commented we have lost a number of padlocks and he has spent some time searching across the hillside for the missing padlocks. Ogof Draenen was susceptible as there were no caving clubs nearby to keep a regular look out for visitors as occurred for Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (OFD) in the Swansea valley.

Returning to the gate repair, AG commented the whole gate did not to be removed from hillside. The current gate is the same design as those used in OFD. The outer frame of the gate is fixed into the hillside, it is fixed in place with concrete and bolts, but the gate is of a modular design and can be removed from the frame by undoing the locking mechanism. This enables the gate to be removed and repaired. AG said the gate has a design specification and this design is with the company that Vince (SWCC) had used to repair the OFD gates. So the Draenen gate could be taken to this company for repair once removed. LW commented that as it is currently not locked then there is no need to put a temporary locked gate in place.

PS pointed out that if current gate was removed for repair for a couple of months then a temporary one would have to be put in place, to prevent bats from starting to use this entrance. We should leave a note at the entrance asking cavers to leave this temporary gate in place. In summary we would need to minimise the time the gate was removed and place a temporary gate in place otherwise there is risk bats could start to use entrance and then when the gate was replaced bats could be trapped inside. DT will consult with AG on how to unlock and remove the gate.

On caver numbers, SF reported there was a caver counter near the Nunnery entrance and he had placed a new one in a different location in the main entrance. There was no monitor at Drys Cefn. SF offered a waterproof paper log book, as he had done for Aggy, and SF also has waterproof pencils. DT did not require logbooks as he had some, however the offer of waterproof pencils would be accepted. DT said this would be useful addition to be placed with the log book. SF will deliver pencils to DT.

**Action DT** to send summary of caver data collected to SM for circulation to PDCMG members. Post Meeting Data Report

2020 - No I limited acc			k stoler	and Co	vid Pan	demic r	estricti	on Mar	ch 20 –	Jul 20,	then po	st Oct	20
2021	Jan- 21	Feb- 21`	Mar- 21	Apr2	May -21	Jun- 21	Jul- 21	Aug- 21	Sep-	Oct- 21	Nov-	Dec- 21	
													Totals
Parties							5	4	3	4	1		17
Persons							13	10	12	6	2		43

Continued discussion on Draenen Gate that occurred as a follow on to Conservation Officer's report:-

After discussion of potential grants from NRW for conservation work, it was suggested we asked NRW to support the cost of a new gate for the Ogof Draenen entrance. CB reported that often money was available in January each year, so DT would speak to NRW (CB) about a potential grant.

JS asked if we were going to re-engineer the gate could the replacement gate could have a bat hole, as requested many years ago. He believed numbers in Big Bang Chamber were affected. PS was also going to ask. PS did report monitoring was completed at time the original gate was installed and the gate was found not to affect bat numbers as there are other entrances the bats use in the area. PS commented cavers do not affect whether bats use an entrance or not; if new entrances are created bats will adopt these entrances for access. LW commented he had seen bats in Goatchurch Cavern in Mendip, probably the busiest cave in the UK.

If the new gate was the same design this would not be possible, also an official bat hole would affect NRW funding; as the NRW bat monitoring staff at NRW were short of resource, so probably best not to include bat hole currently. CB suggested this be left to later date with a new design.

Action DT contact CB at NRW for potential funding towards repair of the gate.

#### 4d. Conservation Officer

JW had sent a report to SM, which had been circulated before the meeting and is copied below:-

# Conservation report

November 2021

Since the last meeting I have been down Ogof Draenen on a leisure trip but can report that in all the locations we visited I saw no problems with tape, rubbish, or any changes to formations. The only issue I came across was a load of food crumbs at the Lamb and Fox chamber, creating fungus piles where everyone stops for water.

No one has been in touch with me with any issues or problems within the system.

Before the days of Covid I had the table below as a to do list. You can see most have been completed three or four years ago, but there are a couple that need starting, finishing and looking at again in the New Year.

#### Conservation to do list for Draenen

Job	8 742			
Number	Job name	Priority	Done	Information
1	Re-tape Gilwern Passage	1	Done	
4	Re-tape Snowball	1	Done	
9	Produce a project outline	1	Done	
17	Re-taping midwinters Chambers	1	Done	
15	Taping MS&D side passages	1		Tapping Clique and Screaming Like A Stuck Pig.
8	Organise Conservation weekend	2	Done	
18	Re-taping Nunnery	2	Done	
21	Taping Haggis Basher	2		
16	Re-taping for forever changed	3	Done	
10	Reporting mechanism	3		
20	Camp removed in Tea Junction	4	Done	
19	Clearing up Yellow Van dig area	5	Done	
5	Removal of rubbish in MS&D	6		Out of the Blue'. Started
7	Review conservation assess doc.	6		
2	Monitoring Program	7		
6	Video production with Andy Freem	8	Done	
22	Last sandwich fungus removal	3	Done	Tried my best
23	Collect archive Photos	6		started, need more photos
24	write statement for photos	3	Done	
25	Tape In Y Gwter Fawr Streamway	8	Done	
	Taping between snowball and the			
26	reactor	5	Done	
27 oshua Whit	Taping in Wyvern Hall	3		

Joshua White

JW had gone down cave after last meeting, year everything seemed fine. He has received no reports of any issues, however he asked those present if they had noticed anything on visits to Draenen. No one else had any issues to reports. JW plans to continue as currently with the conservation checks, and hopes to organise a conservation working day next year Covid restrictions permitting.

SF commented that DCA (Derbyshire) have an annual prize of £50 for the best conservation work in a cave; would something similar work in Wales and maybe help conservation work in Draenen? Currently JW replaced tape and cleaned up. SF had sent an e-mail around CCC members on suggestions for a conservation prize but had no response.

CB commented the purpose of monitoring was to see if there is change, so you need to take photos so it is anecdotal. The conservation monitoring consisted of taking photos at set location. Simple comments and random photos can only be anecdotal. LW commented that in the Mendips they found photography takes a lot of work and is not necessarily the best option, as photos taken from slightly different angles do not provide a good conservation record. In Mendip the monitoring of conservation was completed by recording current status by description only.

Natural England (NE) have no budget for monitoring SSSIs, so cavers are sending in data from SSSI caves (no grant support for this work), this data can help NE in proving to their governing bodies that work is completed, and may potentially lead to grants / funding in future for cave projects. It enables the statutory bodies to show something is being done. In summary, LW commented that recording the status of cave conservation is a job for everyone, and we should appeal to the caving community to record information.

JW proposal was to monitor key points on popular trade routes. SF suggested Gilwern, Indiana Highway and the Wessex series. LW commented we must make sure that for those that volunteer it does not become a millstone of work to do.

CB reported NRW are having discussions with Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club on monitoring Otter Hole, which has a different level of access control. The discussion considered what was suitable, what was too onerous, and what wasn't. They had agreed on monitoring 15 points including delicate areas and areas of heavy footfall. NRW would offer money every few years (2, 5, 10) to complete a new set of photos at the agreed 15 points. These discussions also recognised need for geological conservation. It was difficult for NRW to fund caving clubs for projects but this monitoring regime could be funded by giving some money to caving clubs to support the process. SF asked CB to comment if any potential funding would be affected due to Ogof Draenen not being a SSSI? CB said that for monitoring Geological Conservation Sites a SSSI has no impact. LW commented JW could apply for some funds. JW could consider options for monitoring trade routes and discuss with NRW (CB).

SF commented bats were now various passages in the cave, including Drws Cefn.

At this point the meeting discussion returned to the Draenen entrance gate. This section of the discussion has been moved to the Permit Secretary report Section 4.c above.

#### 4e. Survey Secretary

JS had nothing to report since last meeting. There was no update on the grade 5 survey.

On the action from last meeting LW had contacted Tim Long to see if he held any historical survey records. TL had replied he did not hold any records, and any records he held had been passed on to the next Survey Secretary at the time.

## 4f. Biological Recorder

PS reported nothing had happened since the last meeting.

Action SM to re-send request re access for bat surveys to the land owner.

#### 4g. Geological Recorder

No geological recorder in post, no geological reports received.

#### 4h. Fixed Aids Officer

AG had completed a fixed aids inspection last weekend doing a Round Trip. He had placed new rope on the entrance climb and Indiana Highway traverse. A full report in the form of an Excel spreadsheet is attached to these minutes as Attachment 1.

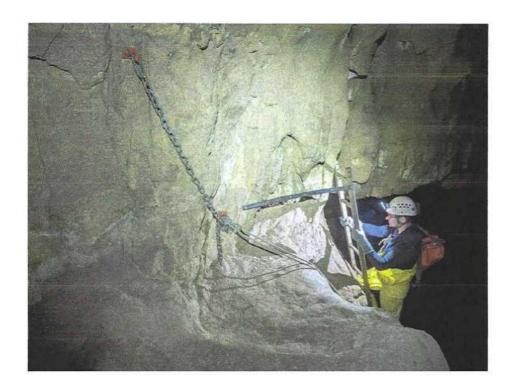
The matter that required some discussion by the meeting was the Balcony Pitch ladder.

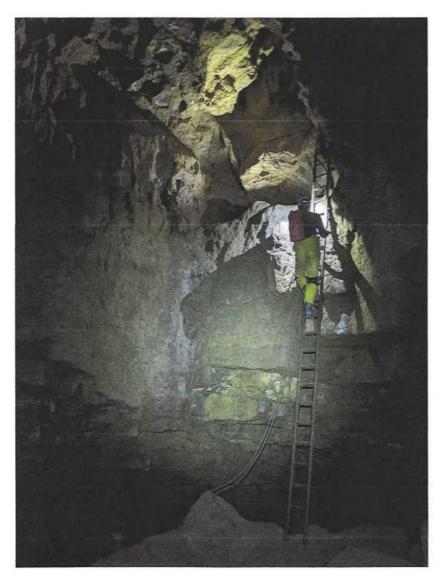
The Daren style ladder that had been installed by PDCMG had been removed, its current location is unknown. Also removed were the MRs for the missing ladder and the life line for that ladder. These items

were re-used for a new ladder.

A new fixed rigid ladder and fixing bolts had been installed by persons unknown, this was similar to the original ladder but instead of being sheet steel with spot welded rungs it was of box design, similar to the ladder in the OFD, Maypole streamway. It appeared the life line rope and the rigging materials (MRs and chain) removed with the PDCMG ladder had been re-cycled for rigging and protection for the new ladder, in summary everything had been moved around. SF believed the chain was now in place to hold the lifeline.

AG showed photos of him on the new ladder, these are copied below:





On review the photos showed the ladder was sturdy and AG had considered safe enough to use. The take off at the top for the new ladder was reasonable for an experienced caver, and similar to take off for the

Maypole ladder in OFD. AG commented there many more 'dangerous points' on the Round trip compared to this ladder.

There was some discussion on the new ladder, on responsibilities, life line options, and possibly replacing the missing ladder. It was unanimously agreed the PDCMG would leave the new ladder in place however the PDCMG would not adopt or take ownership or take any responsibility for the ladder, or for the bolts, as none were installed by the PDCMG and were therefore not insured. Nor would PDCMG install a lifeline. The lifeline present, which did belong to PDCMG would be removed. Those present also agreed that if a party wished to life line members of their party then they should provide their own rope although Ogof Draenen is a cave for experienced cavers and not novices. It was also agreed that as the DMM Eco-Anchors were still in place on the other side of the Balcony Pitch area, therefore anyone not wishing to use the new fixed ladder could take in their own ladder and lifeline, and rig them from the DMM Eco Anchors already in place. It was also agreed that the PDCMG should not install a new ladder to replace the one removed.

Action AG to publicise this new status for Balcony pitch and its rigging, as described above, including to RS to place on the PDCMG website.

AG also reported the cost of the new rope was covered by Draenen Diggers as a donation to PDCMG. PDCMG hold responsibility for this rope. The information on the status of all fixed aids would be sent by AG to RS to be put on the PDCMG website. There should also be a reminder to cavers that they are responsible for checking fixed aids before they use them.

## 5. Applications for Membership and / or Key Holders

No applications had been received for membership of PDCMG or to become key holders.

#### 6. Any Other Business

None.

## 7. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2022, is preferred date for next meeting, with 3<sup>rd</sup> July or 12<sup>th</sup> June as back up dates if 19<sup>th</sup> June not possible for any reason.

LW thanked everyone for giving up their time and attending. Meeting closed 9.20pm.

Approved as a free record on 19th Jone 2022 Is William: