



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN, YSTRAD MYNACH ON FRIDAY, 12TH JUNE 2015 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

William Lindsay - Chair
Garry Lewis - Deputy Chair

Barry Clarke, Glyn Davies, J.R. Davies, Keith Donovan, Andrew Edwards, Roger Evans, Robert Jones, David Parry, Maggie Thomas, Nigel Yates.

Together with:

Philip Griffiths (Secretary and Principal Planner), Andy Powell (Countryside and Access Officer), June Piper (CROW Support Officer), Sharon Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

Chris Heaps (NRW) and PC Simon James.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Elaine Gwynne, Lorraine Howells, Alison Palmer and Councillor Ken James.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th March 2015 were approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Fly Tipping

Phil Griffiths confirmed that he had received a verbal response to the letter he had sent to the Head of Waste Management on behalf of the LAF expressing concern about the problem of fly tipping in the County Borough. Rhodri Lloyd, Senior Projects Officer, Public Services had offered to attend the next meeting of the LAF to explain what the Council is doing in terms of monitoring and controlling the problem. It was agreed to invite Mr Lloyd to the next meeting.

Disability Training Event

It was noted that a further Disability Training event would be organised after the new LAF has been established.

LAF Report by NRW

Further to discussions at the last meeting in terms of raising the profile of the Forum, Phil Griffiths suggested that the Machen Agricultural Show in July would be an appropriate venue for members of the LAF to attend with officers of the Countryside Division.

URDD

Phil Griffiths informed the Forum that there had been a lot of interest in the Countryside Division's presence at the URDD which had taken place at Llancaiach Fawr recently.

Visitor Counter Data

Further discussion took place on the income generated from the introduction of car parking charges in the country parks.

5. OFF ROADING

The Forum welcomed PC Simon James who had been invited to give an overview of the work that he and his colleagues are undertaking to tackle illegal off road riding activities.

PC James outlined the recent changes to his role which now covered Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen as well as the Caerphilly County Borough. He advised the Forum that whilst he is now responsible for a much larger area, he is now able to access additional support from within the force to assist him operationally.

PC James briefed the Forum on the action that is being taken to tackle the illegal use of off road vehicles across Gwent and the powers that the Police have under the Road Traffic Act to seize vehicles that are being ridden illegally. An off road bike awareness week was held at the end of May and social media platforms are being used to raise awareness and to try and educate the public about the issue. During the campaign the public were informed of all the facts including what the laws are, what the impacts can be, what the issues are and what is being done to tackle them. During the course of the presentation, PC James responded to the various queries raised by members of the Forum, including particular issues in their areas.

The Chair thanked PC James for his very interesting presentation and invited him to remain for the rest of the meeting.

6. ACTIVE TRAVEL ACT

The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 places new duties on local authorities in Wales to produce and publish Active Travel maps. The first stage of the Act requires local authorities to produce an 'Existing Routes Map' that has to be submitted to the Welsh Government for approval by September 2015. The Existing Routes Map is about existing routes that the Authority considers provide for Active travel journeys within the requirements set down by Welsh Government. The Forum was advised that the consultation period runs from the beginning of June to 25th August.

During the course of the discussion, it was agreed that the Forum would form a sub group which would meet to discuss the maps and provide feedback to the Highways Department. The following members agreed to sit on the sub-group: Barry Clarke, Keith Donovan, Garry Lewis, David Parry, Maggie Thomas and Nigel Yates.

7. WALES RIGHTS OF WAY MANAGERS WORKING GROUP (WROWMWG)

The WROWMWG meets on a quarterly basis and the next meeting is scheduled for 23rd June 2015. Andy had unfortunately been unable to attend the last meeting in March but had since spoken to his counterparts in other authorities and had received the minutes of the meeting. He was therefore able to advise the Forum of the items discussed, which were as follows: ROWIP funding; the Active Travel Act; De Regulation Bill in England (which is now complete and will be given Royal Assent shortly); Green paper expected for consultation before elections; staffing levels which were becoming a concern across all authorities together with reduction in budgets; Bull/cattle attacks – the Health and Safety Executive is asking for all attacks to be logged with them; Drones – these are becoming an issue in the Snowdonia National Park.

8. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP)

Caerphilly CBC has received confirmation that it will receive £37,480 from Welsh Government to deliver targeted elements of the ROWIP in 2015/16.

Officers are again targeting landowners to persuade them to change stiles for kissing gates which has been very effective over the last few years. This forms part of a wider project to make improvements to the network for those with mobility problems, including surfacing of several community links. Officers will also be looking to carry out some improvement works to several promoted routes in the county borough along with works on some of the equestrian routes. Some funding has also been set aside for the continuing support and development of volunteers in the county borough. Officers are trying to make best use of the funding by spreading it across several different user types and are also trying to cover all corners of the county borough.

Members were reminded that the ROWIP is a ten year plan which will be due for renewal in 2017. Welsh Government has asked NRW to provide them with advice on the revision and update of the statutory guidance and in doing so to carry out targeted consultation with key stakeholders; Local Authority representatives; National Access Forum members and Local Access Forums.

NRW will be leading the work with advice from a working group that will comprise staff from NRW, Welsh Government and local authority representatives. The draft guidance will be issued by email in September 2015 after which input would be encouraged through the following mechanisms: The National Access Forum will be invited to form a sub group which NRW will support. There will be opportunity for consideration of the guidance at the LAF Conference on 15th September 2015. Authorities will be encouraged to feed their thoughts through members of the working group. There will be a period of at least six weeks to allow people to consider and contribute points to the draft guidance. Groups will be encouraged to collate their responses and individual responses will be accepted.

9. FUNDING

Phil Griffiths advised that there had been no additional funding bids since the last meeting. Officers were busy working on the joint uplands and pollinator projects. It was anticipated that there would be a call for funding for partnership programmes from Welsh Government shortly towards NERC duties, Access etc. Welsh Government has divided the funding into work streams combining various programmes: a separate fund which local authorities cannot bid into; a programme which local authorities can bid into, which is for more specific environmental projects and likely to be heavily over subscribed.

The Forum was advised that officers were concerned that the core funding which NRW grants to the Authority each year which contributes towards the cost of three officer posts, was being taken off NRW and transferred to Welsh Government. NRW would continue to have pots that the Authority can bid into.

In terms of the Rural Development Plan (RDP) there had been news that Europe had approved the Welsh programme as a whole. The Local Action Group (LAG) which includes Glyn Davies, Andrew Edwards and Lorraine Howells will determine how the money will be spent in the county borough.

10. HORSE RIDING

Andy Powell advised the Forum that some monies had been put aside from the ROWIP grant to undertake some improvements to the bridleway network. Officers are hoping to meet with representatives of SAFE to coordinate a joint volunteer working group with the existing Rudry volunteers in the south of the County Borough. Officers are also in communication with the local SAFE representative about the wider work of SAFE and whether this can be rolled out across the County Borough.

11. WALK EVENT

CCBC's Annual Walk Event was held on 9th May this year. It was another very successful event with over 500 participants taking part in walks ranging from 2 to 22 miles. Although the weather was poor early on this didn't appear to deter many of the walkers and the weather did improve as the day went on. The start and finish was held at Cross Keys College, which offered excellent facilities and assistance from staff. CCBC's Countryside Service is once again extremely grateful for all the support it receives from Caerphilly Adventure Group, the Islwyn, Caerphilly and Gelligaer Ramblers Groups and the many sponsors. The event now has its own website at www.caerphillychallengeseries.co.uk

12. ANNUAL REPORT

Phil Griffiths reminded the Forum of the need to produce an Annual Report by the end of the calendar year. The document would serve as an introduction for new members and potentially a means of raising the profile of the LAF.

13. MEMBERSHIP OF NEW FORUM

Under the Countryside Access (Local Access Forums) (Wales) Regulations 2001, an appointing authority must establish a new Local Access Forum every three years. As such the current Forum would now be disbanded and applications would be invited from old and new members to sit on the new one. Officers would write to each individual or organisation seeking re-election. An advert would also be placed in the local press to give other individuals an opportunity of expressing an interest in becoming a member.

In accordance with the Regulations, a Forum should consist of between 10 and 22 members. The Caerphilly LAF presently consists of 17 and members were asked to consider whether there was a need to try and fill any possible voids in the balance of the membership. During the course of the discussion it was suggested that the Forum currently lacks young members, a representative of a motor-cycling/cycling organisation and a representative of a Wildlife Trust.

The Secretary thanked Members for their contributions to the current Forum and circulated a list of their contact details which they were asked to check and amend if necessary.

14. FEEDBACK SESSION

Members were invited to provide feedback on their experiences of the last three years on the Local Access Forum.

Barry Clarke expressed his appreciation of all the work that had been undertaken to improve access for people with mobility problems. Reference was made to the benefits gained from visiting different sites around the County Borough to view some of the schemes and improvements that have been undertaken. Officers were congratulated on their success in obtaining funding from diminishing sources for the various projects undertaken.

Several Members commented on the knowledge they had gained from their involvement in the Forum and the positive way in which members of the Forum worked together.

In response to a request made at a previous meeting to discuss possible guidance for developers in relation to rights of way, Andy Powell confirmed that he would organise a meeting with the Development Control Manager and the Forum members concerned.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Larch Update

It was reported that work is progressing at Parc Cwm Darren and Cwmcarn Scenic Drive and will be commencing in the Sirhowy Valley in the new calendar year. Very significant tree felling will be taking place during the next three years.

Nant Llesg Update

The Planning Application which was recently submitted to the Planning Committee, was deferred for a site visit on 23rd June followed by a special meeting of the Planning Committee on 24th June 2015.

Solar Farms

Reference was made to the number of solar farms that are being developed in the countryside. Officers anticipated that there would be an increase in the number of applications received in the future and advised that each site is determined on its merits. There are general Development Control policies in place which look at impact on environment, wildlife etc.

Chair

The Chair advised that this was Sharon Kauczok's last meeting of the Local Access Forum as she was leaving the Authority at the end of July. The Chair thanked Sharon for the efficient manner in which she had supported the LAF over the last twelve years as Committee Services Officer.

In closing the meeting, the Chair also thanked Officers and Members for all their support and valuable contributions to the LAF during his term of office.

The meeting closed at 12.40 pm.