



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN,
YSTRAD MYNACH, ON FRIDAY 8TH DECEMBER 2017 AT 10:00AM

PRESENT:

William Lindsay (Chair)

Councillor Nigel George (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services)

Michael Benjamin, Glyn Davies, Keith Donovan, Chris Heaps – Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Lorraine Howells, Alison Palmer.

Officers – Phil Griffiths (Secretary/Principal Planner), Andy Fleming (Countryside and Rights of Way Officer), Amy Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Barry Clarke, Roger Evans, Ruth Stones, Maggie Thomas, Nigel Yates.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES – 9TH JUNE 2017

Subject to it being recorded that the penultimate paragraph on page 5, minute No. 10 – *Report of the LAF Chairs Meeting*, should read 'Mr Lindsay then referred to the *Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey and suggested that the report is well worth looking at*', the minutes of the meeting held on the 9th June 2017 were approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Minute No. 10 – Report of LAF Chairs' Conference

Phil advised the Forum that a presentation will be delivered at the next meeting (9th March 2018) regarding Glastir, the Welsh Government's sustainable land management scheme, through which financial support is offered to farmers and land managers. It is funded by the Welsh Government's Rural Development Programme 2014-20.

Minute No. 12 – Adopt a Gate

Phil confirmed that he had not received a response from the Ramblers' Association in terms of him inviting a representative to attend this or a future meeting to discuss this scheme.

Minute No. 15 – Rights of Way Staff

Phil confirmed that the Senior Countryside and Rights of Way Officer Post had been appointed and was pleased to introduce Andrew Fleming to the meeting.

5. MINUTES – 8TH SEPTEMBER 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on the 8th September 2017 were approved as a correct record.

6. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

7. TO ELECT A VICE-CHAIR

Phil advised the Forum that it is with regret that Mr Garry Lewis has stood down from his role as Vice-Chair of the Local Access Forum (LAF) due to ill health. The Forum extended their best wishes to Garry and thanked him for the valued advice and contribution he had given to the Forum over many years. It was moved and seconded that Councillor N. George be elected as Vice-Chair of the LAF.

8. NEW ROWIP (ANDY FLEMING)

The Chair gave permission for this item to be brought forward on the agenda.

Andy set out a brief summary and delivered a presentation regarding the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and what this consists of and confirmed that although the current ROWIP has been in place since 2007, Caerphilly has been given an extension to produce an updated version that was due in 2017. He confirmed that there is no funding available for completion of this, however the Rights of Way Team will undertake this task with the help of the Local Access Forum (LAF).

An overview was provided of the definitive map which is a legal recognition of existing public rights to walk, ride and use vehicles. The Definitive Statement is a legal document indicating where all routes are set out and changes must be made through Modification Orders for example to close, divert or create.

It was explained that the Team have a number of outstanding orders on file and they are currently prioritising workloads. The cut-off date for applications is 2026.

The Forum was advised that the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced the concept of the ROWIP. New legislation has been introduced since this time that will be incorporated in the new ROWIP. Andy will introduce an annual plan from January 2018 setting out targets. It is intended that a Draft ROWIP will be produced by July 2018 and the final document produced in December 2018.

A Forum Member stated that he would like to see more routes cleared and published in terms of walks for Rambler's which may also attract tourism to the Borough.

9. CHAIRS REPORT 2017/2018

Phil advised that he and the Chair attended a recent meeting with other Local Authority Access Forums across Wales, at Resolven in South Wales. It had been decided that 2 separate meetings would be arranged on this occasion with 1 to be held in South Wales and 1 in North Wales for ease of travelling. Phil felt this was a constructive meeting for improving access to the outdoors with emphasis on the need for additional resources. He confirmed that not all Secretaries felt that 2 separate meetings were beneficial. However, the Chair felt it was beneficial as it felt more intimate.

William Lindsay (Chair) referred to the meeting that was Chaired by Jon Morgan who discussed the Welsh Government (WG) Consultation Document 'Taking Wales Forward' and the responses received. The Consultation relates to a number of proposals that seeks to further deliver WG commitment to manage natural resources more sustainably to deliver lasting economic, social and cultural, as well as environmental benefits, to ensure the continued prosperity of Wales. It was felt that there were a lot of similar conclusions and that few questions provided enough detail.

The meeting questioned whether WG may need to consider a further consultation as the Chairs felt that they weren't able to give accurate responses to the questions. Reference was made to the 5000 plus cyclists that had signed pre-printed forms in response. It was suggested that the quality of responses should be considered (as in the LAF environment) rather than the quantity received.

The representatives at the meeting asked the Chair to write to WG to emphasise the need for WG to give more weight to and to respect the views, expertise and advice of LAF Chairs as well as other groups providing responses.

In terms of Public Finances William referred to statements made at the meeting on how LAF's can achieve roles with no/limited finances. It was also stated that available funding should not just be allocated to National Parks.

Reference was made to Ms Hannah Blyddyn (Minister for Environment) and comments received from her in relation to the responses being qualitative and quantitative and consideration would be given to all in-depth responses.

The subject of Glastir was also discussed, William confirmed this issue was tackled at a Chairs Conference previously where arguments were made against Glastir and permissive rights.

William attended a Chairs' meeting on the 7th December and in terms of the ROWIP it was questioned whether this should be aspirational or achievable although the emphasis may change on this in time.

The Chair feels that the status of the LAF hasn't changed. The LAF consists of volunteer representatives who cannot commit as much time and effort as they would wish to, to be influential, as collectively they possess a lot of expertise and knowledge.

The Forum discussed the Public Service Board (PSB) within the context of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and questioned if the LAF should sit on this as the wellbeing and health themes should link in with the ROWIP. Alison Palmer set out the Core Membership of the PSB that included the 4 statutory Members: Local Authority, Natural Resources Wales, Health Board and South Wales Fire and Rescue Service. She confirmed that the PSB can invite other interested parties and Caerphilly Council currently has a standard Membership.

Andy stated the New ROWIP will emphasise a User Needs Analysis.

10. FUNDING UPDATE

Phil advised the Forum that the Council are relying on Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for funding and the grants are looking quite competitive over the next 18 months). It appears to be fairly capital focussed, delivering nature based solutions, increasing renewable energy and place based approach, responding to local needs.

Reference was made to the All Wales Projects and the need to promote sustainable use of natural resources to support the economy and develop skills and learning. It was suggested that with this in mind the LAF need to focus on wellbeing.

The Team are optimistic in terms of the Rural Development Programme and hopeful that further funding opportunities will become available. An update was provided in relation to ongoing applications that include Caerphilly Landscape Partnership for £350k and Merthyr and Gelligaer Commons for £300k (relating to fly-tipping removal). An application has also been made for the Rural Community Development Fund (RCDF) for Rail to trail projects and projects in Parc Penallta ranging between £45k and £300k. Phil also referred to an adventure Triangle joint bid for Mynydd Maen for £250k, with Newport and Blaenau Gwent Councils. It is hoped this will help encourage people in using the countryside.

11. MODIFICATION ORDER PROCESS/ADVICE

Andy gave a brief overview of the chart presented on screen that set out the process of applying for such orders that were referred to in item 8 of these minutes.

12. 2018 WALK EVENT

Phil advised the Forum that the 2018 event has been arranged for Saturday the 12th of May that will see beginners, seasoned walkers and runners tackle the Twmbarlwn Trek Challenge in the stunning surrounds of the Sirhowy Valley. Participants are invited to choose from a range of options from shorter led walks of 1 – 5 miles or 11 miles, to longer more challenging routes of 14 miles or the ultimate 22 mile challenge. The self-led options are best suited to those who can read a map and access the route independently. It was explained that more people from outside of the Borough took part last year. 500 people took part this year and it is hoped the figure will increase to 1000 next year. Further information is available on the Caerphilly Challenge Series Website and the Forum was encouraged to take part next year and to also advertise the event. Caerphilly Action Group (CAG) will also provide support.

13. 2017 VALLEYS WALKING FESTIVAL FEEDBACK

An update was provided in relation to the Wales Valleys Walking Festival that was organised in September, for the 13th year. The festival consisted of 12 walks across the South Wales Valleys that took on the 'legendary' theme, with a variety of walks from challenging all day treks to easier strolls and special interest walks. A walk through Parc Cwm Darran was held for a day that then led up onto the open space of Gelligaer Common to take a look at the very important sites of historical interest (approximately 10 miles). A strenuous 7 mile walk was also arranged from the former Markham Colliery that lead walkers through the monastic landscape of Manmoel and Markham, whilst keeping an eye out for any interesting wildlife in the Sirhowy Valley's wild woodlands and valleys.

Positive feedback was received in terms of the event and it was explained that next year the focus will move to wildlife and nature with emphasis on bio-diversity.

14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Held at Penallta House, Tredomen Business Park, Ystrad Mynach:

9th March 2018

8th June 2018

7th September 2018

7th December 2018

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A brief update was provided in relation to Eglwysilan Common that had been referred to at previous meetings. The LAF wrote a letter of support to reject the planning application of the land owners who are currently appealing the decision. The Planning Department are awaiting the decision of the appeal.

Phil asked NRW to deliver a presentation on tree felling across the Borough and how this will impact on the public rights of way.

Councillor Walter Williams (Argoed Ward) will replace Garry Lewis as a Community Council Representative on the LAF.

The meeting closed at 12:30pm.