



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN,
YSTRAD MYNACH, ON FRIDAY 7TH SEPTEMBER 2018 AT 10:00

PRESENT:

Councillor N. George (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services) - Vice-Chair

Councillor W. Williams, M. Benjamin, R. Evans, L. Howells, A. Palmer, R. Stones and M. Thomas.

Together with: Officers – P. Griffiths (Secretary/Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager) and K. Houghton (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

In the absence of the chair and due to the late arrival of the Vice-Chair, it was agreed that the Secretary of the Forum, P. Griffiths would Chair the meeting until the Vice-Chair arrived.

Apologies for absence were received from B. Clarke, G. Davies, K. Donovan, A. Edwards, E. Gwynne and W. Lindsay (Chair) and N. Yates.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES - 8TH JUNE 2018

P. Griffiths requested an amendment to Item 10. (Green Infrastructure Strategy). The length of the strategy should read '10-20 year time period'.

Subject to the aforementioned amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on the 8th June 2018 were approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES

Agenda Item 4 – Matters Arising

P. Griffiths confirmed that a detailed briefing on the Countryside Access Management System would be postponed to the next meeting to allow for the relevant Officer to attend. The Off Road Vehicles Meeting would be discussed at Item No. 12 of the Agenda.

5. CAERPHILLY LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP

P. Griffiths updated the Members on progress made on the Caerphilly Landscape Partnership. Welsh Government have signed-off on funding for the 2 year programme of works underpinning the Strategy. White Young Green have been commissioned to undertake part of the Strategy to link urban Caerphilly with Rudry and improve the resources in that area. This ties in with the Rural Development Plan (RDP) and involves engagement with a variety of stakeholders and community groups.

The first consultation meeting took place on Wednesday 5th September 2018 where pedestrian and cycle access was a main point of discussion. There were no representatives from horse-riding groups present which was unexpected. P. Griffiths informed the Forum that the opportunities for putting views forward had not been closed as there was a further meeting taking place on 14th September 2018 in Rudry Village Hall at 6.30pm. Alternatively comments could be emailed to Lee Morris at White Young Green. Lee Morris' contact details can be obtained from P. Griffiths.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE REPORT

P. Griffiths, on behalf of the Chair, provided a Chair's update report. There has not been a LAF Chair's meeting since the last meeting of the Caerphilly Local Access Forum so there is nothing to report in relation to this.

O. Wicks from Ramblers Cymru provided the Forum with a presentation on a project taking place to develop the Cambrian Way. This is a long distance, 221 miles, challenging trail connecting Cardiff to Conwy. Funding was bequeathed to this project following the death of the Cambrian Way's founder, with the request that the funding be used to improve and promote the Way.

Caerphilly County Borough includes parts of Stages 1 and 2 of the Cambrian Way, Stage 1 being from Cardiff to Machen and Stage 2 being from Machen to Pontypool.

The project aims to engage with stakeholders such as land owners and local communities to restore the connectivity of the Way along its entire length, waymark the route and promote the Way via guidebooks, a dedicated website and social media. This is a partnership project and any suggestions on how and who would be beneficial to engage with were welcomed. O. Wicks' contact details can be obtained from P. Griffiths. A Member suggested that the County based Farmer's Unions would be a good group to engage with and P. Griffiths agreed to contact them and pass O. Wicks' contact details on to them.

Engagement with organisations such as Local Authorities and NRW and some landowners had been positive so far with little issues and concerns raised. However there remained some key groups that were proving to be hard to reach and work continues to engage with these.

The Way will be re-launched next year however promotion of the route needs to be directed at the appropriate level of users as this trail is difficult and not for novices. It requires the use of GPS, map reading skills and a good level of fitness. Members discussed the potential for sections of the Way to be coded based on difficulty and/or length. O. Wicks responded that there are no current plans to do this but he would feedback the suggestions to the project team and consider inclusion in current work to provide descriptions on what to expect.

P. Griffiths advised that this was a good opportunity to tie the project in to work being carried out in the Machen area by the Countryside and Landscape Services team. Structures are in place for contacting landowners and stakeholders and there is access to funding for Rights of Way (RoW) improvements in that area. The Countryside website is also currently being updated and so information on the Cambrian Way could be included in this.

7. ROWIP UPDATE

P. Griffiths updated the Forum that progress on the ROWIP had been slow. Progress continues on establishing the CAMS system and a further report will be brought to the next meeting of the LAF. There had been a notable change in service delivery as there is now a three man in-house team to carry out maintenance work and plans in place to encourage and expand the teams utilisation of volunteers.

8. FUNDING UPDATE

P. Griffiths reported to the Forum that there had been a change in 'core' funding known as the Environment Single Revenue Grant (ESRG). Previously, CCBC received £115k to fund initiatives under Local Environmental Quality and Natural Resource Management such as biodiversity, climate change and access, although little goes towards direct access works but does support volunteer development and events. WG are now rolling several short-term grants, including the ESRG, into one single competitive grant. Application guidance has not yet been issued for this however it has been indicated that bids will need to be both collaborative and pan border but with 'reduced' funding. The potential 'reduced' funding is of concern as it threatens service delivery and also a large amount of the funding comes from the communities' element of the RDP LEADER programme. CCBC had traditionally used this to fund access works. In anticipation of the release of the funding guidance and the application criteria, the Countryside and Landscape Services team has been exploring various proposal options and what 'support' will be required. A leading option is to make a joint bid, under the banner of the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) Initiative. The initiative is established and largely meets the Service's aims and objectives.

P. Griffiths sought the LAF endorsement in principal of a VRP joint bid. It is likely that several partnership bids will be submitted however the VRP could be the most significant for CCBC and adjoining local authorities. The Bid would look to include most elements contained in the existing ESRG. The Forum discussed the sustainability of short-term funding and expressed frustration at the changes in funding opportunities from Welsh Government. The Forum agreed to endorse in principal a VRP joint bid.

P. Griffiths advised the Forum that final approval for £250k over 2 plus years was received to make, predominantly, access improvements to the Adventure Triangle on

and around Mynydd Maen. The regional uplands project, led by Torfaen, has also received approval. This was to implement the Landscape Crime Toolkit which provides support for landowners to prevent rural crime such as illegal off-roading and arson.

P. Griffiths also advised the Forum that the Forest Health project had received approval for £36k. This project works with the Health Board and was primarily about accessing and using woodlands for cardiac recovery patients, this includes a virtual recovery room.

Further to the previously mentioned funding approvals the Rail to Trail project, through the RDP, had also been given approval along with several other programmes which will encourage or improve access within country parks.

P. Griffiths informed the Forum that the Green Infrastructure grant continued to be utilised for measures which improve access and understanding. Two new bridges had been purchased and interpretation was being improved.

9. GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

P. Griffiths informed the Forum that TCAP had been appointed to prepare the Strategy. They had conducted two workshops, one with relevant Officers of the Council and one with the Caerphilly Green Spaces Network. The intention was to tie the Strategy in with the Wellbeing Plan and Future Generations Act work that the Public Service Board is undertaking, an objective of which is to 'protect and enhance the natural environment'.

There will be two more workshops taking place for Local User Groups and Elected Members. There are still opportunities for the LAF to get involved by attending the Local User Group workshop

The Consultants are preparing a first draft of the Strategy which will be sent out for consultation to all stakeholders, NRW and the PSB before it goes to a meeting of Full Council for ratification. When the first draft is available then it will be sent around to the Forum but Members were advised that the turnaround to submit comments would be short.

10. COUNTRYSIDE AND LANDSCAPE SERVICES WEB PAGE

P. Griffiths updated the Forum on the Countryside and Landscape services new webpage. The aim was to produce a functional and user friendly site which provides information on what is available, where, when and how.

Orchard Consultancy, who have also produced a site for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, have developed a virtual visitor page with drone filming, photos and panoramas. There are sections on walking facilities, Green Spaces Caerphilly, Learning for schools and wildlife resources.

The website is a good opportunity to promote the work of the LAF alongside the information that exists on the CCBC Corporate website. There will be some overlap between the Countryside and Landscape services website and the CCBC corporate site particularly in regard to policy information. The new site is scheduled to be launched by the end for the year.

Members of the Forum discussed engagement with users groups in the development of the website which has been extensive. A Member suggested that local history information would be valuable and slot in well with the new website. P. Griffiths will feedback this suggestion to the website developers, to consider potential links to local history sites available on the new website.

11. PLANNING MATTERS

P. Griffiths drew attention to Merthyr Tydfil Council's Local Development Plan which was currently out for consultation and although nothing from a Planning point of view was significant to CCBC, there were some areas of interest which were brought to the LAF's attention. There are many areas identified, within the LDP, as suitable for Solar Farm developments including a site which borders the Bargoed area and comes very close to the Common. There is also a large solar farm in Blaenau Gwent on the boarder of the Rhymney area. Although these sites do not directly affect CCBC RoWs they do affect RoWs linked to the CCBC network.

The Forum discussed the community benefits funding that can be offered with these schemes in regards to this funding being awarded by County boarders rather than those communities in a set radius of the solar farm regardless of which County they sit in. It was highlighted by a Member of the Forum that GAVO offer a solar and wind energy grant scheme available to grass roots third sector groups. 3 schemes have been awarded within the Borough at Crosphenmaen, Argoed and Crumlin ward and Mynyddislwyn. It was felt by the Forum that Caerphilly County Borough communities are missing out on significant community benefit funds from solar farm developments just over the boarder.

A further discussion ensued with regards to the impact of wind turbine developments on the landscape. It was agreed that the impact of renewable energy developments on the landscape, within the County Borough or close to its boarders, be placed as an agenda item for discussion at the next meeting in December.

12. OFF ROAD VEHICLES

P. Griffiths updated the Forum that a multi-agency meeting formed to reduce/prevent 'off' roading' and misuse of commons had been arranged, with Gwent Police for 14th September 2018. The consensus of the Forum was that this issue was worsening in some areas and it was felt that a Countryside Ranger from the Local Authority should be present at the meeting which P. Griffiths will arrange.

In a wider context, P. Griffiths informed the Forum that the Welsh Assembly Cabinet Minister for Energy, Planning and Rural Affair will be meeting with the Chief Constable for Gwent Police regarding issues on common land and a lack of proactivity to tackle these issues. Welsh Government is taking this seriously but resources to tackles these issues are limited.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A. Palmer advised the Forum that a consultation was taking place to inform a Local Toilet Strategy being written by CCBC. The purpose of the Strategy is to improve everyone's access to toilets in their day to day lives through better use of existing resources. Forum Members were encouraged to complete the survey as their knowledge of the Borough would be useful in mapping where toilet facilities exist in the Countryside. Forum members further discussed this matter and felt that it could

be valuable to have a map of toilet facilities in the Countryside on the new Countryside and Landscape website.

P. Griffiths, on behalf of the Chair, requested an item be placed on the next LAF Agenda to discuss the process of definitive map modification orders and any role that the LAF could play and this was agreed.

P. Griffiths asked members of the Committee to consider moving the 7th December 2018 meeting forward or back a week.

The meeting closed at 12.06