



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PARC CWM DARRAN ON
FRIDAY, 28TH SEPTEMBER 2007 AT 1.15 PM

PRESENT:

Mike Johnson – Vice-Chairman (Presiding)

Angela Giddings, Keith Green, Robert Jones, William Lindsay, David Parry and Sue Steer.
Mike James (Forestry Commission).

Together with:

Norman Liversuch (Secretary), Phil Griffiths (Asst. Secretary), Andy Powell (Countryside Access Officer), June Piper (CROW Support Officer), Phil Marshall (Rural Access Development Officer), Sharon Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Keith Griffiths, Keith Donovan, Lorraine Howells, Graham Hosgood, William Jenkins, Michael Jeffs, Alison Palmer, Juliet Michael (CCW), Marc Langley (FC) and Adrian Sander (Rights of Way).

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 22nd June and 18th July 2007 were approved as a correct record subject to it being noted under Minute No. 6 – Objective 1 Funding Update (Caerphilly Common) - that approval had been 'sought' to create a bridle link from the Travellers Rest to the Mountain Café, not 'received' as stated in the minutes.

Matters Arising

Copies of a letter received from Clive Menzies, Chair of the Wrexham Local Access Forum, who represented LAFs on the National Access Forum, were tabled at the meeting, together with the response received from the Welsh Assembly Government.

In addition, the minutes of the NAF meeting held on 17th 2007 were circulated.

2. PRESENTATION BY PHIL MARSHALL, RURAL PROJECTS OFFICER

The Forum received a presentation from Phil Marshall, Rural Projects Officer, on the work he has been undertaking on promoted walks within Caerphilly County Borough.

In particular, he referred to the 6 classic circular walks which had been created in conjunction with the local Rambler groups and the Countryside Section i.e.

- Caerphilly and Rudry Ridge Walk.
- Penyfan Pond Country Park to Manmoel.
- Sirhowy Valley Country Park to Mynydd Machen.
- Parc Cwm Darran and the Darran Valley (not yet surveyed).
- Parc Penallta to Eglwysilan.
- Twmbarlwm & Cwmcarn Walk.

Mr Marshall referred to the links with local businesses and tourism in promoting the walks and also to the work that was being carried out on the Caerphilly to Newport Walk, the Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Walk (a 28 mile circular walk) and the Rhymney Riverside Walk. Future projects included dedicated way marker discs, advertising campaigns and a re-run of the walking event held this year.

The Chairman thanked Mr Marshall for his very comprehensive presentation.

3. ANNUAL REPORT

Copies of this year's Annual Report were circulated at the meeting. Members of the Forum were invited to refer any further comments on the content to Andy Powell.

Copies of the report would also be sent to CCW and local libraries.

Discussion took place on the problems connected with fly tipping in the countryside and the steps being undertaken to try and eradicate the problem. It was reported that the Countryside Section is in consultation with Environmental Services with regard to targeting areas where there are particular problems.

4. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP)

June Piper reported that the updated ROWIP is being submitted to the Rights of Way Cabinet Committee on 8th October 2007 for approval. Once it is approved it will be printed and published. Copies of the plan will be available for members of the LAF at their December meeting.

5. UPDATE ON THE CAERPHILLY RIDGE AND HEADS OF THE VALLEYS PROJECTS

Andy Powell briefed the Forum on progress with the two projects.

- Caerphilly Ridge Project.

A similar exercise to the Lower Ebbw Project. The first stage has been completed i.e. a map produced showing access opportunities in the area.

The first map shows open access land with key blocks of open land areas identified. The 2nd map will show rights of way. The main stakeholders need to be identified, the land surveyed and negotiations started with the landowners.

- Heads of the Valleys Project.

Two maps showing all access opportunities, open access areas and linear routes will be produced.

The main stakeholders need to be identified and a survey carried out to examine the best way of linking it altogether.

The Forum was advised that priority would be given to the Heads of the Valleys project in view of the funding opportunities.

An update on progress with both projects will be reported to the next meeting.

6. OBJECTIVE 1 FUNDING

The Forum received an update from Phil Griffiths, Assistant Secretary, on progress with Objective 1 funded projects: -

- Rural Access Network.
It was noted out that the post of Rural Access Development Officer is financed by European funding.
- Rural Events.
The launch of the Classic Walks is scheduled for 10 May 2008. Penallta Kite Festival is taking part at the country park this weekend.
- Invasive Plant Species.
There are currently 70 projects in progress including the clearance of 12 hectares of Japanese Knotweed. In addition, the first case of Giant Hogweed has been discovered in the County Borough.
- Work has started at the Penallta Fishing Lakes.
- Upper Sirhowy.
Reference was made to Cydcoed works and to 2 new lengths of cycleway funded by the HoV initiative and European funding. A joint bid has also been made to the Heritage Lottery for funding.
- Caerphilly Common.
Planning permission is awaited on proposals for the new bridle route. Work is in hand regarding the creation of new footpaths.
- Countryside boundaries.
Eleven projects are being progressed and tenders have started coming in.
- Aberbargoed SSSI.
European monies had been received to help manage the site. Improvements are being undertaken to footpaths, waymarking and interpretation. Officers are working closely with the schools with regard to educational use of the site.
- Cwmcarn Heritage Link.
The link has been installed.
- Key Fund.
Grants to businesses in rural wards.
- Cydcoed funding.
Significant resources are being put into the Darran Valley, Penybryn, Maesycwmmmer and Argoed.

- Heads of the Valleys Funding.
Various projects have been discussed i.e. cycleway in Argoed, access in Groesfaen and improvements to cycle routes in New Tredegar. Reference also to Butetown Heritage Trail.
- Rural Development Plan.
Two thirds of the county borough wards have finally been designated as rural. This could result in a significant amount of funding for the County Borough.
- Convergence Funding.
Reference was made to the scheme being put forward by a consortium for a Valleys Regional Park.

Mr Griffiths was thanked for his comprehensive report.

7. LAND USE CONSULTANTS

Phil Griffiths updated the Forum on work that has been undertaken by the Land Use Consultants in relation to common land in the County Borough.

It was reported that officers would be meeting the consultants on Wednesday to discuss progress and consider the draft strategy.

The Commons Ranger has been very active in land management eg bracken rolling etc.

A volunteer base has been set up with BCTV to carry out stone walling. The potential for other projects to be undertaken is being examined.

8. WATER RELATED SPORTS AND RECREATION IN WALES

Andy Powell updated the Forum on the latest position regarding the consultation exercise on water related sport and recreation in Wales.

Members had been asked to complete a questionnaire at the March meeting. Copies of Caerphilly's response were tabled at the meeting. It was anticipated that the draft strategy would be available within the next 3 months.

Sue Steer pointed out that there is no reference to disturbance to wildlife in the response.

The Forum was advised that further details of the survey together with the responses were available on the following website: www.brighton.ac.uk/waterrecreation/ .

9. LOBBYING AMs

In accordance with a request made by Sue Steer at the last meeting, the Forum discussed whether it should become involved in lobbying AMs when land which was felt to be important to local communities, was being sold. Reference was made to the recent sale of Rudry Common where the local community had been unable to raise funds to buy the common. Sue Steer felt that the Welsh Assembly should have the power to defer sales to give communities more of an opportunity to raise money to buy the land.

It was concluded that as the Local Access Forum is primarily concerned with access issues, it would not be appropriate for it to become involved in the aforementioned course of action.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Off Road Motorcycling.

The Forum was updated on progress to alleviate the widespread problems caused by illegal off roading activities in the countryside. In particular, reference was made to two successful exercises undertaken in conjunction with the Police on Gelligaer Common.

- Total Liability.

The Forum's attention was drawn to correspondence received from Clive Menzies who was seeking support from all LAFs in respect of a private members' bill. A copy of a draft letter referring to the burden placed upon land owners and occupiers by the application of total liability, was tabled for discussion.

Given the lack of information in the letter about the proposed bill and the fact that council officers had been unable to get further information on the issue from Mr Menzies or Parliamentary websites, it was agreed to defer consideration of this matter until further details of the bill had been received.

- Handouts.

The minutes of the fourth National LAF Conference held on 15th June 2007 were tabled for information.

- LAF Chairs Conference, 20th September 2007.

Angela Giddings attended this conference on behalf of the Forum as the Chair and Vice Chair were unavailable. Angela briefed the Forum on issues raised at the conference.

The Secretary agreed to send a copy of the action points from the meeting to all members.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Local Access Forum was due to be held at Dyffryn House, Dyffryn Business Park on Friday, 14th December 2007 at 10 am.

The Vice Chair thanked officers and members of the Forum for their contribution to a very enjoyable day and informative meeting.

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm.