



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT DYFFRYN HOUSE, DUFFRYN BUSINESS PARK,
ON THURSDAY, 10TH JANUARY 2008 AT 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT:

Lorraine Howells – Chairman
Mike Johnson – Vice Chairman

Barry Clarke, Keith Donovan, Angela Giddings, Councillor Keith Griffiths, Graham Hosgood, Robert Jones, William Lindsay, Alison Palmer, David Parry & Sue Steer.

Together with:

Norman Liversuch (Secretary), Phil Griffiths (Asst. Secretary), Andy Powell (Countryside Access Officer), Adrian Sander (Senior Asst. Engineer (ROW)), June Piper (CROW Support Officer), Sharon Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

Sarah Tindal (Countryside Council for Wales)
Marc Langley (Forestry Commission)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Keith Green & Malcolm Tucker.

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2007 were approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Minute No. 10 - Total Liability

The Secretary advised that it had not been possible to obtain any further information in relation to this issue. However, he would continue to pursue the matter and report on any progress to the next meeting.

Minute No. 6 – Objective 1 Funding

Sue Steer drew attention to the need to get more volunteers on board when the funding expires. Phil Griffiths advised that he would provide more information on this under his update on Objective Funding later in the agenda.

2. CAERPHILLY RIDGE AND HEADS OF THE VALLEYS PROJECT

Caerphilly Ridge

Andy Powell displayed a map highlighting potential access opportunities in the Caerphilly Ridge area. He explained that a meeting had been set up with the main players along the Caerphilly ridgeline in February to discuss the works that had recently been carried out together with future proposals. The information would be collated and assessed as to where improvements should take place. The main aim was to get everyone together and create partnership working.

A report on progress would be given to the next meeting of the Forum.

Heads of the Valley

Mr Powell explained that a map had been produced showing the majority of access opportunities in the area. It had been decided that due to the extensive amount of access opportunities, the area would be audited on an electoral ward basis. As soon as this information had been collated, investigations would begin to look at how future opportunities for access could be achieved.

Further information would be reported to the next meeting.

Regarding the significant amount of grant aid that had been made available by Welsh Assembly Government for projects in the HoV area, it was reported that the money was not automatically awarded to the relevant Local Authorities. Local Authorities who were eligible for the funding were required to submit bids on an annual basis.

3. OBJECTIVE 1 FUNDING UPDATE

The Forum received an update from Phil Griffiths, Assistant Secretary, on progress with Objective 1 funded projects. Mr Griffiths reminded the Forum that the programme was due to close at the end of 2008. Whilst WAG had given the end of June this year as the deadline for receipt of projects, the Local Authority was hoping that this would be extended to September. In the meantime, Officers were working towards a June deadline.

- **Caerphilly Common**

The bridleway project was now on hold as the landowner had disappointingly withdrawn permission for the work to be undertaken on his land. A further update would be given to the next meeting.

- **Other Commons**

Much work was being undertaken on the other commons in the County Borough, including way-marking, access improvements etc.

- **North Sirhowy Valley**

Permission had been granted for 2 lengths of cycleway in the area. Contracts had been awarded and work was due to start in a couple of weeks.

- **Aberbargoed**

A series of access improvements were being undertaken to enhance public areas.

- **Penallta**

The steps had now been completed allowing access from the new fishing ponds.

- **Invasive plant species**

Extensive treatment work had been undertaken to footpaths etc and officers were optimistic that improvements would be seen in the spring.

- **Rural access network**

Phil Marshall, Rural Access Development Officer, was active throughout the County Borough but primarily on long distance routes. Work on the new path from Rhymney to the Heads of the Valley Industrial Estate was due to start this week.

A planning application had been submitted for the new footbridge in Llanbradach – this would constitute an important part of the Riverside Walk. New leaflets were being produced for many of the walks

- **Rural Events Programme**

The Authority would be running the “Walk in Caerphilly” event this year on 10th May. Two walks, of 16 and 26 miles, would be held on the day with similar routes to last year. In addition, a children’s clue search would take place at Penallta Country Park.

The Forum was advised that the issue of getting more volunteers on board to assist with the projects once funding has expired was high on the agenda for the Valleys Regional Park Project. A consortium of Keep Wales Tidy, Groundwork Trust and BCTV was looking at projects across all the Local Authorities in this area.

Discussion took place on the facilities available for walkers in the County Borough together with the potential for creating additional walks/enhancing existing ones, if necessary.

Mr Liversuch advised that details of the walking routes in the County Borough are published on the Council’s website and that officers were in consultation with local businesses/hoteliers etc in connection with facilities for walkers/horse riders etc.

4. COMMONS PROJECT UPDATE

The Forum received an update on the study being undertaken by Land Use Consultants in respect of the commons strategy for the County Borough which began last year.

The strategy basically comprises two main elements i.e.

- A strategic plan for the commons.
- Individual management plans for the 10 commons which do not already have their own plans.

Whilst the strategy has a 10-year life span, the management plans have 5-year life spans.

The strategy, which is almost complete, has been divided into four parts:-

- Background to the commons
- Character and condition of the commons.
- Towards sustainable management.
- Delivery of the strategy.

This has been based on the expertise of the consultants together with several hundred responses to the consultation exercise.

In terms of the individual management plans, it was anticipated that the first draft would be available within the next four weeks. There would be a further period of consultation on both the strategic and management plans and it was anticipated that the exercise would be completed by the end of June.

5. MIKE JEFFS

The Secretary informed the Forum that he had received a letter of resignation in November 2007 from Mike Jeffs.

Mr Jeffs had given his reasons for resigning as a change in work circumstances and his inability to attend daytime meetings.

Mr Liversuch advised that he had responded to the letter on behalf of the Council. The Chair had also sent a letter to Mr Jeffs thanking him for his past contribution to the Forum.

The Forum discussed the issue of timings of the meetings and it was agreed to agenda the item for further consideration at the next meeting.

The Secretary advised that he was intending to prepare a report to Council recommending that at least one of the scheduled meetings of the Forum is held late afternoon/early evening.

6. RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN PROJECTS

Mike Johnson, Vice Chair, referred to the letter sent on behalf of the LAF in support of the Council's bids for the Rural Development Plan Projects, The Great Outdoors and A Common Asset. Copies of the letter were tabled at the meeting.

The Forum noted the information.

7. MATTERS OF INFORMATION

The following matters were reported for information:-

- **ROWIP Funding**

Andy Powell and Adrian Sander had attended a meeting with WAG at the end of November at which the future funding of the ROWIP was discussed.

It is anticipated that between £1.5 – 2 million will be divided amongst the 22 LA's and BBNP in Wales. The money is primarily new money for works identified in the ROWIP and is to be spent in the 2008-09 financial year. A formula for allocating the funds has yet to be created but it is thought that it will be based on the length of RoW and population. An update will be given when further information is received.

Sara Tindal (CCW) informed the Forum that it was likely that CCW will have some involvement in how the money is allocated.

- **Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) Consultation Paper**

WAG is currently consulting local authorities on sections of the Commons Act 2006 viz. Works on Common Land, Exchanges of Common Land and Greens and Charging.

‘Works on Common Land’ - Ways in which the consenting regime will work and how the application process might work. Exemptions for certain types of work, views on what should be exempt. Enforcement action against unlawful works – guidance on enforcement. Scheme of regulation – what should be included.

Exchanges – Section 147 of existing act replaced by a more modern regime.

Charging – Until now no fees have been charged by ministers for processing applications under S194 of the 25 Act. 2006 makes provisions for fees to be made payable in respect of applications.

Andy Powell had responded to WAG on behalf of the Council. Any further comments needed to be with WAG by 11th January 2008.

- **Coastal Access**

The Wales Coastal Access Improvement Programme is a WAG funded CCW co-ordinated programme which in 2007-08, the first year of a 6 year programme, will see £1.5m of grant aid distributed to carry out access improvement works. The key objective is the completion of an all-Wales Coastal path. Further details are contained in the Recreation and Access Newsletter, copies of which were available at the meeting.

- **British Horse Society Award**

June Piper, CROW Support Officer, briefed the Forum on the prestigious British Horse Society award recently presented to the Council for its work in conjunction with the Forestry Commission and SAFE, in improving equestrian access in the County Borough.

The Forum commended the work of all those who had contributed to the award.

- **Rights of Way Section**

Adrian Sander informed the Forum that the ROW Section had recently been transferred to the Council’s Planning Division. The telephone nos. for Rights of Way staff remained the same.

- **Handouts**

The following papers were circulated:-

Minutes of Chairs’ Meeting

Motorbike Steering Group Annual Report

Recreation and Access Newsletter - this can also be viewed on CCW’s website (www.ccw.gov.uk)

8. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on Friday, 28th March 2008 at 10.00 a.m. The Secretary would send confirmation of the arrangements to all members of the Forum in due course.

The meeting closed at 11.10 am and was followed by the launch of the Council’s ROWIP.