



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN, ON FRIDAY, 19TH MARCH 2010 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

Mike Johnson – Chairman

Barry Clarke, Glyn Davies, Sylvia Dolbear, Keith Donovan, Keith Green, Garry Lewis, William Lindsay, David Parry, Maggie Thomas and Nigel Yates.

Together with:

Phil Griffiths (Principal Planner & Assistant Secretary to the LAF), Andy Powell (Countryside Access Officer), June Piper (CROW Support Officer).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest at the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Ron Davies, Andrew Edwards, Elaine Gwynne, Lorraine Howells, Alison Palmer, Marc Langley, Sarah Tindal, Adrian Sander and Norman Liversuch.

The Chairman advised the Forum that Adrian Sander was retiring from the Local Authority at the end of the month. The Chair recorded his appreciation of Adrian's attendance at meetings and contribution to the work of the Forum over the years and wished him a long and happy retirement. A card was circulated for everyone to sign and express their good wishes to Adrian for the future.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2009 were approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Phil Griffiths reported that a significant number of complaints had been received about the activities of motorbikes in the countryside and that a number of hot spots had been identified in the Sirhowy Valley and Penyrheol areas. A number of Police operations had been carried out and vehicles had subsequently been seized. There was also a problem with drivers of a small group of 4 x 4 vehicles that were causing damage in the countryside.

It was noted that the Secretary had not, as yet, had the opportunity to meet with Fran Richley of Gwent Police, to discuss the idea of setting up a project similar to that in Oxford to deal with some of the issues resulting from illegal off road riding. An update would be given at the next meeting.

5. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP)

June Piper, CROW Support Officer, gave an update on projects that had been completed in relation to the implementation of the ROWIP.

The Forum was advised that the £63k grant aid secured in 2009 had now been spent on the projects identified. However, the bid for an extra £27k to fund additional works had not been successful. A sum of £63k had been allocated for 2010, in line with the previous year's grant, and a list of projects had already been compiled.

The following surface and drainage works had been undertaken: -

- 2 urban paths surfaced in Cefn Fforest and Bedwas.
- 2 rural footpaths surfaced and drainage works at Ystrad Mynach and Wyllie.
- 2 bridleways in Rudry - one arising from a joint scheme with SAFE and the Forestry Commission.

Additional money had been secured from the Engineering Annual Maintenance budget and the Community Partnership Area Forum budget to complete work to footpath 92 Mynyddislwyn. The footpath is now a Safe Route to School. Footpath 41 is also a school route.

Other projects included construction of a flight of steps on FP51 Gelligaer - Bargoed to provide access for elderly residents and the installation of kissing gates on FP21 Gelligaer - Glan-y-Nant and FP18 Gelligaer - Penpedairheol to prevent misuse and allow disabled access. A horse step over barrier had also been installed on Restricted By-Way 59 Abercarn near Penyfan Pond to prevent mis-use.

Interpretation signs and access improvement panels had been erected at various locations and new way markers had been purchased to identify correct users for each status. At footpath 8 Van, a new footbridge had been installed as part of a circular route.

It was confirmed that the budget for next year remained at £63k although it was noted that future funding from WAG could be under threat.

A Member of the Forum advised that she had witnessed what could have resulted in a nasty accident on the route of a popular walk. The rider of a motorbike at the scene had insisted that the path was a by-way. Officers were aware of the problem of bikers in this area and were exploring ways of preventing them from gaining access. It was important to continue to report these incidents to the Police in order that there is an official log of each incident. It was agreed that June and Andy would investigate the possibility of barriers being erected at a suitable point at this location.

Another Member referred to problems in the Upper Sirhowy Valley and asked whether it would be possible to erect a sign prohibiting motorised transport in that area. Phil Griffiths agreed to explore the possibility although he advised that a lot had already been spent in that area to try and prevent unauthorised access onto the railway line.

6. FUNDING UPDATE

At the last meeting the Forum was presented with a 3-year update of funding secured through the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) and the Heads of the Valleys (HoV).

The works being undertaken this year through these sources primarily were as follows: -

- Parc Cwm Darran (upgrading the path around the lake to make DDA compliant).
- Riverside walk between New Tredegar and Abertyswg.
- Works linking Rhymney and Bryn Bach Park.
- Access works from Markham onto the cycleway.
- Improvements within Parc Coetir Bargod.
- Continuation of works to the route around Pen y Fan Pond.
- Upgrading crossing points along the Monmouthshire Brecon Canal.
- Design works for several proposed projects had also commenced.

The following three new bids had been submitted to Valleys Regional Park, which would help support access works/initiatives.

1. Aberbargoed, primarily linked around audio trails from the education centre - £53k.
2. General, wider web promotion including flagship walks, Caerphilly mountain, Pen y Fan Pond, Bedwas Riverside Park, Harold Finch Park - £70k.
3. An events programme, which includes an access event - £234k.

The outcome of these bids is not yet known.

The LAF were informed that a Sustrans employee would be based in the Pontllanfraith Offices on a one day a week basis to help drive forward the range of cycling schemes that VRP and others are funding.

It was intended that slides would be shown at the next meeting to highlight schemes that had been undertaken via the ROWIP/Countryside Section.

6. WATER RECREATION

There are 15 significant water sites in the Caerphilly County Borough, including two recently acquired reservoirs. In recognising that water recreation is a growth area, the Local Authority has prepared two grant applications for the purpose of funding a study to look at making best use of its water sites. One of the applications has been made to the Heads of the Valleys fund and the other to "Splash".

The first part of the study will focus on survey work, analyse trends and identify opportunities. The second part, should funding become available, will concentrate on drawing up management plans. A company who have undertaken a number of water-based projects in Wales have been commissioned to carry out the work. An update on progress will be reported back to the next meeting.

7. DDA PROJECT

As agreed at the last meeting Andy Powell had prepared an access audit for Parc Coetir Bargod based on the current access standards developed by the Fieldfare Trust. If this method proves to be a success the process would be rolled out to the other country parks in the county borough.

A further meeting of the sub-group would be held in April and a progress report would be presented to the next meeting of the Forum in June.

8. LAF CHAIRS' CONFERENCE

Mike Johnson briefed the Forum on the topics discussed at the LAF Chairs' Conference, which he attended on 25th February 2010.

The first item on the agenda for the meeting was a presentation on the current status of Glastir by Catrin Dellar, Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).

WAG has announced a shift in approach to land management schemes in Wales. From 2012 the five existing agri-environment schemes will be replaced by one scheme, Glastir, which WAG believe is better positioned to meet current and future environmental changes. However, there is some concern within the farming community about the entry requirements for joining the scheme.

It appears that there are two levels of participation. The emphasis of the high level agreement will be to create new permitted access points to existing main routes. These may well only exist for the five-year period of the agreement and will be provided and maintained by the landowner. It seems that permitted routes provided under Tir Gofal will lapse when that grant is withdrawn. As these routes are not permanent they will not be shown on the ordnance survey maps but will hopefully be displayed on the CCW website on a map base.

The next item that was discussed at the conference was the funding of the ROWIP. Most of the LAFs did not know what local authority funding would be available in 2010/11 but all anticipated at best, a stand still. Mr Johnson had spoken to Catrin Dellar after the meeting and was advised that Jane Davidson, the current WAG Member responsible for environmental matters, is very supportive of rights of way.

Discussion then took place on the funding of maintenance of the coastal footpath after 2012. This will be complicated by the fact that in some cases agreements have not been finalised with landowners.

The next topic that was raised was the impact of wind farms on rights of way and in particular, the concerns of horse riders who feared that their horses might be spooked by the movement and noise of the blades.

Finally, reference was made to the fact that some community councils have a member responsible for monitoring rights of way in the community council area and for checking planning applications. The suggestion was that LAFs could liaise with community councils.

The Forum thanked the Chairman for his informative report.

9. ANNUAL REPORT

Andy Powell circulated copies of last year's Annual Report. It was agreed that Andy and Norman would prepare this year's Annual Report in line with previous years. Members were urged to contact Andy or Norman with their ideas as soon as possible. A draft report would be prepared for the Forum's consideration in due course.

10. WALK-IN EVENT

The Forum received details of this year's "Walk-in" event, which was taking place from Waunfawr Park, Crosskeys on 22nd May 2010. The event is being held in partnership with Islwyn Ramblers who are celebrating their 75th anniversary. The walks are suitable for varying levels of fitness and experience and a high demand for entries is expected.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Countryside Division

The Forum was informed of staff changes within the Countryside Division.

Phil Jayne, Manager Countryside and Landscape Services, was due to retire in a couple of weeks and Norman Liversuch, would be taking over as Manager of the Countryside Division. It was agreed that a letter would be sent to Phil on behalf of the Forum thanking him for his significant contribution to countryside issues over the years and wishing him a long, healthy and happy future.

Adrian Sander, Senior Assistant Engineer, Rights of Way was also due to retire from the Authority at the end of the month. Andy Powell would be taking over responsibility for rights of way matters, assisted by June Piper, Mark Gibbons and Stefan Denbury. Andy would also continue to undertake his current countryside access duties. The Forum placed on record its appreciation of Adrian's contribution to the work of the Forum over the years and those present signed a good luck card to wish him well for the future.

It was also noted that, Phil Marshall, Rural Access Development Officer, had left the section to join the RDP Team.

Countryside Walks

Keith Donovan complimented those who had been involved in the construction of the riverside walk in Machen and referred to the renovation work that was being undertaken to the iron bridge, which is situated along the route.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution to the meeting and closed the meeting at 11.30 am.