



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT TY PENALLTA, TREDOMEN, ON
FRIDAY, 1ST OCTOBER 2010 AT 10.00 AM**

PRESENT:

Mike Johnson – Chairman

Barry Clarke, Sylvia Dolbear, Keith Donovan, Keith Green, Robert Jones, Garry Lewis, William Lindsay, David Parry, Maggie Thomas.

Together with:

Norman Liversuch (Manager Countryside and Landscape Services & Secretary to the LAF), Andy Powell (ROW & Countryside Access Officer), Owen Struthers (Countryside Planning Assistant), Sarah Tindal (CCW), Emma Louise Felkin (Forestry Commission), Sharon Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Glyn Davies, Councillor Ron Davies, Andrew Edwards, Phil Griffiths, Elaine Gwynne, Lorraine Howells, Alison Palmer, June Piper and Nigel Yates.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th June 2010 were approved as a correct record subject to it being noted that Glyn Parry should read David Parry (minute no. 9 - composition of sub-group).

4. MATTERS ARISING

Norman gave an update on the off road motorbike project that had been set up with Gwent Police. Twelve young people had undertaken a 12 week intensive course teaching them about sensible riding, access in the countryside, basic mechanics, first aid etc. A presentation had been produced showing how the young people had progressed through the course. The star pupil on the course was a young person who had had his motorbike taken from him for riding illegally. There were plans to run a similar course in the near future.

Norman suggested that the organiser of the course, Police Inspector Fran Richley, be invited to attend a future meeting of the LAF to discuss the project in more detail. This was agreed.

5. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP)

Andy gave an update on the present position with the ROWIP. He confirmed that the sum of £63k had been granted this year towards its implementation in line with the previous year's grant. Projects amounting to £83,000, to include contingencies, had been put forward. There were two claim periods, the first to the end of November and the remaining spend was due by end of February 2011. Projects were out to tender and quotes have started to be awarded for the end of November spend.

The three year project comes to an end in 2011 and the funding from WAG is due to finish. CCW were asking all local authorities to provide them with details of the ROWIP projects they had undertaken over this period in order to feedback to WAG and help to strengthen the case for future funding. It was agreed that Norman would write a letter to WAG on behalf of the Forum in relation to future funding.

6. FUNDING UPDATE

In the absence of Phil Griffiths, who had tendered his apologies for the meeting, Andy gave an update on funding issues.

The Sirhowy Valley Country Park project was due to commence on 13th October 2010 and was due to last 12 weeks. A large part of the park would be closed during the week but would be open at weekends.

Surveys, designs and negotiations were being undertaken for the projects at Old Merthyr Road/HoV cross valley link; the link from Hollybush to Tredegar; the new bridge at Argoed and the link from Parc Cwm Darren to Fochriw. All were funded by the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) scheme. In addition, work was underway at Senghenydd and Caerphilly as part of the safe routes to school scheme.

Since the last meeting new applications had focused on providing amenities and interpretation along existing routes, mainly through the VRP. Approval had been received for the Gren Way and proposals were in hand to develop a Canal Audio Trail in conjunction with Newport and Torfaen Councils. In addition, there were proposals to further develop the Sirhowy Country Park with local communities.

An events application, which included a long distance walk, had not been approved. However, a valleys wide walking festival project had and the Authority had been asked to bid into this for its walking proposals. An application had also been submitted to the Aggregate Levy Fund for improved interpretation along trails in the Caerphilly Woodlands project.

As part of the VRP and the next stage of the Caerphilly Mountain/Common project, an existing strategy was being used to identify priority access routes to be upgraded/developed over the coming 18 months. Funding had been secured for this work. A range of access improvements was also being undertaken in the HoV area through funding secured as part of the HoV project.

The LAF noted the information and asked for further details of the Valleys Regional Park. Norman gave a brief explanation of the concept of the VRP and suggested that the Director of the VRP be invited to a future meeting to provide further information.

Norman also informed the Forum that further details on how monies are drawn down in relation to the ROWIP would be presented to the December meeting.

7. DRAFT COUNTRYSIDE STRATEGY

Owen Struthers attended the meeting to give a short presentation on the Draft Countryside Strategy, copies of which had been sent to members of the Forum with the agenda for the meeting.

The Countryside Strategy for Caerphilly was produced and adopted as policy for the Council in 1998. The revised strategy sets out the aims and objectives of the County Borough's countryside policy. The strategy is an important document, which provides coordination between different areas of the Council's activities within the countryside. It identifies links between different areas of the Countryside Section's activities and acts as a supporting document for funding applications for countryside initiatives and projects.

The document is divided into different sections each covering a distinctive theme or topic area. The topics included within the strategy, together with their aims, are: -

- *Landscape Conservation and Enhancement: To protect and enhance the landscape and environmental quality of the county by working with landowners and land managers and working with other bodies to carry out schemes aimed at maintaining and enhancing the quality of the urban and rural environment.*
- *Biodiversity and Nature Conservation: The strategy seeks to support, maintain and enhance biodiversity and nature conservation interests and projects.*
- *Countryside Access, Recreation and Enjoyment: The strategy will provide encouragement and opportunities for countryside recreation for all sectors of the community and visitors taking into account the needs of other countryside interests and land users.*
- *Environmental Education and Interpretation: The strategy identifies that the Council will support initiatives, which interpret and provide information, assist in the provision of skills and training within and outside the traditional education system to develop people and provide opportunities for employment.*
- *The Rural Economy: The Council is helping diversity and sustain this economy by delivering the funding programmes of the rural development plan and working directly with key groups such as commoners to achieve better management of the landscape and upland commons.*
- *Sustainable Development and Climate Change: The strategy contributes towards the attainment of the 3 objectives in the Council's Sustainable Development Strategy i.e. promoting longer healthier lives; promoting fulfilled and satisfied lives; reducing resource consumption and assisting with combating climate change.*

The Chair thanked Owen for his informative presentation and a question and answer session ensued. Clarification was sought on the type of monitoring in place for grant-funded projects. Norman advised that there is strict monitoring of how the money is spent and further information on this would be presented to the December meeting of the LAF.

Information was sought on the resource availability to tackle the effects of invasive plant species in the county borough. The Forum was advised that Caerphilly CBC has a dedicated Invasive Plant Species Officer who provides advice, surveys, guidance, research, monitoring and direct control of invasive plant species such as Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed which detrimentally affect the environment, damage biodiversity and substantially increase the cost of development. In addition, Caerphilly is the lead Authority in a Heads of the Valley funded project across the five HoV authorities, which is seeking to control Japanese Knotweed and identify the most cost effective methods of doing so.

Members of the Forum were asked to submit their comments on the draft strategy to Norman by the end of November.

At the end of the consultation process officers would collate all the comments received and make any necessary amendments to the strategy. The strategy would then be presented to the appropriate committee and Cabinet together with the five year Action Plan. A copy of the Action Plan would be presented to the LAF in due course.

8. GLASTIR ACCESS MAPS

Andy outlined the work undertaken by the LAF sub-group in relation to the Glastir scheme and access maps. He reminded the Forum of the new land management scheme, which replaces Tir Gofal, Tir Comin and Tir Mynydd. The Sub-Group, which had been formed at the last meeting, comprising Barry Clarke, Keith Green, Phil Griffiths, Garry Lewis, David Parry, June Piper and Andy Powell, had met on 8th July.

The WAG Rural Payments Department had provided a map, which had been broken down into specific areas by grids, asking officers to highlight where public rights of way and bridleways exist. Andy circulated the map for all to view and advised that the information had been collated and plotted onto the map, which was then returned to WAG within their timescale. Andy expressed his disappointment that to date there had been no acknowledgement from WAG that they had received the information.

Whilst some of the details of Glastir were still unclear, Sarah Tindal (CCW) advised that the scheme would only fund paths that were strategically needed and where there were crucial missing links.

The Chairman thanked everyone who had been involved in the sub-group and suggested that a further reminder be sent to WAG asking them for feedback on the information that had been sent to them.

9. DDA

Andy advised the Forum that although the Access for All Policy had not yet been formalised, DDA works were being undertaken in the country parks, as witnessed by members of the Forum at the site visits to Pen y Fan Country Park and Parc Coetir Bargod that morning.

Reference was made to the access audit that had been undertaken and to the use of 'K' barriers in country parks. Andy advised that the advantage of using 'K' barriers in the country parks was that the width is adjustable to an extent, thereby allowing access to certain areas by motorbility scooters etc. Tests had been undertaken with users of the motorbility scooters and others and the results of the consultation exercise were awaited. The outcome would be reported to the LAF meeting in December.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Sylvia Dolbear raised two issues of concern in the Rudry area, which Andy and Norman agreed to discuss with Sylvia after the meeting.

Norman reminded everyone to complete a travel expenses claim form, copies of which were available at the meeting.

It was noted that the Chair and Vice Chair were unable to attend the National Chairs Conference at Bulth Wells on 12th October 2010 and Norman asked whether any of the

Forum members present would be interested in attending as a substitute. It was agreed that David Parry would attend on behalf of the LAF.

Keith Donovan referred to the recent changes within the Countryside and Rights of Way Sections and sought clarification on the division of responsibilities. Norman gave a brief explanation of the changes to roles and responsibilities within that area.

The Chairman thanked Officers for arranging the site visits to Pen y Fan and Parc Coetir Bargod and for providing the buffet lunch.

The meeting closed at 2.50pm.