



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN PARK,
YSTRAD MYNACH, ON FRIDAY, 18TH MARCH 2011 AT 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT:

Mike Johnson – Chairman

Barry Clarke, Glyn Davies, Councillor Ron Davies, Sylvia Dolbear, Keith Donovan, Keith Green, Robert Jones, Garry Lewis, William Lindsay, David Parry & Nigel Yates

Together with:

Norman Liversuch (Manager Countryside and Landscape Services & Secretary to the LAF), Phil Griffiths (Principal Planner and Assistant Secretary to the LAF), Andy Powell (ROW & Countryside Access Officer), June Piper (CROW Support Officer), Natalie Davies (Living Environment Officer), Owen Struthers (Countryside and Landscape Planning Assistant), 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 Andrew Edwards, Elaine Gwynne, Alison Palmer and Maggie Thomas.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd December 2010 (Minute nos. 1-10; page nos. 1-4) were approved as a correct record.

4. WATER RECREATION

Owen Struthers, Countryside and Landscape Planning Assistant, briefed the Forum on his attendance at an event organised by WAG to seek feedback on the proposal to develop voluntary access agreements.

There is evidence that demand for access to inland water has increased in recent years and the increase may continue into the near future. This has led to a perceived increase in conflict between competing recreational uses, which has been exacerbated by the breakdown in voluntary agreements and disputes about the clarity of the law regarding access to inland water. It is proposed that local access agreements be developed that can take into account all the relevant factors e.g. access that may be restricted at certain times of the year for fish

spawning etc., and that these agreements should be voluntary not statutory.

Owen highlighted the key issues raised at the event and agreed to circulate the notes of the meeting when they were available. Members commented on the importance of maintaining waterways and their environment in terms of promoting tourism.

5. THE ACTIVE ENVIRONMENT REPORT 2011

The Forum received a PowerPoint presentation from Natalie Davies, Living Environment Officer, on the work of the Great Outdoors Working Group in promoting the health benefits of outdoor exercise. Natalie highlighted what the Group hopes to achieve in Caerphilly where 62% of the residents are classed as obese and 80% of the county borough is countryside.

The Great Outdoors Working Group is a partnership between 17 different organisations working together to promote safe access and active use of our countryside and open green spaces, with the aim of improving the health and well being of the residents of the county borough. The Group believes that anticipating and reacting to the signs of future problems in healthcare can help to build a more sustainable future for the healthcare system in Wales. It also believes that its work can bring significant long-term benefits to the National Health Service through prevention of ill health and reduced cost of treatment but that more investment is required to support a green exercise programme.

The Active Environment report will be updated regularly. The next stage will be its implementation and to agree priorities for action to develop a rolling programme, to identify other partners to make links and contribute to the research element.

The Forum thanked Natalie for her very comprehensive presentation. It was agreed that hard copies of the report would be circulated at the next meeting.

Discussion ensued on the content of the report and the timetable for its implementation. It was anticipated that the report would be updated on a regular basis to incorporate changes that would enable long-term benefits. Officers were currently putting together an economic case in an attempt to attract investment.

6. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP) UPDATE

Andy confirmed that the Authority had received £63,208k to spend on improvements to the rights of way network in 2010/2011. A total of 17 access projects had been undertaken, including the installation of k' barriers; handrails; horse access step over barriers; drainage works; path re-surfacing etc. The Department had also re-produced the leaflet detailing the Ridgeway rides, which was also available on the Internet. The projects range in cost from £500 to £12,000. The claims have been submitted and payment is awaited.

As mentioned at the last meeting, the funding for 2011/12 had been reduced and the Authority had been granted a total of £40,000. Officers had to identify projects and report back to CCW by 4th April 2011 with details. The contingencies from last year's allocation would be incorporated into the programme for this year. The possibility of surplus WAG funding being available and shared amongst the Authorities did not come to fruition.

A Member of the Forum drew attention to an area in the county borough where fencing which had been erected to prevent motorbike access to the land, had been vandalised. Officers thought that the area was Forestry land where barriers and horse step overs had been installed by the Forestry Commission. As far as work undertaken by the Authority was concerned, Andy confirmed that this was subject to audit and that if the work was deemed to be sub-standard, the contractor would be called back to rectify the matter.

7. FUNDING UPDATE

Details were received of the key projects that are currently in progress and those that are planned for next year.

HoV projects that are currently being undertaken include the Riverside Pontlottyn, which links to the Safe Routes to Schools scheme. Two access improvement projects are due to commence at Butetown Reservoir and the Angling Club are undertaking work to the north of the site with funding they had secured. A project linking Argoed Rock with Oakdale to enable people to be able to cycle to work is also underway. At Gelligaer Common, proposals are in hand to create a Heritage Walk, incorporating the Gelligaer Roman Fort. In addition, a series of photography walks is being developed in the Upper Sirhowy Valley.

With regard to Valleys Regional Park funding, a tender had recently been returned for the Caerphilly Mountain scheme. Officers are keen to develop two sites at Parc Cwm Darren and Aberbargoed Grasslands and a consultant had been commissioned to provide ideas with regard to interpretation at the two sites. The first of the cycleway projects (SVCP) had been completed. The second, from Argoed Bridge to Hollybush is now underway. The VRP had also funded the production of leaflets this year for Penallta and other country parks.

There are five cycleway projects in progress for the coming year. Designs are being prepared for those at Hollybush North, Heads of the Valleys and Parc Cwm Darren. The other two involve Hafodyrynys and the Canal. Money had been secured from HoV for other access improvements in the Upper Rhymney Valley area similar to last year. There is also funding for a landscape partnership in the Upper Sirhowy Valley. In terms of the Water Recreation Strategy, the European Unit is working on a joint bid for the Canal. There are also proposals for an outdoor theatre, with an educational link, at Parc Cwm Darren.

The Forum noted progress on the aforementioned projects.

8. LAF CHAIRS' CONFERENCE

Mike Johnson briefed the Forum on his attendance at the meeting of the Chairs of LAFs in Wales held at Builth Wells on 15th February 2011. Copies of the notes from the meeting were circulated for all members. The main items discussed at the meeting were as follows:-

- Wales Walking and Cycling Strategy
- Glastir and Tir Gofal *
- Wales Coastal Path
- ROWIP Funding
- Countryside Access Management Systems
- Dog Fouling on Public Rights of Way
- Topics for the Conference to be held on 7th June 2011

* Norman said he would circulate updated information, which had since been received on Glastir.

Andy pointed out that Caerphilly CBC had subsequently been granted approximately £4k more for the ROWIP this year than the figure quoted in the report.

The Forum thanked the Chair for his report on the conference and noted that the next Chairs' meeting was scheduled for 13th October 2011.

9. RUDRY VOLUNTEERS' PROJECT

Andy updated the Forum on the footpath project that was currently being developed in Rudry in partnership with the local community.

The project consisted of a three-phase approach. The first phase focussed on an understanding of map reading; the second on surveying techniques and the third on manual handling.

10. MEMBERSHIP

The Forum was reminded that the Regulations of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act state that all LAFs should have a three-year life span from the date of their first meeting. The present LAF would come to an end later this year and existing members would need to re-apply if they wished to continue as members of the Forum.

Later in the year, Norman, as Secretary to the LAF, would consult individuals and organisations, which he considers have an interest in the functions of the LAF and he would arrange for an advertisement to be placed in the local press inviting applications from interested parties. The formal process would be further explained at the next meeting.

11. SITE VISIT

It was proposed that a site visit take place at the LAF's next scheduled meeting on Friday, 17th June 2011. Arrangements would be made for the Forum to view the work that had been carried out to improve access to bridleways in Rudry and also the work that had been undertaken along the riverside walk from Draethen to Cefn Mably. Following the site visit lunch and a formal meeting of the LAF would take place in Rudry Village Hall.

The Forum welcomed the proposals for the June meeting.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- **Walk in Event.**

This year's event was taking place on 21st May, at Crosskeys. There would be two circular routes of 20 and 14 miles as well as shorter guided walks.

- **Countryside Strategy**

Norman stated that responses had been received and the strategy may be amended to take account of these. An action plan detailing how the Strategy would be implemented would be prepared over the next couple of months. The final version of the strategy and the action plan would be presented to a future meeting.

- **CCW Recreation and Access Newsletter**

It was noted that the newsletter was no longer available as a printed copy but could be accessed on the CCW website. The Forum's attention was drawn to page 17 of the most recent Newsletter which contained a reference to CCBC.

The Chair thanked all those present for their contributions to the meeting and closed the meeting at 12.15 p.m.