



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN PARK,
YSTRAD MYNACH ON FRIDAY, 10TH FEBRUARY 2012 AT 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT:

Barry Clarke, Glyn Davies, Councillor Ron Davies, John R. Davies, Keith Donovan, Andrew Edwards, Roger Evans, Byron Grubb, Lorraine Howells, Robert Jones, Garry Lewis, William Lindsay, Alison Palmer, David Parry, Maggie Thomas, 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), Sharon Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

2. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Norman welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that apologies for absence had been received from Sylvia Dolbear and Elaine Gwynne.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th January 2012 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Barry Clarke queried whether the expense claim forms were available in a more accessible format. Norman advised that officers are hoping to be able to produce all leaflets and forms on line in a format, which would be easier to read by people with sight problems. Andy confirmed that he had spoken to IT officers about electronic expense claim forms.

Norman circulated a list of contact details for LAF members and asked all to update and provide email addresses where relevant.

5. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

Norman reminded members of the procedure for the election of a Chair and Deputy Chair. Each member of the Forum had been provided with a form on which they could express an interest in becoming Chair or Deputy Chair. Members were requested to return the forms to Norman in the prepaid envelope by 1st February 2012. Two expressions of interest had been returned. William Lindsay had expressed an interest in becoming Chair and Garry Lewis had expressed an interest in being Deputy Chair. Norman therefore proposed that the applications be accepted and that William Lindsay be appointed Chair of the Forum and Garry Lewis, Deputy Chair. This was unanimously agreed.

William then took the chair and placed on record his thanks to his predecessor, Mike Johnson, for being a 'superb chairman' and for the dignified and effortless manner in which he had undertaken his duties during his term of office.

6. REPORT ON THE MEETING OF THE WALES RIGHTS OF WAY MANAGERS WORKING GROUP (FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE COUNTY SURVEYORS SOCIETY) HELD ON 3RD FEBRUARY 2012

Andy Powell briefed the Forum on the issues discussed at the Wales Rights of Way Managers Working Group (formerly known as the County Surveyors Society), which he had attended on 3rd February 2012.

The first item that was discussed at the meeting was the Glastir Scheme, which replaced Tir Gofal. Andy advised that the scheme is now operating but the feeling amongst Rights of Way Officers is that it is not as good as Tir Gofal. Glastir is aimed more at strategic routes, for example, where there is a link to a coastal path. If a Glastir farm has a right of way on its land the right of way must remain open at all times and will be subject to monitoring. If a right of way is found to be blocked, the matter can be reported to Welsh Government via an online facility.

Andy reported that there is a Walking and Cycling Bill due to come out in March. Maggie Thomas commented on rumours about plans to convert footpaths into joint footpaths/cycle paths. Andy responded that the LAF is likely to be involved in the consultation process and that the matter will be included on an agenda for a future meeting for further discussion.

Andy then referred to discussions that had taken place with John Griffiths, Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, on access and rights of way issues. In terms of the ROWIP, the Minister did not commit to the matter of future funding but frequently referred to the words 'Prove and Benefits' i.e. the need to prove how many people are using the routes and the resultant benefits to health and the economy. William Lindsay queried whether footfall meters are used in the county borough. Andy responded that the equipment is expensive but monitoring is undertaken in the country parks, with clickers on stiles etc. There are different means of monitoring usage depending on the level of information required.

In terms of other matters raised at the meeting, there are plans to merge CCW with the Forestry Commission and possibly other agencies to form a single Environment Agency/Body. However, no further details are available at present.

Keith Donovan sought clarification on the monitoring that is undertaken of businesses that have been awarded grants and their effectiveness in terms of how the business has benefited, Phil Griffiths advised that monitoring is undertaken at a strategic level by the Wales Tourist Board but not at a micro level. As far as the Rural Development Plan is concerned, a very thorough scrutiny process is followed before any grant is awarded and the outcomes are evidenced. It was agreed that one of the RDP Officers would be invited to the next meeting of the Forum to explain the scheme in more detail and the work that is being undertaken.

At the meeting discussion also took place on the launch of coastal access, which is planned for 15th May 2012 with three national and various smaller events taking place across Wales. Reference was made to the new Director of the Welsh Ramblers, Angela Charlton, who is very keen to develop good relationships with LAFs. CCW are undertaking a survey, seeking information on the length of the network, how it is managed and the amount spent on maintenance etc. CCW are also planning to hold seminars and workshops to share experiences.

7. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND OTHER ACCESS WORKS

Following a request made at the last meeting, copies of a map showing key sites in the County Borough were circulated.

Andy Powell and Phil Griffiths provided an update on projects undertaken/being undertaken this year and those being considered for next year.

A very successful project has been undertaken in Bedwellty, using ROWIP monies, where a permissive bridleway has been created following negotiations with the landowner. Improvement works have been carried out to the Sirhowy Valley Country Walk, in the sum of £4,600. A multi use route has been created at the site of the disused railway line in Maesycwmmmer, using £7,000 of ROWIP funding. Work has been undertaken on a joint access project with Torfaen CBC and as a result £5,000 has been secured from the Valleys Regional Park scheme. In Bedwas, £11,000 of ROWIP monies has been used to upgrade five footpaths. A further £6,000 has been used in Rudry on improvements to the bridleway network. Over £7,000 has been spent on DDA improvements, with the installation of 'k' barriers etc. Phil Griffiths will update the Forum on other projects that have been undertaken at the next meeting.

The Forum was advised that funding sources are drying up and that lean times are ahead. The Heads of the Valleys Programme has almost dried up completely. The Valleys Regional Park Fund will also be a much reduced pot next year. In terms of other funding, early signs are that ROWIP will be continued for one final year although the amount has yet to be confirmed. There may also be other funding opportunities after the merger of CCW, the Forestry Commission and other agencies.

Officers are currently working on five projects i.e. at Penyfan Pond; Parc Cwm Darren; Rudry car park; tree planting via the FC initiative PLANT; and interactive interpretation at the Aberbargoed Special Area of Conservation. A joint project that it is currently in its infancy relates to Twmbarlwm Ridgeline. A grant has already been received for the car park and access works.

8. DATES AND VENUES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Meetings of the LAF have traditionally been held on a quarterly basis on a Friday morning, as this has been the most convenient time for LAF members and officers. Norman proposed the following dates for the next round of meetings:-

- Friday, 18th May 2012 at 10.00am
- Friday, 14th September 2012 (to include a field trip)
- Friday, 7th December 2012 at 10.00am

The Forum endorsed these proposals but asked whether the summer meeting could incorporate a site visit. Norman agreed to look at this and report back to the next meeting.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Opening of Argoed Walking and Cycling Bridge

The new bridge was officially opened on 9th February 2012. Pupils from Markham Primary School who attended the event had named the bridge "Quoits Wood Crossing" as Argoed used to be famous for playing quoits and once staged the World Quoits Championships. The bridge is traffic free allowing walkers, cyclists and horse riders to travel between Blackwood and Hollybush on National Cycle Network Route 467.

Rights of Way

Clarification was sought on the type of information that the Council publishes in relation to rights of way issues. Officers advised that there is a lot of information relating to walks and walking on the Council's web site and also in the libraries and a list of rights of ways in the county borough would be provided for the next meeting. Members of the public are also often directed to the OS maps, which also provide general information on rights of ways.

Contact List

Members of the Forum were asked to check their contact details on the list circulated at the meeting and to update where appropriate.

Annual Challenge Walk

The Forum received details of the annual walk-in event, which is scheduled to take place on 12th May 2012. Further information will be circulated in due course.

10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

CCW are due to attend the next meeting of the Forum on Friday, 18th May 2012 at 10.00 am, to explain the consultation process for the review of open access arrangements in Wales.

The Chair thanked all those present for attending and for their contributions to the meeting.

The meeting closed at 11.32 a.m.