



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT ABERBARGOED GRASSLANDS EDUCATION CENTRE ON THURSDAY, 27TH SEPTEMBER 2012 AT 1.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

William Lindsay - Chairman
Garry Lewis - Deputy Chairman

Barry Clarke, Keith Donovan, Andrew Edwards, Roger Evans, Lorraine Howells,
Robert Jones, Alison Palmer, David Parry, Maggie Thomas, Councillor Ken James.

Together with:

Norman Liversuch (Secretary to the LAF & Manager Countryside & Landscape Services),
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

David Parry advised that he is involved in the implementation of the Gren Way Project (Agenda item 10).

2. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair thanked everyone who had been involved in the arrangements for the site visit to the Upper Sirhowy Valley earlier in the day and the tour around the Education Centre to view the recently designated Aberbargoed Grasslands National Nature Reserve. It had been an extremely interesting and enjoyable morning.

Apologies for absence had been received from Glyn Davies, John R. Davies, Sylvia Dolbear, Byron Grubb, Elaine Gwynne, Sarah Tindal (CCW) and Nigel Yates.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2012 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Norman advised the Forum that he had written to former Member Ron Davies to thank him for his contribution to the LAF during his term of office.

Barry Clarke thanked Andy for arranging the electronic expense claim forms. Andy will email copies to Forum members after the meeting.

Norman would arrange for representatives of the RDP Team to attend the next meeting.

Andrew Edwards asked whether the presentations received at the last meeting were available for circulation to LAF members. Andy confirmed that he would forward the presentation on the review of Open Access to members of the Forum. However, there had been technical issues with the second presentation, which had prevented him from accessing it since the meeting.

Norman introduced the new Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development, Councillor Ken James. Councillor James looked forward to working with the Forum in the future.

5. OPEN ACCESS/GLASTIR

Open Access

At the last meeting of the Forum in May a presentation was received from Chris Heaps, CCW, on the review of Open Access Land in Wales. The Forum had been consulted on the draft maps and had until 23rd November 2012 to make representations as an individual or as a LAF. There would not be another opportunity to review the maps for ten years.

In response to queries from members of the Forum, Andy advised that representations could be made on an individual basis or as a Local Access Forum. The guidance is available on the internet and is relatively simple to follow. CCW will assess the highlighted areas and will notify the landowner(s) concerned.

It was agreed that a sub-group of LAF members would be set up to look at existing sites on the map and discuss whether there should be any additions. Andy would email the criteria to members.

Glastir

The sub-group, which had been established to identify potential permissive access routes, had produced a map, which had been sent to Welsh Government who had subsequently added the information onto a base layer. The map will now form the base layer for the Glastir scheme.

6. REPORT OF THE NATIONAL MEETING OF LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS - 13TH JUNE 2012

The keynote speech at the meeting was received from Mr John Watkins, Head of Nature, Landscape and Outdoor Recreation, Welsh Government, on behalf of the Minister, who was representing Welsh Government at the United National Sustainable Development Conference in Brazil.

Mr Watkins outlined the key achievements. He reported that there had been a threefold increase in the amount of land available by the public through the implementation of the statutory right of access to over 350,000 hectares of open country and registered common land, plus a further 100,000 hectares of land managed by the Forestry Commission.

Improvements have been made to an estimated additional 1300 miles of public rights of way since work started on the implementation of improvement plans in 2008, bringing the total to some 11,500 miles across Wales. Glyndwr's Way National Trail opened in 2002, adding 135 miles of the highest standard trail to the existing 363 miles of the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path and Offa's Dyke Path.

There are some 1200 miles of the National Cycle Network in Wales providing for an estimated 28 million walking and cycling trips annually. In 2010 more than 280,000 mountain bikers were recorded at the Forestry Commission's purpose built trails with Wales recognised as one of the best mountain biking destinations in the world.

Eighteen local authorities had completed green space assessments and 70 Green Flags were awarded last year to local authorities and voluntary groups. On 5th May this year the 870 mile Wales Coastal Path was opened.

The second half of the presentation focussed on Welsh Government's prioritisation of funds. Up to this year there had been £6.5 million for rights of way, £1.7 million on the Splash Water Recreation fund and £9 million on coastal access. These three programmes had been allocated a further £3.3 million this year, bringing the total Government spend to over £20 million since 2007.

Looking forward, Mr Watkins advised that the two priorities for Welsh Government are, to improve public access to land and water with a particular focus on access for families and children and to deliver improvements to rights of way for cyclists and walkers, including work to complete the development of the Wales Coastal Path.

Reference was then made to the development of a single environmental body for Wales comprising the functions of CCW, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission. The precise arrangements for transferring powers and defining the outcomes and operating model for the new body are being worked on but the Minister has stated that the new body would have an important role in taking forward Welsh Government access priorities. Welsh Government is also consulting on proposals in the Active Travel Bill White Paper and urged all Local Access Forums to take time to consider it and to respond.

Mr Watkins was not in a position to confirm in absolute terms what would happen to the different funding programmes but emphasised that the Government wishes to see an increased enjoyment of the outdoors contributing significantly to the economy and wellbeing of Wales and its people.

The other items on the agenda for the meeting were as follows: -

- Health and Outdoor Recreation Report - Arry Beresford-Webb, CCW's Health and Well-Being Officer.
- Perspectives of Countryside Access from a Council's Point of View - Keith Evans, Former Leader, Ceredigion County Council.
- Active Travel Bill - Victoria Marshall Jones.
- Campaign for National Parks: The Welsh Mosaic Project - Helen Jackson.
- Equestrian Trails - Jean Hyett.
- Local Access Forum - Secretaries and Chairmen - Pete Rutherford, Access Officer, Snowden National Park.
- Designing Rights of Way Accessible for All - Joe Penfold, Fieldfare Trust.

The meeting concluded with a question and answer session.

7. PROJECT UPDATES

Philip Griffiths gave an update on projects being undertaken in the County Borough.

In terms of the Valleys Regional Park, it was reported at the last meeting that two of CCBC's schemes had been tentatively approved. However, since that time the whole programme had been pulled and funding withdrawn.

The schemes at Parc Cwm Darren, Penallta Country Park and Aberbargoed had been completed. On a strategic level, funding had been agreed for a cycle way scheme from Pengam to Caerphilly.

The third Heads of the Valleys programme is coming to an end. Welsh Government has found slush funding for this year and officers have submitted potential schemes in the sum of £130k. The outcome of the bid is expected in the near future.

A bid has also been submitted for Tranquil Greener Cleaner grant funding and a joint brief has been prepared with Torfaen in respect of a landscape study in the Twmbarlwm area.

8. THE ACTIVE TRAVEL BILL

Philip Griffiths updated the Forum on consultation on the Active Travel Bill. The consultation ended on 14th August 2012. Due to the time constraints there had been no opportunity to set up a sub group to discuss the seven questions posed in the consultation response form. Phillip briefed the Forum on the responses that officers had submitted to the Active Travel Bill Team. Welsh Government.

Question 1 asked for views on the proposals for Local Authorities to have a duty to:

Identify and map the routes within their areas that are safe and appropriate for walking and cycling; Identify and map the enhancements that would be required to create a fully integrated network for walking and cycling and develop a prioritised list of schemes to deliver the network; Deliver an enhanced network subject to budget availability and following due process; Consider the potential for enhancing walking and cycling provision in the development of new road schemes.

Officers were supportive of the map but considered that this should be an aspiration rather than a duty. They were concerned that the use of the word 'safe' would lead to a higher expectation of maintenance. They were supportive of improving the network and consideration is already being given to enhancing walking and cycling provision in the development of new road schemes.

Question 2 asked for views on how the duty should be enforced. It was felt that this should be via an incentive scheme. Enforcement would only draw on already strained resources.

Question 3 asked whether the type of routes and facilities that local authorities should be required to map should be specified in guidance or regulation. Officers felt that the guidance should be revised.

Question 4 sought views on revising rights of way definitions eg. allowing cyclists to use footpaths or equestrians to use cycle paths. Officers felt that this question raises all sorts of issues, including a potential conflict of interests, a higher level of safety concerns, impact on resources etc. Officers were generally not supportive of revising the definitions.

Question 5 asked for the Authority's views on the proposal for new design guidance. Officers considered that this should be in the form of guidance notes only.

Question 6 asked what the costs and the benefits would be to the organisation, or the people the organisation represents. It was felt that it would provide a coherent integrated useable network, which would be uniform across Wales. However, there would be increased ongoing costs, which would include maintenance and staffing. There is also a risk of raising public expectation.

Question 7 asked whether there was anything else that the Authority would like to be taken into consideration as part of the development of the Active Travel Bill. Officers believed that equestrian needs should be dealt with separately.

Members of the Forum complimented officers on their responses to the questions.

9. CAERPHILLY CHALLENGE SERIES

Andy Powell provided an overview of the proposals for the 2013 annual walking event.

Officers were liaising with Duke of Edinburgh Groups and the Caerphilly Adventure Group and were looking at possible routes in the Caerphilly Basin. It was intended that there would be three routes for walkers of all abilities.

10. THE GREN WAY

Grenfell Jones (Gren), the noted cartoonist, was born in Hengoed. Gren died in 2007 and to commemorate him the Council had created a four mile walk from Hengoed through Pengam, Maesycwmmmer and Fleur-de-lis, taking in features which Gren had immortalised in his cartoons. Artwork depicting some of Gren's cartoon characters had been placed on the walk, the Maesycwmmmer viaduct and Hengoed Railway Station. The Chair and Deputy Chair had been invited to attend the launch, which will take place at the viaduct on 12th October 2012.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Observers at the Local Access Forum

It was agreed that a representative of the Forestry Commission should be invited to attend future meetings of the LAF as an observer.

Mynydd Eglwsilan Common

Philip Griffiths briefed the Forum on unlawful activity at the common.

Stray horses

Lorraine Howells raised concerns about stray horses, particularly stallions, on common land.

12. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Forum was scheduled to be held on Friday, 7th December 2012 at Penallta House. Further details would be circulated in due course.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions to the meeting and closed the meeting at 3.00 pm.