



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN ON FRIDAY, 14TH JUNE 2013 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

William Lindsay - Chairman
Garry Lewis - Deputy Chairman

Barry Clarke, Sylvia Dolbear, Keith Donovan, Andrew Edwards, Roger Evans,
Councillor Ken James, David Parry, Maggie Thomas.

Together with:

Norman Liversuch (Secretary to the LAF & Manager Countryside & Landscape Services),
Philip Griffiths (Assistant Secretary and Principal Planner), Sharon Kauczok (Committee
Services Officer).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

2. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed Jane Tibbot, Senior Tir Gofal/Glastir Contract Manager, Welsh Government, who had been invited to the meeting to give an update on Glastir (agenda item 5).

Apologies for absence had been received from Glyn Davies, J.R. Davies, Byron Grubb, Elaine Gwynne, Lorraine Howells, Robert Jones, Alison Palmer and Nigel Yates; Sarah Tindal, Chris Heaps and Emma Felkin (Natural Resources Wales), Andy Powell and June Piper (CCBC).

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th March 2013 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Norman advised that discussions had taken place with the Police and it had been decided to retain Simon James, Forgotten Landscapes and Crime Prevention Officer, for a further twelve months. The post would now cover the whole of the county borough not just the Twmbarlwm area.

5. GLASTIR

The Forum welcomed Jane Tibbot, Senior Tir Gofal/Glastir Contract Manager, Welsh Government, who had been invited to give an update to the Forum on the Glastir scheme. Jane had attended several LAF Chairs' meetings and also various LAF meetings to brief them on Glastir.

Glastir has two levels i.e. Entry level and Advanced level. Only the Advanced level contains possible permissive access. The first Glastir Entry (GE) schemes commenced in January 2012 and the first Glastir Advanced (GA) schemes commenced in January 2013.

Glastir Advanced, formerly known as Glastir Targeted Element (TE), sits above Glastir All-Wales Element (AWE) and is designed to deliver significant improvements to the environment status of a range of habitats, species, soils and water. The target objectives are: Access; Biodiversity; Soil Carbon; Historic Environment & Landscape; Water Quantity and Water Quality, along with targeted areas within these objectives.

Eligible farmers can express an interest in GA on their annual single application form. Each farm is assessed on its ability to deliver against the outcomes the Welsh Government is seeking, linked to the targeted maps. Each farm will be scored based upon the range and scale of delivery that can be achieved on that farm i.e. the score is calculated for each farm based on the number of targeted areas falling into the farm. The more targeted areas on the farm the higher the score.

The scores are calculated on the proportion of the farm intersected by the target layers, as well as by the weighting of the layer. The scores are adjusted to take account of farm size by dividing the total score with the farm size so not favouring big farms. Different target areas attract different scores dependent on Welsh Government priorities. A higher priority targeted area will attract a higher score. Glastir is a five year commitment and must be underpinned by a Glastir AWE contract i.e. works to be undertaken by farmers in respect of their contract will sit on top of the commitments made in contacting the Glastir AWE.

The Glastir Woodland Management Scheme (GWM) is available to all landowners with more than 0.50ha of woodland. The objectives of the scheme are the same as GA with the emphasis on what woodlands can deliver.

A full discussion ensued on the scheme and during the course of the debate it was noted that the LAFs had been asked to decide which successful existing permissive access areas/routes they would like to see targeted within the TE element of Glastir in their areas and where new permissive access would be desirable. The Forum queried as to why it had been decided to proceed in this way rather than asking LAFs to populate maps produced by Welsh Government. Jane Tibbot advised the Forum that there had been criticism when this approach had been taken during the implementation of the Tir Gofal scheme and that all stakeholders had been involved in the consultation process when Glastir was being developed.

Another query related to the feasibility of the Forum being notified when applications were received by Welsh Government to enable the Forum to consider whether permissive access could be advantageous in a particular area. The Forum was advised that it would not be possible to provide this information until the contract had been signed by the farmer. It was suggested that a way forward might be for the Forum to look at current permissive access and consider strategic routes.

Only routes, areas and woodland shown on the maps produced by the LAFs will be considered by Glastir officers as permissive access for the next entry for the Advanced Glastir schemes starting in January 2014. As Glastir Advanced schemes are signed up, Glastir officers will send details of the permissive access in these schemes to the relevant LAF. A member of the Forum asked whether consideration could be given to increasing the scale of the maps produced. Jane Tibbot agreed to discuss this with her colleagues in Graphics.

Reference was then made to the Glastir score maps and the priorities on which the scheme is scored. If a farmer successfully obtains a GA contract and expresses an interest in Glastir Advanced (GA) on the Single Application Form (SAF), the land covered by the GE contract will be assessed for GA. It will be scored on its ability to deliver against the outcomes the Welsh Government is seeking through GA. Each farm will be allocated a score based upon the range and scale of delivery that can be achieved on that farm. The score will be adjusted to take account of farm size. Those farms achieving the highest scores will be visited, in the main, by a Contract Manager. Each farm must deliver at least one action per objective. Each objective has a list of actions (options), which can be used to deliver this objective. Only those actions are available to that particular farmer. Some of those objectives can be covered by existing GE options. The Forum was surprised to learn that if selected, the farmer can choose whether or not to deliver against the 'Access' objective.

Phil Griffiths advised that a map had been produced showing the PA's identified by a sub-group of the LAF that had been established for this purpose. Any additional information could be added to the map, the scale of which could be increased. Clarification was sought on how specific any areas identified needed to be. Jane Tibbot advised, the more precise the better. The Forum queried whether the map could identify where Tir Gofal grants had been allocated and/or whether the Forum would be notified of all successful Glastir contracts. Phil Griffiths believed that this information would appear on the new maps as it had previously been shown for Tir Gofal access.

The Chairman thanked Jane for the very detailed presentation and for responding to the questions and comments raised.

6. LAF CONFERENCE - 12TH JUNE 2013

The Chair, the Deputy Chair and the Assistant Secretary briefed the Forum on the key issues discussed at the LAF Conference on 12th June 2013.

Jill Bullen gave an interesting presentation on the coastal path development programme. This was followed by a presentation by Professor Denis Murphy on the shared use of routes with particular emphasis on the conflict between cyclists and walkers. Professor Murphy illustrated good and bad practice in terms of the development of cycle paths.

Ceri Evans, Executive Director Natural Resources Wales (NRW), also addressed the conference and explained the work the organisation hoped to take forward during 2013-14, the first year of the new body. The organisation has an operating budget of £179m and manages 7% of the land area of Wales. Its aim is to improve the environmental, economic and social outcomes for Wales through its wide range of services and responsibilities with sustainable development as its central organising principle. During its first year Welsh Government expects NRW to maintain business continuity, deliver effective enforcement and pre-emptive action where there are emerging risks, respond to incidents and meet its European and domestic statutory obligations and take forward the ecosystem approach. Alongside this, it will develop long term plans to deliver increased flood protection, improve urban environments for the poorest communities and create more opportunities for access and recreation using natural resources.

The Forum was advised that funding availability was also discussed at the conference and the feeling amongst the attendees was that funding is going to be more strategic and targeted towards the more deprived areas.

Reference was also made to a number of Bills that are being considered although the introduction of the Environment Bill has been delayed due to a Cabinet re-shuffle within Welsh Government. The aim was to launch the White Paper for consultation at the end of 2013. John Griffiths, Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, has asked for rights of way/countryside access/green spaces etc to be transferred into his remit.

An interesting presentation had also been received on 'Accessible Powys & Denbighshire', which illustrated levels of accommodation that had been looked at in terms of access for disabled users. The Chair of the National LAF had requested a report on the Caerphilly LAF's involvement with the development of access for the disabled. The only other reference was to the Countryside Code, which was divided into three sections i.e. consultation on a code for dog walking, sea angling and sea kayaking.

7. GRANT AID AND PROJECTS

Phil Griffiths briefed the Forum on grant aid applications and current and proposed projects.

As mentioned previously, apart from National Lottery funding, there were far fewer funding pots available. It seemed from Welsh Government guidance that the Heads of the Valleys and Bargoed were likely to be priority beneficiaries in terms of future funding.

In terms of bids, a scheme for Energlyn Sidings had been submitted and phase 1 approval had been received for a project officer for the Upper Sirhowy Valley. The preparation of the second phase of this application scheme was underway. A scheme relating to the Mynydd Maen area was being developed with Torfaen CBC. Finally, there are various upgrades being undertaken to cycleways and routes to schools.

8. PROPOSED OPENCAST COAL MINING AT NANT LLESG, FOCHRIW

Reference was made to the decision taken at the last meeting of the Forum in March to convene a sub-committee to view and discuss the proposals for the provision of access land to compensate for the land that would be lost if the Nant Llesg project proceeds.

Five members of the Forum, together with Phil Griffiths and Andy Powell, met on 4th April 2013 to view the sites prior to reconvening at Aberbargoed Grasslands Centre to discuss each one in terms of the agreed criteria. The group concluded that all the sites would serve a useful purpose during the period of the scheme although further consideration would need to be given as to where and how many access/egress points should be created. It had been agreed that officers would prepare a response to Miller Argent based on the views expressed by the sub-group with a caveat that the Forum wished to reserve the right to comment further at the formal consultation stage.

The Chair wrote to Miller Argent on behalf of the Forum on 12th April 2013, setting out the main issues that had been raised by the Sub-Group. These related in particular to the land that is currently being used for farming where there may be issues with stock on site; the work that is being undertaken to promote the alternative sites to the public and the proposals for the maintenance of the sites on completion of the scheme and restoration.

The Forum sought clarification on its involvement in the formal consultation process. Officers advised that the Countryside Section would expect to be consulted on the proposals when the planning application is received and would request that the LAF is included as a formal consultee at this stage.

9. SEPTEMBER MEETING

It was proposed that arrangements would be made for the LAF to visit Twmbarlwm to see the works undertaken to protect the ancient monument. It would also provide an opportunity to view part of the Mynydd Maen, Mynydd Llywd and Mynydd Henllys Common, which has been subject to a study, which seeks to identify how the area can be protected and enhanced.

Members of the Forum were happy with the proposals and would be informed of the date for the visit in due course.

10. NATURAL RESOURCES WALES - LOCAL ACCESS FORUM - WORK PLANS 2013/14

Copies of a work plan detailing matters that Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Government anticipate that they will refer to LAFs during the year had been sent to all members of the Forum. This was for guidance only and may alter to reflect work priorities. It was noted that LAF Members are also able to put forward items for consideration.

In terms of 'Improving Local Environment' (page 3 of the work plan), the Forum was advised that the Local Authority had already undertaken a lot of work identifying what is accessible and it was suggested that the officers involved be invited to attend a future meeting to illustrate what had been done.

The work plan also suggested that LAFs could become involved with the 'Green Flag Community Award by suggesting public green spaces managed by local authorities, corporate organisations and community groups that could be eligible for the award, which recognises and publicises the best parks and recreational areas in the country. It was noted that the Local Authority puts forward its country parks for this award and that Parc Cwm Darren had been successful last year. The Authority is currently working towards achieving this standard for all of its country parks.

11. RETIREMENT OF NORMAN LIVERSUCH,, MANAGER COUNTRYSIDE AND LANDSCAPE SERVICES & SECRETARY TO THE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

This was Norman's last LAF meeting as he was due to retire from the Authority in three weeks. Norman had been Secretary to the LAF since its establishment and had played a significant part in its aim to improve access in the community. Norman thanked all the LAF members and Phil, Andy and Sharon for all their support and for helping to make his role as Secretary to the LAF so enjoyable.

William expressed his gratitude for all the support Norman had given him since he had been appointed as Chairman of the LAF and for the contribution he had made to the work of the Forum over the years. Norman's dedication and the experience he had brought to the proceedings had been very much appreciated and all his colleagues wished him every happiness for the future.

Due to another commitment Councillor Ken James was not present for this part of the meeting but before he had left he had thanked Norman for all his support and for the professional and courteous manner in which he had fulfilled his role in the Countryside Service and as Secretary to the LAF.

The meeting closed at 1 pm.