



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN ON FRIDAY, 17TH JANUARY 2014 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT:

William Lindsay - Chairman
Garry Lewis - Deputy Chairman

Barry Clarke, Sylvia Dolbear, Andrew Edwards, Roger Evans, Byron Grubb, Elaine Gwynne, Councillor Ken James, Alison Palmer, David Parry, Maggie Thomas, Nigel Yates.

Together with:

Philip Griffiths (Secretary and Principal Planner), Andy Powell (Countryside Access & Rights of Way Officer), June Piper (CROW Support Officer), Sharon Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Glyn Davies, J.R. Davies, Keith Donovan, Lorraine Howells and Sarah Tindal (Natural Resources Wales).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations received.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th October 2013 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Minute No. 6.

The completed questionnaire relating to the Review of LAF Working Practices had been returned to Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and an acknowledgement had been received. NRW are currently analysing the information, which they hope to incorporate within a report to Welsh Government.

Minute No. 9.

The meeting with representatives of the horse-riding sector was scheduled to take place on 6th March 2014.

5. NANT LLESG OPENCAST - PLANNING APPLICATION

Andy Powell gave an update on the planning application for the Nant Llesg Opencast Scheme, which had been received by the Authority. It was noted that Miller Argent had set out how they foresee the access elements in the application and had presented their proposals for the common land and rights of way that pass through the site. Miller Argent are awaiting the outcome of the planning application before submitting a formal application to the Highway Authority in respect of the rights of way. The Chair queried whether there were any other elements that would need to be dealt with at the planning application stage. Phil Griffiths advised that there are usually conditions/reserved matters as part of the consent.

Andy had subsequently met with the relevant Planning Officer who had suggested that it would be more beneficial if the LAF put forward their views on the rights of way element at this stage rather than after the applicant had been determined. Following discussion it was agreed that the sub-group, which had been established previously to consider the proposals for the land exchange, meet immediately following this meeting in order to progress the matter. The views of the sub group would be reported back to the LAF.

6. LAND ACCESS AND RECREATION ASSOCIATION (LARA)

The Forum received a brief overview of LARA's latest document, Traffic Management Hierarchy, which sets out to draw together examples of good practice in the management of motor traffic on byways (byways open to all traffic - BOATs and unsealed unclassified roads) in a way that provides a model for a 'least restrictive access' approach, which can be tailored to suit just about any local situation.

The policy approach to route standards can be summarised as a simple traffic light banding of Green, Amber and Red. Red is poor condition or a route that is inherently fragile or sensitive in some way. Amber is basically adequate and green is good and robust. To move from red or amber to green often requires improvement over and above maintenance. LARA's Traffic Management Hierarchy changes the 'aspiration bias' from green to 'robust amber'.

Over the last 10 years there has been a steady move towards the use of traffic orders that are proportionate to the perceived problem that they are employed to cure. Various types of order have been used i.e. weight restrictions, width restrictions, wheel restrictions, permit access, open day access and most commonly seasonal restrictions. From LARA's overview of traffic orders being consulted upon and made, simple seasonal restrictions are now by far the most common type, typically prohibiting motorcars through the end of autumn, winter and early spring.

7. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP)

It was noted that the Authority had been allocated £36k in this financial year to spend on its ROW programme. The last claim had to be with NRW by 1st February 2014. Andy reminded members of some of the projects that had been undertaken, these included a safety barrier at Bedwas Infants School, ongoing improvement works at Rudry, including a footpath, which will link Rudry School to the common. Other projects included circuits to footpaths and replacing stiles with gates.

In terms of future funding, Andy informed members that whilst official confirmation had not yet been received, it was anticipated that there would be funding from WG for the ROWIP for 2014/15. However, if WG funding ceases in the future it would put increasing pressure on existing scarce resources. It was felt that repairs required to the coastal path, following the recent inclement weather, could also impact on future funding.

8. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (LDP)

Phil Griffiths updated the Forum on the current position with Caerphilly CBC's LDP which is now due for its first review.

The Council had started the review by calling for candidate sites to be nominated for potential allocation in the LDP. The deadline for submitting expressions of interest is 6th March 2014. It was noted that there has to be justification for development and assessment of any nominated sites would commence following the deadline. The LAF would be consulted on the Deposit Plan in October 2014 and there was a possibility that the LAF would also participate in the Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA). If the process runs to schedule a new plan would be adopted in August 2017.

Officers advised that village green legislation was currently under review in England and was due to be reviewed in Wales as part of the Access and Recreation Green Paper consultation.

9. ACCESS AND RECREATION PAPER

It was noted that publication of the Access and Recreation Paper had been delayed due to the volume of consultation papers that WG is currently dealing with. Officers were aware that there would be a reference to village greens and allotments in the Paper and that the LAF would have an opportunity to provide its views on the proposals in due course. Arising from discussion it was suggested that a representative of WG be invited to attend a meeting of the Forum to provide further advice and guidance.

It was recognised that this would be a major issue for the LAF and that dependant on when the paper is released, a special meeting may need to be convened to discuss the proposals in detail. Copies of the Paper would be forwarded to LAF members as soon as it becomes available.

10. GRANT AID PROJECTS

Phil Griffiths updated the Forum on progress since the last meeting. He advised that there are several projects ongoing at the present time. The first at Twmbarlwm, involves works to the car park. The other, which is being undertaken in conjunction with the Twmbarlwm Society, involves improvements to some of the walking routes. Work had also started at Energlyn sidings and planting projects, involving schools, were in progress at Pantside. A study, largely funded by NRW and Tourism, relating to links to cycle routes and forest walks at Cwmcarn Visitor Centre was also taking place. A project relating to a bridge in Bargoed was being submitted for planning consent and several projects relating to cycle paths were taking place at Parc Cwm Darren. A response was awaited in relation to funding for work in the Upper Sirhowy Valley and approval had been received from NRW for an operational grant. A whole range of projects had been submitted for match funding.

European funding had been received to create a new path alongside the river in Newbridge. and several bids, in partnership with other local authorities in Wales, had been put forward for NRW Eco system and Green Infrastructure grants. News on these was awaited. Projects were also being developed for the Valleys Regional Park but it would not be known until September as to whether the bids had been successful. A bid had also been submitted to the Aggregate Levy Fund in relation to access projects, long distance bridleways etc. The criteria for this was quite strict but could prove to be a valuable source of funding in the future. Reference was also made to a WG grant scheme aimed at voluntary sector projects with a possibility of partnership projects.

11. VOLUNTEERS

Andy Powell advised that there are two established groups of volunteers in the County Borough, one based in Rudry and the other in the Islwyn area. Both groups undertake a lot of excellent work for the Authority in helping to maintain the network. There are also individuals who assist the Countryside Warden on a regular basis. Officers were very appreciative of all the assistance received.

12. WALKING EVENT

This year's walking event is taking place on 10th May in Rhymney. CCBC's Countryside and Landscape Service, in conjunction with Rhymney Comprehensive School, Caerphilly Adventure Group, Ramblers Cymru and other partners were once again throwing down a challenge to walkers of all abilities. From a one mile stroll along the banks of the Rhymney River to taking up the challenge of the 22 mile 'Wild Boar'. Further details are available on the website.

13. MAPPING APPEALS

Phil Griffiths updated the Forum on the present position with the mapping appeals process. Following detailed consideration of the Local Access Plans, the LAF had proposed 4 amendments to the Plan, 3 of which CCW had not approved. However, the area to the north of the HoV road linking the Brecon Beacons National Park had now been accepted. Phil had spoken to NRW, in connection with this site and it would appear that an appeal had been made in relation to part of it. Further information would be provided as soon as it becomes available.

14. REGISTER FOR THE WELSH GOVERNMENT'S OUTDOOR RECREATION NEWSLETTER

Andy Powell advised the Forum of the option to register with Welsh Government to receive all their newsletters/announcements via email. Andy would forward the hyperlink to Forum members.

15. PHYTOPHTHORA RAMORUM

An update was provided on the impact of a fatal tree disease, which is infecting larch trees across the country. Phytophthora Ramorum is a fungus-like pathogen, which causes the disease, which can spread to other trees and shrubs.

Most forestry sites contain an element of larch and the two largest in the County Borough are at Parc Cwm Darren and Cwmcarn Scenic Drive. The Authority had already been served with a statutory felling notice for work to take place at Parc Cwm Darren and felling at Cwmcarn was likely to start before the end of the year.

There will be an impact on public areas that will be available during the felling process and implications for the operation of the two sites. It was anticipated that a series of temporary closure orders would be necessary as there are rights of way in parts of the forestry. As a result of the CROW Act, the Forestry Commission dedicated all its woodland for public access.

Councillor Ken James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development, informed the Forum that he had been in discussion with NRW regarding the situation at Cwmcarn and they had provided him with a map, which identifies where the Larch is situated. He had been advised by NRW that a 3-5 year felling programme would

commence at Cwmcarn in September this year. The Forest Drive would remain open until the end of September, after which it would be closed to vehicles other than those used in the felling operation. One of the proposals being submitted to Planning is to amend the access to the Forest Drive to allow the lorries access and egress to the site. Hopefully it would not be necessary to close off the whole area to the public during the felling programme.

16. LAF CHAIRS' MEETING - OCTOBER 2013

William Lindsay gave an overview of the LAF Chairs' meeting he had attended in October.

"The Welsh Government's Woodland Estate" is now being managed by NRW with the policy expressed as "woodlands for people", with themes including recreation, health, enterprise and community. The estate embraces former FC Wales woodland, some national nature reserves and managed water courses. There are approximately 4 million visits to woodlands each year with an average spend of £6 to £10 per adult. Two new initiatives "Woodlands and you" which aims to promote community use of woodlands and "Vibrant and Viable Places", which is aimed at community regeneration.

New dog walking guidance is being prepared by NRW under the themes of dog control, dog mess, safety around livestock; local guidance and opportunity and dog health. It is intended to produce the guidance by the end of the year, with a consultation period between January and March.

A ROWIP evaluation project has been undertaken by consultants for NRW. This included an online survey of LAs and LAF Chairs. The survey revealed good progress and the importance of funding but poor relationships to other policies. The dedicated ROWIP funding was seen as particularly important with ring fencing of budgets being very significant. Emerging recommendations include: a continuation of the statutory process; re-consideration of the ROWIP remit and legislation; NRW to continue with staff support and facilitation; Local Authorities to agree staffing and better monitoring and LAFs to scrutinise and monitor the process.

A presentation on behalf of the Open Spaces Society revealed this body as the historic "parent" of both the Ramblers and RSPB. The OSS has an important role to play in respect of common land, village greens, open space and PROW.

The meeting included a workshop to discuss the Welsh Government's Access and Recreation Legislative Review. This was intended to inform the development of proposals to improve the existing legislative framework to secure increased opportunities for access to land and water.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Forum's attention was drawn to concerns that had been raised about the speed at which some cyclists are travelling along bridleways and footpaths in the Caerphilly/Rudry area, causing problems for horse riders and pedestrians. Officers were currently investigating ways in which they could resolve the problem.

A member of the Forum sought further information in respect of a bridleway at Graig-y-Rhacca Farm. Andy agreed to provide further information in relation to this matter following the meeting.

Reference was made to the launch of the National Trails new website at www.nationaltrails.co.uk which provides information on officially designated long distance routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

The Forum was advised that Maggie Thomas had recently been granted a "Pride in your Place" award. All those present extended their congratulations to Maggie on this achievement.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled to be held in March 2014 but may be brought forward or delayed depending on the date of the release of the Access and Recreation Green Paper.

The meeting closed at 4.40 pm.