



RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING HELD AT DYFFRYN HOUSE, DYFFRYN BUSINESS PARK ON TUESDAY, 26TH SEPTEMBER 2006 AT 1.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D.G. Carter - Chairman
Councillor N.S. Dix - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

P.J. Bevan, D. Cullen, S. Jenkins & K. Lloyd

Together with:

C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), A.J. Sander (Senior Assistant Engineer – Rights of Way), Mrs J. Piper (CROW Support Officer), S.M. Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors M. Adams and Mrs D. Price.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. DRAFT RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), all highway authorities must produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) by the end of Autumn 2007. The Welsh Assembly Government wants all authorities to produce a ROWIP by 1st November 2007.

Mr. Adrian Sander, Senior Assistant Engineer (Rights of Way) presented the draft Plan to the Committee.

The Plan comprises 5 sections under the following main headings-

Section 1 – Structure of Document.

Section 2 – Rights of Way Improvement Plan Process.

Section 3 – The Assessment.

Section 4 – Rights of Way Improvement Plan Partnership Working.

Section 5 – Statement of Action.

The ROWIP must contain a statement of the action the authority proposes to take for the management of local rights of way and for securing an improved network of local rights of way.

Caerphilly CBC aims to provide local residents and visitors with sustainable opportunities to access and enjoy the countryside in their close locality. Reference was made to a number of projects that were being progressed by the Council and its partners in a bid to attract more people to enjoy the benefits of the countryside and a healthier lifestyle. In particular, the ROWIP will aim to ensure that access opportunities within the area, for new and existing networks, meet the present and likely future needs of the public for outdoor recreation, exercise and general travel.

In endeavouring to raise the profile of the rights of way network the Authority is considering how best to advertise the network through different media. One method considered is to highlight certain routes due to their circular nature, showing distance, terrain and walking time. Another avenue which is currently being explored is the promotion of the network via the Internet.

One of the key partners, the Caerphilly Local Access Forum (LAF), has been heavily involved with the production of the Plan and has identified the following nine priorities:-

1. Raise the profile of rights of way.
2. Marry the plan to the health improvement agenda.
3. Put the management of rights of way and the countryside into the community planning process.
4. Ensure Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 compliance where practicable, implementing cost effective measures.
5. Focus the rights of way budget where it can be used most effectively.
6. Make the ROWIP a bid document for the Equestrian Route.
7. Ensure all open access land can be reached easily from the highway system.
8. Develop circular walking routes and ensure their sustainability and use.
9. Agree a programme to finalise an accurate definitive map.

There is a total of 846.80km of registered rights of way within the county borough. 721.47km of paths have been categorised as 'easy to use' and 125.32km as 'not easy to use'. The current cost for the heavy clearance of overgrowth is £2.00 per metre or £2000 per km. The cost for clearing the network will therefore be in the region of £250,640.

The current budget for the maintenance of the network is £67k. Of this, £20k is identified by the Rights of Way Committee each year for two special project works. The remainder of the budget is used in reacting to complaints received from the public, user groups etc.

Some of the works identified through the ROWIP will be accommodated as part of the day-to-day maintenance of the map and statement and network as a whole. However, these works will not complete the various schemes identified. In order to make real progress additional funding will need to be sourced from outside the Authority.

An additional page 54 entitled Cycling – Statement of Action/Draft ROW was tabled at the meeting.

Cycling initiatives will be promoted to improve sustainable community access, improve access for people with disabilities, improve health and fitness and help regenerate and improve the environment and tourism opportunities.

As part of the Council's Local Development Plan process provision for cyclists will be safeguarded. A network of cycle routes will be developed and land safeguarded as identified within the UDP, subject to resources and funding becoming available.

Members were then invited to comment on the draft Plan and the following issues were raised:-

- A Member asked whether key partners could assist with some of the work e.g. by undertaking surveys etc. and prioritising the works that were most necessary. In addition, it was pointed out that other groups might be able to access funds that would not otherwise be available to the Local Authority.

- Page 7 – Raise the profile of rights of way.

A Member drew attention to the benefits of the digital mapping software package “Tracklogs”.

- Paragraph 2.3.01 - Ensure Disability Discrimination Act 1995 compliance where practicable, implementing cost effective measures.

Reference was made to the cost implications arising from DDA compliance and the feasibility of allocating a proportion of the budget to deal with specific DDA problems was raised.

- Walking for Health Initiative.

It was suggested that the contact nos. of secretaries of local Walking Groups be included in the information.

- Make the ROWIP a bid document for the Equestrian Route.

It was requested that a reference to ‘liaison with partnerships’ be included in this paragraph.

- Paragraph 2.7 – Urban Development.

Reference was made to the relatively high percentage (approximately 48.7%) of residents in the county borough who are classed as permanently sick or disabled or have a limiting long-term illness.

- Page 32 – The figures in the cost evaluation table required updating.

Having regard to the fact that it is a 10-year Plan, a Member suggested that the figures in the table be left blank, updated each year and included in the list of appendices.

- Rights of Way Best Value Performance Indicators.

It was noted that a different area was chosen each year to survey. For example, the Rudry network had been surveyed in 2004-05 and Rhymney in 2005-06. There can be huge differences between areas, for example, the involvement of user groups in the Rudry area.

It was agreed to include clarification of how the PI's are compiled and the possible differences between areas, in the explanation.

- Assessing the needs of different classes of user - conflicting interests – cyclists v pedestrians.

Attention was drawn to information leaflets/proficiency training for cyclists.

- Motorised vehicles – misuse of the network with the increase in off road vehicular activity in the countryside.

Reference was made to the measures being taken to deal with the problems caused by illegal off road activities in the countryside.

Concerns were raised that certain users of the network i.e. drivers of horse drawn vehicles could be prevented from accessing certain areas if physical barriers were erected to prevent mis-use.

- A Member endorsed the inclusion of the sentence in paragraph 3.7.02 that “Similar access to the remainder of the network will not be achievable unless there is a considerable financial input.”
- Paragraph 3.10.09 – Publication of routes.

Clarification was sought on the implications for staffing and resources arising from the additional work.

It was confirmed that WAG had not committed any additional funding in this respect. It was considered that the Plans would be used as a basis for bidding for funding.

- A Member sought details of the budgets held by other Local Authorities for rights of way matters.

Mr Sander indicated that there are tables available and that he would include the information in a report to the Rights of Way Committee.

- Key Partners.

The Chair asked whether it would be useful to meet with representatives of the key partners, once the plan had been amended, to discuss some of the issues the Committee had raised at this meeting.

Mr Sander pointed out that most of the key partners are represented on the Caerphilly Local Access Forum and that therefore they would already have been consulted on the draft Plan. The LAF would be consulted on the amendments made to the ROWIP at the LAF’s next meeting in December.

Members endorsed the draft ROWIP and expressed their appreciation of the contribution made by all those involved in its preparation.

The meeting closed at 3.05 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the subsequent meeting, they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN