



## CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN, YSTRAD  
MYNACH, ON FRIDAY 9TH OCTOBER 2015 AT 10:00

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### PRESENT:

William Lindsay - Chair  
Gary Lewis - Vice-Chair

Councillor Ken James

Barry Clarke, Andrew Edwards, Roger Evans, Elaine Gwynne, Lorraine Howells, Sartha Rajoo,  
Alison Palmer, Maggie Thomas, Nigel Yates, Ruth Stones

Together with: Officers – Phil Griffiths (Secretary/Principal Planner), Andy Powell (ROW and  
Countryside Access Officer), Amy Dredge (Committee Services Officer)

Chris Heaps – Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

### 1. WELCOME

Phil Griffiths (Secretary) welcomed all members to the Fifth Local Access Forum.

### BEREAVEMENT - J.R DAVIES

The Secretary referred to the recent death of J.R. Davies, who'd been a Member of the LAF for a number of years. Members and Officers stood in silence as a mark of respect and extended their condolences to the bereaved family.

### 2. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

Phil Griffiths confirmed that the election of Chair and Vice Chair was required as this was a new Forum and as a result, the meeting would be held in two parts. The first meeting would be to elect a new Chair and Vice Chair and the second meeting would be used to go through the main agenda. The Secretary canvassed with the members for any interest in taking up these positions but no response was received. The previous Chair and Vice Chair confirmed they were happy to remain in post and this was proposed and seconded.

### **3. SHORT BREAK**

The Secretary then opened the main meeting.

### **4. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Glyn Davies, David Parry, Michael Benjamin, June Piper.

### **5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

### **6. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 12th June 2015 were approved as a correct record.

### **7. MATTERS ARISING**

Two members have unfortunately resigned from the Forum namely Syliva Dolbear and Robert Jones. Three new members were welcomed to the meeting, Sartha Rajoo, Michael Benjamin (who unfortunately was unable to attend the meeting) and Ruth Stones.

Members introduced themselves and it was confirmed for the benefit of new members that the membership is made up of Countryside Access & Rights of Way Officers from the Local Authority, Farmers, Ramblers, Cyclists, representatives from Disability Access Groups, Ken James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the Environment and Local Residents.

A Member raised the issue of fly tipping and confirmed that this remains a problem even though volunteers are now assisting with the clean-up. It was confirmed that Rhodri Lloyd (Special Projects Officer) will attend the December meeting and provide an update on this subject.

Councillor Ken James confirmed he will be happy to take this issue back to Cabinet as the Council budget is being cut year on year but was not aware that volunteers are being "thwarted" and the Local Authority may need to find another way around it.

The Members discussed the issue of off-roading and it was confirmed that this is an ongoing problem. A local task group has been launched and the local Minister for Blaenau Gwent is involved in tackling this problem.

### **8. ACCESS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION GREEN PAPER**

The Officer referred to the Welsh Government Consultation Document dated July 2015 relating to improving opportunities to access the outdoors for responsible recreation. All Local Access Forums throughout Wales were tasked with completing a questionnaire and the Officer outlined each question individually and confirmed the Local Authority's responses as well as the National Access Forum (NAF). The general theme was the challenges facing all Local Authorities for improving services with less resources and funding available.

### **9. OPEN ACCESS LAND**

Chris Heaps (NRW) made reference to open access land and in particular unimproved agricultural land.

The local maps were revised in September 2014 by the Welsh Government and set out access available to the public. The NRW has provided new symbols available to Local Authorities that are intended to be more clear for the public, when accessing land.

Members were asked to view maps during the meeting and the Committee were asked to place pins where they considered these symbols should be placed. There were four categories of land: Open Country, Public Forests, Dedicated Access Land and Registered Common Land. Chris Heaps confirmed that the symbols will replace existing signage in time when the resources are available.

## **10. LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS CONFERENCE**

Phil Griffiths and Garry Lewis (Vice Chair) attended the recent National Access Forum (NAF) Conference.

This was the eleventh National Access Forum where Jean Rosenhall has been the same Chair since the introduction in 2002. The opening presentation related to Recreation and Access in Wales. Much emphasis was placed on the script relating to budgetary restrictions. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan was considered and it was confirmed that the current green paper is subject to imminent consultation, whereby guidance will be relayed in 2016 and the open review taking place in 2017.

There is a requirement of the departments of the Welsh Government to work close together. It was confirmed that disabled access is being neglected.

The Welsh Government has committed to funding the Coastal Path for the sum of £900,000 over the next five years. The coastal path received 2.8 million visits in 2014 and much emphasis is being placed on the health benefits to the public.

Delegates were informed of the wide ranging threats to funding and consideration was given to alternatives to funding for example Volunteers or Community Council's maintaining rights of way.

Members were informed that the "Come Outside Project" was discussed and it was confirmed that this project has been utilised in twelve out of fifty areas in Wales and has far exceeded the expectation of participants. The programme deals with social deprivation and educationally, people learn to use the countryside and how the countryside functions along with the health benefits associated. Other benefits include self-esteem, confidence building and improvement to life chances. Although funding is due to run out in April 2016 the NAF hope to somehow achieve ongoing funding. There is a new consultation due in October/November 2015 followed by guidance being received in February 2016 focussing on public need and more focus on monitoring. This will be an enhanced role for the Local Access Forum.

## **11. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP) - UPDATE**

Andy Powell informed Members that in 2007 the Welsh Government tasked all Local Authorities and National Parks to publish an Improvement Plan (ROWIP), relating to countryside access and provisions for less able people. The Local Authorities submitted the ROWIP to Welsh Government who provided funding for the Local Authority to deliver what was contained in the plan. Unfortunately, funding has been reduced to approximately £37,500 pa when the budget in 2007 was approximately £60,000 pa. Copies of the plan are available to members.

The Rights of Way and Countryside Team create projects annually. Members were informed that there are two claim periods, the first ending in November and the team need to confirm how

much money is spent at that time as a limit of £15,000 must have been committed to project(s) by that time. The current spend is approximately £18,000 which is well ahead of the limit figure. Andy Powell confirmed that there are rolling projects for instance changing styles for gates this will assist people with mobility problems. Money is allocated for equestrian projects and last year the team funded the Machen Forge Trail by putting a bridge in place. There are other projects lined up this year for walks whereby volunteers are tasked to check on previous projects where repairs may be required.

## **12. FUNDING UPDATE**

Phil Griffiths provided an update in relation to funding bids and the budget. He confirmed an update in relation to the Canal bid which is a multi-million pound shared with Torfaen and Caerphilly County Borough Council which is the first of two applications about to be submitted to Tourism Wales setting out various priorities.

The second application is shared with Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent and the Brecon Beacons and this relates to the 'Upland Project'.

The Local Authority are looking to generate income within the Borough. Phil Griffiths confirmed that there are three events this year arranged at Penallta Park in Ystrad Mynach.

There are three, one year grant approved projects ongoing:

Invasive Species  
Twmbarlwm  
Upper Sirhowy Valley

Phil Griffiths confirmed that the NRW is a big ally with the Local Authority.

## **13. FUTURE WORK/TRAINING OF THE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

Field Fair Trust – is access to countryside for people with disabilities.

It was suggested that Members attend a Disability Awareness Training Course and the Officers committed to arranging this and will email dates and venues to the Committee in due course.

## **14. REPORT OF THE PREVIOUS FORUM**

The LAF agreed on an end of term tenure report at the previous meeting.

Members were asked to volunteer to form a sub-group of the LAF to prepare the report collectively and the Chair volunteered. A Member suggested the Officer and the Chair to provide a "bare bones" report that could be distributed to members who could then offer additional comments. There is no specific format for this report but previous reports could be looked at.

Phil Griffiths considered that a report of this type could be useful in future with ROWIP rather than just attaching minutes of meetings held.

**15. DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next meeting will be held on Friday 11th December 2015, where the meetings throughout 2016 will be agreed. It is suggested that one out of the four meetings will be a site visit (preferably held in June) that would allow Members an opportunity to visit a venue that is relevant to the content of the meeting. All members supported this suggestion.

**16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no matters raised.

The meeting closed at 12.45pm.