



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN,
YSTRAD MYNACH, ON FRIDAY 11TH DECEMBER 2015 AT 10:00AM

PRESENT:

William Lindsay - Chair
Garry Lewis - Vice-Chair

Councillor Ken James

Michael Benjamin, Barry Clarke, Glyn Davies, Keith Donovan, Roger Evans, Lorraine Howells, Alison Palmer, David Parry, Sartha Rajoo, Maggie Thomas, and Nigel Yates.

Together with:

Phil Griffiths (Secretary/Principal Planner), Andy Powell (ROW and Countryside Access Officer), June Piper (CROW Support Officer), Lyndon Ross (Senior Environmental Health Officer), Rhodri Lloyd (Special Projects Officer – Public Services) and Amy Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

Chris Heaps – Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Michael Benjamin to his first meeting of the Local Access Forum.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Andrew Edwards, Elaine Gwynne and Ruth Stones.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

4. MINUTES – 9TH OCTOBER 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on the 9th October 2015 (minute nos. 1 - 16) were approved and signed as a correct record subject to it being noted under Minute No. 7 - Matters Arising – the last sentence in the last paragraph should read 'Local Member for Blaenau Gwent'.

5. MATTERS ARISING

Fly Tipping (Minute No. 9)

Phil Griffiths confirmed that as discussed previously, Rhodri Lloyd (Special Projects Officer, Public Services) will deliver a presentation to Members to explain what the Council is doing in terms of monitoring and controlling the problem of fly tipping and waste management.

6. THE COUNCIL'S WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY – PRESENTATION

The Forum welcomed Rhodri Lloyd to the meeting who presented Members with details of how the Council is tackling the problems with waste throughout the borough.

Mr Lloyd set out the background to the strategy including factors such as:

- Geography/Geology
- Environmental Management
- Employment History
- Affinity with local area and supporter of the countryside
- Commitment to providing a better LEQ, a better Caerphilly and a better Wales
- Environmental and community improvement schemes in both the built and natural environment

Members were informed of the amount of waste the Council deals with on a weekly and annual basis and the different types of collection services that are available to the public. It was explained that a range of disposal facilities are available and unfortunately due to budget cuts, the 6 CAHWR licensed sites are reducing their service from 7 days a week to 6.

Concerns were expressed with the ongoing problem of fly tipping and Mr Lloyd confirmed that incidents have not significantly increased and although budget cuts have reduced the team's presence within the community, less than 1 percent of waste disposed of by the Authority is from fly tipping in the countryside.

Lyndon Ross (Senior Environmental Health Officer) was invited to advise the Forum at this stage on the issue of Enforcement. He confirmed that his Officers form a professional and proactive team, who are committed and experienced and compare favourably with other Local Authorities (LAs). He gave examples of the types of cases the team deal with including abandoned vehicles, illicit tipping and dog fouling and discussed the various prosecutions and in particular the difficult cases that were prosecuted during 2015. Members were pleased to note that those individuals who had been prosecuted, were 'named and shamed' in the local press.

Mr Lloyd informed Members that the Local Authority are working in collaboration with government agencies, third sector and individuals in tackling waste and confirmed there are a network of ambassadors who go the 'extra mile'. He confirmed that a lot of 'clean up' work is on non-Authority owned land. In terms of performance levels in waste management, Mr Lloyd confirmed the Authority has a 60 percent recycling rate, an 85 percent CAHWR site recovery rate and that satisfaction rates for service are constantly high.

In concluding, he advised Members that the Authority understands the strategic importance of maintaining the countryside and remain committed to helping tackle the issues with waste.

During the course of the presentation, Mr Lloyd and Mr Ross responded to the various queries raised by members of the Forum, including particular issues in their areas.

The Chair thanked Mr Lloyd and Mr Ross for their informative presentation.

7. WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION PAPERS

Access Green Paper

Andy Powell reminded members that at the last meeting details were provided of the LAF and Caerphilly CBC responses sent to the Welsh Government (WG) in respect of the Green Paper. He confirmed that there are no current updates and the Authority does not expect to receive any further progress with the Green Paper until after the WG elections in May 2016, when it is hoped that a timeline will be set on how this paper will progress to the White Paper Stage.

ROWIP's - Review of Guidance to Local Highway Authorities

The Forum received a brief overview of the document that has been issued to support the first decennial review of Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs) in Wales, where local authorities must have regard to S61(4) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) that replaces the previous guidance issued in 2002.

Mr Powell advised Members that Caerphilly published the ROWIP in 2007 (to 2017). The LA will therefore need to prepare and publish a new ROWIP and this document will provide helpful guidance in its preparation.

The Welsh Government expects local highway authorities to use ROWIPs to plan strategically for the management, development, integration and promotion of their local rights of way network.

Mr Powell confirmed that there is little difference in this document compared with the 2002 guidance. However, there is no commitment in the document from WG to help fund its implementation for the next 10 year period and this was one of the main points raised by Caerphilly at the consultation stage. Concerns were expressed in relation to the reduction in resources across all Rights of Way sections in Local Government.

8. FUNDING UPDATE

The Forum received an update on current funding bids from Phil Griffiths.

There are 2 current bids that are looking positive, the first is the Canal joint bid between Caerphilly and Torfaen (with the introduction of bike hire at Cwmcarn Visitor Centre). The main Countryside element of this bid involves wider works, including significant access improvements on Mynydd Maen with the potential introduction of a part-time land manager.

The second is an application for funding to NRW for a project to support Aberbargoed Grasslands and its hinterlands. This would make use of Aberbargoed Education Centre as a training centre and this bid has gone through the first stage of the process.

There are potentially 17 applications to be made by Caerphilly County Borough Council for funding under the Rural Development Programmes 'Community Rural Development Fund'. Expressions of Interest are currently being prepared.

In terms of tourism, reference was made to consolidating the hub at Parc Cwm Darren. The caravan park has been improved and it is proposed that this may be extended with the possibility of also diversifying to include glamping pods. The background to this has been achieved by working with NRW.

Reference was made to the European Grant (Life Plus) but unfortunately Caerphilly does not have the resources to take this forward as an 18 month preparation time is required, although the LA monitor this regularly.

During the course of the ensuing discussion, reference was made to NRW and the fact they have not come out well in relation to Welsh Government funding which will impact on CCBC, although no details have been provided where the cuts will be made at this time.

9. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP) UPDATE

ROWIP Funding

Andy Powell provided Members with an update in relation to the current spend and confirmed the allocation of funding for 2015/16 is £37,480. A claim of 40% was made at the end of November amounting to approximately £14,500 which now makes the total £17, 500, for the current claim period. A commitment has been made to spend a further £18,000 to projects, leaving approximately £2K to spend in areas that will be identified in early 2016. The final claim will be submitted at the end of February.

It was explained that this year's projects include changing stiles for gates, which is a rolling programme that involves working with landowners, as their permission is required when structures are replaced. Improvement works have been made to several bridleways through drainage improvements and surfacing. Some handrails have been installed and consideration is being given for improving signage throughout the borough with the purchase of a new style fingerpost, which will be rolled out when the remainder of the current stock has been exhausted.

The Forum sought clarification in relation to the replacement finger posts and Mr Powell confirmed they would be made from aluminium and not wood as previously used. He explained that the wooden posts have a cost implication as they need to be replaced every 8 to 10 years. The aluminium gates are also considered to be visibly clearer.

10. OFF ROADING

Andy Powell updated the Forum regarding the ongoing problem with off roading and advised Members that PC Simon James (who attended the meeting in June) is still in post and trying to combat the problem, although he will also covering the Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent areas.

Members were advised of a recent cross boundary multi agency meeting held in Torfaen that Mr Powell attended. Also in attendance was Chief Inspector Nick Maclean and colleagues from Gwent Police, Local Government Officers from Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Caerphilly and various Commoners Representatives. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the issues of illegal off roading and fly tipping on the commons.

Mr Powell confirmed that although resources are stretched within Gwent Police, they are trying to combat these problems. It was stated that the work PC James has been involved with highlights the importance of partnership working between all organisations.

Reference was made to a presentation that was received from TACP at the meeting that had recently been commissioned by Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Caerphilly whereby LAs are to undertake an Uplands Study. Part of this study produced a South-East Wales Uplands Landscape Crime Toolkit, which provides various elements of trying to combat illegal activity.

This Group is due to meet again in February 2016 and it is hoped that an update in relation to implementing the elements of the toolkit, will be available for the next LAF meeting in March.

11. WALKING FOR HEALTH

Andy Powell provided an update in relation to healthier initiative walks and confirmed that over

3,000 walkers have participated. Over 10,000 walkers attended 671 'led walks' arranged by Brian Bebb across the 80 routes within the borough. 11 volunteers have now trained as walk leaders.

Concerns were expressed regarding the reduction in funding from the NHS in relation to contributing to fund Mr Bebb's role for this project as it has been running for 8 years and Members fear that the capacity will be lost. The NHS fund Mr Bebb's post and the LA fund his expenses. It was proposed, seconded and unanimously agreed that a letter is sent to Mr Bebb's manager expressing the Forum's concerns and requesting the project continues.

12. RIGHTS OF WAY AND PLANNING GUIDANCE

Phil Griffiths gave an overview of a meeting held in the summer with Tim Stephens (Development Control Manager) and some Members of this Forum. The issues of rights of way were discussed in relation to the planning application process and reference was made to a guidance note that has been produced by Leicester City Council. It is intended that Leicester's model will be adopted to suit Caerphilly's needs. The draft document will be brought to this committee for agreement and then approval shall be sought from appropriate Officers.

13. TRAINING – MEMBERS TRAINING UPDATE

June Piper informed Members of a Disability Awareness Training session opportunity for Members to attend, provided by Andy Johnson formerly of the Fieldfare Trust (who had previously provided training to this committee several years ago). Dates of availability were discussed and Members agreed to attend the course on the 26th February 2016. The venue for the training session shall be chosen by Andy Johnson.

14. WALK EVENT 2016

The Forum noted the date of 7th May 2016 for CCBC's Annual Walk Event, which is named 'The Forge – Feet of Fire'. There are routes to suit all abilities and fitness levels including:

- 1-5 mile route (led walk)
- 11 mile route (led walk)
- 17 mile route (self-led challenge: walk, jog or run)
- 17 mile led walk (limited to 30 entrants)
- 22 mile route (self-led challenge: walk, jog or run)
- 22 mile led walk (limited to 10 entrants)

Early bird prices are available until the 1st of March 2016 and more information can be found at www.caerphillychallengeseries.co.uk or follow the team on Facebook on 'Cwm a Mynydd' Facebook Page (formerly 'Rural Caerphilly'). <https://www.facebook.com/ruralcaerphilly/>.

Andy Powell was pleased to inform Members that CCBC's Countryside Service is working in conjunction with Bedwas High School, Caerphilly Adventure Group the Local Ramblers in relation to this event.

15. DATES AND VENUES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed that future meetings of the LAF would be held at Penallta House on the following dates:

- Friday, 11th March 2016 at 10.00am

- Friday, 3rd June 2016 at 10.00am (Site Visit to be agreed at a future meeting)
- Friday, 9th September 2016 at 10.00am
- Friday, 2nd December 2016 at 10.00am

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Keith Donovan expressed his appreciation of the work undertaken by the Countryside Team in relation to the new bridge built on the Machen Forge Trail.

The Chair closed the meeting at 12.30pm and wished everyone a Merry Christmas.