



## CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH, ON  
FRIDAY 9TH JUNE 2017 AT 10.00 AM

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PRESENT:

William Lindsay – Chair  
Gary Lewis – Vice Chair

Councillor N. George (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services)

Mr B. Clarke, Mr K. Donovan, Mr A. Edwards, R. E. Evans, Ms R. Stones, M. Thomas, N. Yates.

Together with:-

P. Griffiths (Secretary/Principal Planner), S. Denbury (Countryside and Rights of Way Assistant), A. Palmer (Community Planning Co-ordinator) and A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr G. Davies, E. Gwynne, L. Howells, S. Rajoo, M. Benjamin and C. Heaps (Natural Resources Wales).

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was received from Mr. William Lindsay (Chair) in relation to Agenda Item No. 17, Eglwysilan Common. Details are recorded with the respective item.

### 3. MINUTES – 10TH MARCH 2017

Subject to it being recorded that Roger Evans was in attendance at the meeting and that in relation to the final paragraph of minute No. 6 – Report on LAF Chairs Conference, it was confirmed that the new ROWIP will seek the promotion of health and wellbeing, and the Chairs discussed whether the new document should be a full with-list or a limited but deliverable one. Both options require Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely (SMART) objectives to be applied. The minutes of the meeting held on the 10th March 2017 were approved as a correct record.

### 4. MATTER ARISING

#### Minute No. 14 – Any Other Business

The Chair confirmed that he will write letters to both Andy Powell and June Piper, thanking them for their hard work, support and commitment to working with the Forum.

## **5. PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD**

Philip Griffiths (Principal Planner) provided the Forum with an update on the roles and responsibilities of the Public Services Board in relation to sustainable development principals within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the formation of the Local Wellbeing Plan.

Local Authority Public Services Board brings public bodies together to improve the economic, social, environment and cultural well-being of Caerphilly County Borough through seven well-being priorities.

The process to establish the various themes that would be included within the Local Wellbeing Plan for Council to take forward were noted. Reference was made to a 'New Environment' paper being compiled by Dr Helen Fletcher of National Resources Wales (NRW) which would be going out for consultation.

Mr Griffiths also referred to Welsh Government consultation document 'Taking Forward Wales' Sustainable Management of Natural Resources' and Chapter 4 which set out proposals relating to access to the countryside. The paper identifies issues in relation to public access to the outdoors for recreation and how improvements would contribute to the goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The proposals under consideration in the paper are presented in two themes and emphasise why green spaces are so important.

The importance of public engagement was emphasised and it was noted that a package would be put forward to the Public Services Board to make this a 'priority measure'. Members were advised that Tracey Evans (Policy Unit) would provide the consultation link with LAF and it was noted that a Sub Group would be established to look at the project going forward. LAF Members Ruth Stones and Nigel Yates volunteered to take part if required and were advised that a Member of the Rights of Way Team can be made available, if necessary.

Reference was made to the Bi-Annual Standing Conference at Llanciach Fawr and Members were advised Public Service Boards Leads would be in attendance. The conference would look at the Wellbeing Objective and would have an environmental theme.

Having fully considered its content the Forum noted the update.

## **6. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Forum received an update on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and confirmation that implementation funding of £36,105 had been indicated, this equated to a slight decrease of 3.7%. The bid was currently being put together to be ratified by Natural Resources Wales.

It was noted that going forward the ROWIP would be married with the health agenda. An update was given on the position of the Bridle Way improvements, Rights of Way promotional material, signage and the continuation of improvement works for those with mobility problems.

With regard to the review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan it was explained that while this was underway the Council would wait to replace Andy Powell.

Having fully considered its content the Forum noted the update.

## 7. CAERPHILLY ACTIVE TRAVEL PLAN

The Forum was advised of a revision to the report title which should read the Active Travel Integrated Network Map.

Mr Griffiths apologised on behalf of Liz Gibby the author of the report who unfortunately was unable to attend the meeting. The Officer summarised the report which would also be presented to the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee as part of the consultation process prior to seeking Cabinet approval.

It was noted that the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 places new duties on local authorities in Wales to produce and publicise active travel maps. Caerphilly's Existing Routes Map was approved by Welsh Government in April 2016 and the next stage in the process was to produce an Active Travel Integrated Network Map (INM) which would need to be completed by November 2017. Part of this process was a 12 week public consultation on the draft INM.

Active travel means walking, cycling and the use of mobility scooters for everyday journeys. These would include journeys to school, work, shops and to access services such as health or leisure centres. However this does not include walking and cycling for recreational purposes. Its primary aim is to promote healthier lifestyles and reduce the negative impacts of traffic on our neighbourhoods and communities by making active travel the most attractive option for shorter journeys.

As well as producing active travel maps the Act requires Council's to deliver year on year improvements in active travel routes and facilities, make enhancements to routes and facilities for pedestrians and cyclist in new road schemes and have regard for the needs of walkers and cyclists in a range of other highway authority functions.

Areas within Caerphilly determined by Welsh Government for inclusion were noted as: - Aberbargoed, Abercarn, Abertridwr, Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly, Cwmfelinfach, Llanbradach, Machen, Nelson, New Tredegar, Newbridge, Pontllanfraith, Pontlottyn, Rhymney, Risca, Wattsville, Ynysddu and Ystrad Mynach.

The consultation process was summarised and the forum were advised of the different methods of getting involved. It was noted that the questionnaire would be available on-line via the dedicated Active Travel page on the CCBC Website. Hardcopies would be made available at all libraries across the County Borough. Seven active consultation sessions would also be held in the libraries themselves. The consultation would also be promoted through Newline, social media and email to a range of internal and external stakeholders. Forum Members were encouraged to access the website and leave their comments on the map.

The active travel proposals would be grouped into either short (1-5 years), medium (5-10 years) or long-term (10-15 years) schemes. The development and delivery of these proposals would be dependent on funding becoming available.

The final version of the Active Travel INM is required to be submitted to Welsh Government for approval by 3rd November 2017 and would need to be reviewed and resubmitted within three years of approval.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and Members comments and questions were welcomed.

Ms Ruth Stones confirmed that she had attended the roadshow event in Caerphilly Library to consider its impact on horses and riders and confirmed that it was very good.

Having fully considered its content the Forum noted the report.

## 8. EGLWYSILAN COMMON

With the permission of the Chair it was moved and seconded that Agenda Item No. 17 Eglwysilan Common be brought forward and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

Mr William Lindsay (Chair) declared an interest in this item as he had written on behalf of supporters of the planning enforcement notices issued in regard to Eglwysilan Common.

Mr T. Jones and Mr K. Stephens, local land owners attended the meeting and circulated an aerial photograph taken of the area and advised the Forum of an application to down-grade byways 117, 118 and 119. Reference was made to a number of tracks shown on the byways and the impact of off-roaders was discussed.

The Forum discussed correspondence with the Open Space Society with regard to the common land and those with an interest in walking. Having the countryside accessible for all those interested in using it was discussed further as was the fencing of footpaths which could prohibit walkers.

The level of LAF support for motorised vehicle such as off-roaders and their access to the countryside was discussed. Balancing the role of the Local Access Forum within such a contentious issue and its commitment under its constitutional principle to promote and retain the legitimate use of the countryside. The legislation pertaining to both sides was debated. The Officer confirmed that the Rights of Way Cabinet Committee would determine any application.

Reference was made to similar issues experienced in Blaenau Gwent and the National Parks response to problems they had. The Officer confirmed that this was an issue for Commons throughout the Valleys and across South Wales. The legality of motorised access to Commons was debated further. The impact of bracken fires throughout the spring months and the need to safeguard and provide safe access to the countryside was emphasised. The down-grading to a restricted byway which would give access to all other forms of transportation (horse and cart etc.) other than motorised vehicles and the need to protect existing legal rights was then discussed.

It was noted that there was a democratic right to apply to the Rights of Way Cabinet Committee for such amendments and it would be a decision for that committee. Mr Griffiths confirmed that the lines on the plan were definitive which was disputed by Mr Jones who questioned the age and authenticity of the lines within the map being used for identification.

Mr Griffiths set out the process for the Rights of Way Cabinet Committee and advised that following this procedure the application would in all likelihood be referred to the Planning Inspectorate for Wales. He confirmed that there was a backlog in rights of way applications.

Discussion returned to the level of LAF support for motorised vehicles on by-ways and the need to respect the legal issues involved. Reference was made to a number of Section 59 notices issued by Police with regard to illegal off-road use. The Forum were also mindful of the general misconception that these vehicles were causing damage to the mountain and wished to emphasise the need to promote 'all' legal use. It was agreed that within the legal framework and the principles of the Local Access Forum, they would have to be in favour of any legal use on byways.

Reference was made to Penallta Park and the use of restrictions that apply there compared to that of Common land. In response it was noted that Penallta Park was not common land whereas Eglwysilan is common land with legal byways and with that comes the public right to use the countryside.

## 9. FUNDING UPDATE

Mr Griffiths provided an update on the present position of funding applications. He confirmed that a Stage 2 application under the Sustainable Management Scheme is ongoing and a final bid for joint funding with Torfaen County Borough Council covering the Uplands Project shall be submitted in late July 2017.

A Stage 1 bid has been approved for the Rural Development Fund, which the Officer hoped would see the money available to spend in the autumn.

Unfortunately the bid in relation to the Merthyr and Gelligaer Common did not receive Welsh Government approval.

RDP working with Merthyr and Gelligaer Commoners on bids of £165,000 plus.

Funding for a Scheme of mapping Heritage and Digital Landscapes is being developed.

Funding for a scheme to update access to the Bryn Oer Tram Road which is hoped to be approved on the 22nd June 2017.

In relation to the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle the Officer confirmed that the Council is working with project partners in Torfaen County Borough Council and Visit Wales on the proposals which will be considered by Cabinet in July 2017 for approval.

In terms of core funding Mr Griffiths confirmed that he would be working with Welsh Government on further funding streams however there were not that many other grants available.

## 10. REPORT OF LAF CHAIRS MEETING

Mr William Lindsay (Chair) provided Members with an overview of the last LAF Chairs meeting.

The Chairs meeting received an update from Welsh Government in relation to Landscape and Recreation which provided a basic starting point for land management activities. It outlined three main priorities going forward, achieving consistency, simplifying and improvement. The proposals will lead to a white paper and the First Minister will make any decisions.

Details of the Glastir Management Scheme was discussed at the meeting, which offers financial support to farmers and land managers for specific environmental goods and services aimed at combating climate change, improving water management and maintain and enhancing biodiversity. The Forum discussed access route issues in relation to Glastir projects. Forum Members agreed that they would like to see a report on Glastir as a future agenda **item** and Mr Phil Griffiths confirmed that he would prepare this for **a future** meeting.

Mr Lindsay then referred to the Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey and advised participation had been very low.

The relationship between LAFs' and Councils was debated and Members were conscious that limited resources would impact on the input of LAFs' in going forward. The future of arrangements with National Resources Wales was also discussed in light of likely cut backs. It was noted that there were currently 4 meetings being facilitated by NRW and in all likelihood they would be reduced to 3. Forum Members agreed that they would like to see one of these meetings opened up to include Vice Chairs and Forum Secretaries. Gratitude was expressed to Mr Lindsay for this attendance given the frequency of the meetings. Mr Griffiths confirmed that he would support a reduction in meetings.

Members thanked Mr Lindsay for his update.

## **11. PLANNING GUIDANCE**

Mr Griffiths circulated a copy of the Planning Guidance for the Forum's consideration. He advised that the cover photograph would be changed and referenced section 5 of the report which would contain 2 photographs when finalised. The Officer also confirmed that hyperlinks to the website would also be included and would also be sent out with planning applications.

The Forum considered the guidance and agreed that it would be a valuable reference document.

## **12. ADOPT A GATE**

Mr Griffiths provided the Forum with an update and advised that the initiative was 'Donate a Gate' rather than 'Adopt a Gate'.

Members discussed the initiative which they noted was already in place on the Isle of Wight. The initiative is organised by the local Ramblers who run a successful donate a gate scheme, where stiles have been swapped for gates on permissive paths created over private land.

Mr Griffiths confirmed that he would invite a representative from the Ramblers' Association attend a future LAF meeting.

Ms Stones expressed an interest on behalf of the Equestrians in terms of this project.

## **13. WALK EVENT**

The Forum were informed of the recent 'Walk Event' that started in Rhymney at the North of the Valley for the 2017 Caerphilly Challenge Series, which was an over whelming success. With over 500 registered entrants and 450 of all abilities taking part in various routes throughout the day. The range of routes were suitable for beginners, more experienced hikers and runners, including a 22 and 14 mile unled routes and an 11 mile and 1 – 5 mile led routes.

The event was organized by Caerphilly County Borough Council's Countryside Service and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board in conjunction with Lets Walk Cymru, Caerphilly Adventure Group, Islwyn Ramblers, Caerphilly Ramblers, the Penallta Strollers and The Pengam Strollers.

The Forum was pleased to note that attendance was very good, there were no incidents during the day and positive feedback was received by all those involved with the event and looked forward to receiving the arrangements for next year.

## **14. DATES FOR DIARY**

The Forum was asked to note the schedule of forthcoming events and reference was made to the opportunities to explore the Caerphilly countryside this September with a number of guided walks and family events. The events available are:

- A 5km stroll at Machen Forge
- The 'Ten Stone Trail' at Parc Cwm Darran
- 'Picnic in the Park' returns to Bedwas Riverside Park

- Walks and Talks in 'Marvelous Mynyddislwyn' in some of nature's finest autumnal views, part of the free Valleys Walking festival.

Ms A. Palmer confirmed she would distribute posters at her Third Sector meetings which will cover Community Centres that will help to advertise these events. Further details can be obtained on the Council's website at [www.caerphilly.gov.uk](http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk).

#### **15. RIGHTS OF WAY STAFF**

Mr Griffiths provided an update in relation to staffing levels within the Rights of Way Team and confirmed that an advertisement for the Senior Post had been placed with a closing date of the 8th June 2017. In terms of the Junior role within the team, this would be considered after the Senior post had been filled.

#### **16. TRAINING**

Mr Griffiths confirmed that training for the Local Access Forum Members would take place before the next meeting and would be particularly beneficial for new Members to attend.

#### **17. SITE VISIT**

Mr Griffiths confirmed there would be a site visit, this afternoon at Parc Penallta for the Forum to see the works that have been undertaken and what is being proposed in the future.

#### **18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr Griffiths advised the Forum of the present position of the tree felling programme within the Borough and confirmed that there was a further 2 years of work to progress. Main areas for works had been identified and were continuing.

In relation to Solar Panels, available guidance was referenced and it was noted that Welsh Government were heavily promoting the use of renewable energy and Council policy also supported and promoted the use of renewable energy production. The Forum expressed concern in relation to Solar Farms.

The Chair advised the Forum that this would be Mr David Parry's last meeting as he is moving to a new farm out of the Borough. Mr Parry was thanked for his valuable contribution during his membership on the Local Access Forum.

#### **19. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

This has been arranged for 8th September 2017.

The meeting closed at 12.40 p.m.