



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN,
YSTRAD MYNACH, ON FRIDAY 9TH MARCH 2018 AT 10:00AM

PRESENT:

William Lindsay (Chair)

Councillor Nigel George (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services)

Councillor Walter Williams, Michael Benjamin, Glyn Davies, Keith Donovan, Roger Evans, Elaine Gwynne, Alison Palmer, Maggie Thomas and Nigel Yates.

Officers – Phil Griffiths (Secretary/Principal Planner), Andy Fleming (Countryside and Rights of Way Officer), Amy Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Barry Clarke, Andrew Edwards, Chris Heaps – Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Lorraine Howells and Ruth Stones.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 8TH DECEMBER 2017

Subject to it being recorded that Elaine Gwynne's apologies had not been recorded, the minutes of the meeting held on the 8th December 2017 were approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Agenda item 4 – Matters arising from the Minutes of the 9th June 2017 – Glastir Update

Phil Griffiths confirmed that he had not been successful in arranging for a representative to attend this meeting to provide an update on Glastir. He read out a statement provided by Cerys Drew that provided a summary of Glastir Permissive Access Objectives and advised that this is a complicated and intricate process.

Agenda item 15 – Any Other Business – National Resources Wales (NRW) – Tree Felling

Phil advised that he has spoken with Mr Peter Clarke (Manager at NRW) in relation to tree felling in the lower Islwyn area and confirmed that works have been completed in that area. Maggie Thomas confirmed that she had walked in the Medart area the previous day and the paths referred to previously had been cleared. She felt that the tree felling process had taken a long time to complete and that cycle routes took priority. She also stated there was no evidence of re-planting of trees in the area.

5. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Councillor Walter Williams to his first meeting of the Local Access Forum.

6. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Andy set out how the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) was first published in 2008 and its purpose of how Caerphilly County Borough Council identifies, prioritises and plans for improvements to the access available in the County. The Plan sets out the basis for all Rights of Way work.

He advised that legislation now requires the Local Authority to produce a new ROWIP and set out the review requirements that include:

- an assessment of the extent to which local Rights of Way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
- the opportunities provided by local Rights of Way for exercise and forms of open air recreation and the enjoyment of the County;
- the accessibility of Rights of Way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.

The role of the Local Access Forum (LAF) was discussed. It was explained that the LAF (with other bodies) must be consulted prior to the review of a ROWIP. There is an expectation that they will be involved throughout the process and kept informed of progress with the development and subsequent implementation of the Plans.

The LAF were advised the new ROWIP will be developed from 'scratch'. This will be an inclusive document that will set out a 10 year plan. The work involved will be shared with Members of the ROW Team who will endeavour to complete the review in line with the target date. Andy confirmed this will be a working document, designed with an action plan that will be reviewed on an annual basis or every 3 years, this is yet to be confirmed.

The Chair thanked Andy for his work undertaken so far in what will be a 'mammoth task' in moving forward.

7. RIGHTS OF WAY FUNDING

Phil advised the Forum that ROWIP funding has been withdrawn (approximately £36,000 pa) although no formal notification has been received. Welsh Government has confirmed this was only ever a temporary funding stream. It was acknowledged that this funding has provided over a third of a million pound in the last decade which has resulted in some very good projects that have improved the access network. This funding was in addition to the maintenance budget and other grant support received. It is anticipated that the amount of £36,000 can be made up from increased sources of funding from elsewhere (NRW).

8. FUNDING UPDATE

Phil provided an update on the Rural Community Development Fund (RCDF) funded study into 'Bryn Oer' tramway which is located at the north of the Rhymney Valley. This has now been commissioned and many Consultants are involved and working in conjunction with Sustrans, Gwynydd and Richard Rees who is well known in this area of expertise.

In terms of other Rural Development Programmes (RDP) funded programmes include the 2 **SMS** projects. A service level agreement has recently been signed between Caerphilly and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's to allow the Gelligaer Common Project to proceed and the South Caerphilly Landscape Partnership approval letter is due imminently.

The LAF were pleased to note that Core Funding from NRW has been increased for natural resource management following years of cutbacks. Some access works are included in this and this will help pay towards wider countryside ranger costs.

Reference was made to the previous meeting and the discussion around NRW Competitive Grants. It was explained that 7 projects were applied for and the Council was successful with 2 of those bids. One of which relates to 'Forest Health' which builds upon Brian Begg's healthy walking initiative and it is hoped that volunteers can be encouraged to assist in managing the access network. The second project relates to 'Invasive Plants'.

The Team was also successful with 3 out of 3 funding applications for Green Infrastructure Grants, launched by Welsh Government. With particular importance is the 'Pollinator Project' which aims to increase the biodiversity of green spaces including all types of access tracks and highway verges. This will pay for the practical works and machinery involved with the project. Other funding will be used to prepare a Countryside/Green Infrastructure Strategy. The grants approved for these projects amount to approximately £150,000.

9. GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

Phil advised that Welsh Government are looking at new ways of working. They are looking at how we analyse our lives and the affect this has. He referred to terms such as 'Natural Resource Management' and 'Ecosystem Services' that supports the approach of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It is intended that a Consultant will be engaged to tie in regional strategies and prepare a GI Strategy that covers the urban and rural developments. This will cover issues such as connectivity for wildlife as well as access. The aim is to have a prioritised Strategy that can influence land use and land management.

The next stages of developing the Strategy were set out that include working with Elected Members, Public Service Boards (PSB's) and Community Groups. It was suggested that a representative from the LAF become involved with this process and join the interest Group which is unlikely to meet prior the LAF June meeting.

The LAF supported this Strategy in moving forward. Conversely, a Member expressed concerns in respect of the location and visual impact of some wind turbines in particular those close to the entrance of Country Parks and those visible to residential areas. The LAF discussed this issue in detail.

10. MODIFICATION ORDERS

Andy delivered a presentation on the process of Modification Orders and provided examples where these arise. He advised that the team have a number of outstanding Orders to action and workloads are currently being prioritised. The cut-off date for applications is 2026.

11. TWMBARLWM TREK

Phil informed the LAF that Nikwax are sponsoring and providing additional marketing for this year's Caerphilly Challenge (Twmbarlum Trek) that has been arranged for the 12th May 2018. The walks available cover distances of 5, 10, 15 and 20 miles. Approximately 70 volunteers have committed to helping on the day which will involve setting up, registration, manning stations and leading and back marking the walks. Partners include Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Caerphilly Adventurers, Caerphilly Ramblers, Islwyn Ramblers, Pengam Strollers, Bedwas Strollers, Penallta Strollers and Coleg Gwent.

12. COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM MOBILE

Andy provided the LAF with details of the Countryside Access Management System (CAMS). This is a package used by many Local Authority's for undertaking Rights of Way work.

He advised that funding has been made available for the current equipment to be updated that will enhance the performance of details of works undertaken and plot furniture and issues on the map using GPS. The benefits of the CAMS device was set out and it was explained that this is ideal for carrying out condition surveys, will provide an immediate information resource and will also provide a detailed recording of site visits. Essentially, the CAMS mobile provides live data that can be accessed via smartphone or tablet which is fast and accurate and consists of a built in camera. Further details will be provided as the update is received and progressed.

13. OFF ROAD VEHICLES MEETING

Andy informed the LAF of a meeting he attended on 17th October 2017 with Nick Smith (MP's Office), Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office and Gwent Police. Representatives from Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen County Borough Council's and other interested parties attended to discuss the issues of off road vehicles. The meeting was held at Police Headquarters in Croesyceiliog in Cwmbran. The purpose of the meeting is a collaborative approach to reducing/preventing 'off roading' and the misuse of commons. He gave an overview of what was discussed at the meeting with emphasis on the importance of education and users and the impact of law enforcement in this area. Andy urged Members of the LAF to attend the next meeting (date to be confirmed) as he feels that Members will provide a valued contribution.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Annual Site Visit – the Forum agreed this year's site visit will follow the meeting held on the 7th September 2018. The venue will be agreed at the Meeting in June.

Phil advised that Chris Heaps (Representative from NRW) will no longer be covering the Caerphilly area and Sarah Tindall will now be the LAF Representative for NRW. It was suggested that the LAF write a letter to Chris thanking him for his valued contribution and support over the years and wishing him well in his future endeavors.

The meeting closed at 12:35 pm.