



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON FRIDAY, 4TH JUNE 2021 AT 10.00 A.M.



M. Benjamin – Chair

PRESENT:

A. Edwards, A. Evans, D. Hale, L. Howells, D. Llewellyn, J. Morgan, M. Pointon, M. Thomas, W. Williams, and N. Yates.

Together with:

P. Griffiths (LAF Secretary/Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager), A. Fleming (Countryside and Rights of Way Officer), C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), J. Horwood (Senior Engineer), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer) and C. Evans-Thomas (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being filmed but would not be live streamed, however a recording would be available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here To View](#).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from A. Palmer, R. Stones and Dr. A. Wilson.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 12TH MARCH 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2021 were approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Following consideration of the Minutes and discussions there were no matters arising.

5. ACTIVE TRAVEL PLAN.

The Chair welcomed Mr Clive Campbell and Jason Horwood to the Forum, who provided the Forum with a detailed presentation on the Consultation on Walking and Cycling in Caerphilly.

The Forum thanked the Officers for the detailed presentation and discussion ensued.

A Member raised concerns around the increased risk to walkers on a few paths across the borough, because of the increased use of cycles and in particular areas of multiple vehicle use. Officers explained that there is guidance provided by Welsh Government in relation to the design and hierarchy of routes, which is applied to various routes across the borough, this includes heavily walked areas. However, there is an element of common sense and courtesy required from users to maintain the safety and viability of routes.

Discussions took place around the use of electric scooters, a scheme which has been adopted in several towns and cities in England, and the advantages and disadvantages of similar schemes being adopted within the borough. Officers explained that this is a long-term project, and requires a large culture change, around the use of electric scooters.

Members raised several concerns around multi-use areas and concerns in which many cycle users do not use bells, thus resulting in accidents. Officers explained that new cycles are often fitted with bells, however it is difficult to enforce their use when users remove them or simply do not use them. Members raised concerns for older users who are less likely to use the paths because of the increased cycles.

A Member raised concerns around new housing development sites and the lack of kerbs and pavements in some areas and queried whether the Transport and Planning departments consider the Active Travel Plan and walkers when agreeing to developments. Officers assured the Member that the Highways Department are considered as part of the Planning Process and provide comments around the various implications of a development. It was noted that pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and car users are all considered, with pedestrians and walkers as the first priority during the planning process in respect of a Planning Application.

The Forum thanked the Officer for the detailed presentation and noted the updates provided.

6. VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK.

The Local Access Forum welcomed Mr Phil Lewis, Strategic and Operational Lead for the Valleys Regional Park who provided the Forum with a video and presentation on the background and plans and proposals for the Valleys Regional Park.

The Forum thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

The Forum were pleased to note the projects and the proposals to increase the connections to nature, but a Member sought further information on the plans to protect wildlife. Officers explained that work is underway with a representative from Natural Resources Wales (NRW), who is the lead Officer for landscape with a strong ecological background, his experience and knowledge will endeavour to maintain the wellbeing of the landscape. The Officer suggested that, should the Forum require further information, contact details of the Officer can be provided.

Discussions took place around landscapes on Gelligaer/ Merthyr Common and the continued destruction of works on the land because of illegal off-roading, fly tipping and fly grazing. It was noted that the Warden for the area provides a valuable service but sought further information on the work being undertaken to prevent the ongoing concerns. Officers agreed that rural crime is a concern and forms part of the plan.

The Forum discussed the video, and whilst they felt that it was an excellent piece of promotional work, demonstrated concerns in respect of a particular clip around lighting a fire/ BBQ. Officers explained that this activity is part of the Bushcraft works being undertaken, however feedback will be provided as it was felt that this could be taken out of context.

The Forum thanked the Officers and noted the update.

7. COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE.

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager, with the permission of the Chair and Forum requested that this item be deferred to the next meeting in the absence of the Cabinet Member.

Following consideration and discussion, it was agreed that this item be deferred.

8. COMPOSITION OF RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE.

The Forum noted that, following the recent Council AGM, there have been changes to the composition of the Rights of Way Committee. Councillor John Ridgewell has been replaced with Councillor Nigel George due to a change in Cabinet Members and portfolio and Councillor Colin Gordon has been replaced by Councillor Andrew Whitcombe because of conflicts of interest.

The Forum thanked the Officer and noted the update.

9. LAF STANDING ORDERS.

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager provided the Forum with an update on the Welsh Government Legislation in respect of Local Access Forum Meetings. It was noted that the legislation dictates that Local Access Forums (LAF) are to meet in person, however recent legislation due to the ongoing Pandemic has been amended to allow LAF's to continue meeting remotely until the end of the year. The Forum were asked to provide their comments and feedback on future meeting arrangements.

Following consideration and discussion, the Forum agreed that, considering the ongoing restrictions and risks associated with the Pandemic, that the Forum should continue to meet remotely until the end of the year. However, discussions took place around the benefits of remote meetings such as increased attendance, more accessibility and environmental benefits and felt that hybrid attendance be explored as options for the Forum.

10. RIGHTS OF WAY WORKS.

The Local Access Forum welcomed Mr Andrew Fleming, Rights of Way Officer, who provided the Forum with an update on recent works.

It was noted that work has been underway over the past 2 months on the development and launch of a new website, which is now up and running. There have however, been a few hiccups, particularly around the online Definitive Maps, and that markings on the lines may deviate slightly on the ground compared to that on the online map. Officers urged the Forum to raise any issues they note with Officers for this to be remedied.

It was noted that because of the lockdowns, there has been a significant increase in public use of the Rights of Ways and footpaths, and as a result, a number of claims have been submitted for injuries. The Forum were asked to report any issues they, or their respective

groups note along these pathways, as the 2 Officers are not able to cover and note each of the routes due to the vast number within the borough.

The Rights of Way Officer added that a request has been received to provide labels along the Cambrian route, which stretches from South to North Wales, which has been provided by Adventure Smart. The website of which can be located at www.adventuresmart.co.uk.

The Forum thanked the Officer for the updates and discussion ensued.

A Member wished to thank the Officers for the electronic Definitive Maps, which have proved to be very useful resource.

Queries were raised around Section 147 applications, as they were not available on the website. Officers explained that the website is still a work in progress and further clarity will be sought on whether the applications need to be posted on the website, or just the details of those currently in place.

Members were asked to visit www.caerphilly.gov.uk and search for Rights of Way in order to access the website, report any issues and access the maps etc.

The Local Access Forum thanked the Officer and noted the update.

11. GRANTS.

The Local Access Forum noted that the Regional Bids for the Gwent Green Grid have been approved and works will shortly be undertaken to identify the works required and appoint the apprentices to their roles.

The Forum noted that further funding has been identified from Welsh Government which will be utilised to repair several footpaths and bridges which were damaged during the storms over the recent months. It was noted that should further funding be identified; the Local Access Forum will be consulted on any projects they may have identified.

Discussions took place around the funding and the identified works, with particular reference to a bridge in Crosskeys. Officers confirmed that works are to be undertaken to replace the bridge, however, Officers agreed to follow up and provide a response to the Member.

A Member queried the grant funding that was allocated for the Financial year of 2020/21. Officers explained that because of the ongoing Pandemic, it was not possible to allocate the funding to relevant works, engage contractors or engineers and as a result the grant was returned.

The Local Access Forum thanked the Officer and noted the update.

12. CHALLENGE WALK.

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager provided the Forum with an update and confirmed that the Challenge Walk has been confirmed and will be taking place on 10th July 2021. Attendees were urged to sign up and take part in the event, which is scheduled to take place at the North of the Borough and spaces are limited due to the ongoing Pandemic and resulting restrictions.

Mr Llewellyn added that he was pleased that the event would be going ahead, in particular as the enjoyment of outdoor spaces can assist with health and wellbeing of residents, but also encouraged local people to take part in the event and explore and appreciate the natural beauty on their doorstep.

The Local Access Forum thanked the Officers and noted the update.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

A Member of the Local Access Forum, in respect of discussions undertaken at the previous meeting raised concerns around the responses provided by NRW, with particular reference to Rights of Way which are not on the legal line and the placement of roads or paths which cross over rights of ways. It was noted that representations have been made for the NRW to correct the legal line or defer paths to no avail. It was queried where NRW are in the process, the number of applications that have been received, and which Right of Ways are being dealt with.

Further concerns were raised in relation to bike trails within Cwmcarn and the many representations made for footpaths to be cleared, for trails to be clearly labelled and limitations put on specific footpaths to prevent cyclists using these paths.

Officers explained that discussions are ongoing with NRW in relation to the restoration of Rights of Way and footpaths, in particular due to the ongoing felling programme. It was noted that some of the paths within Caerphilly are now being restored and in addition, paths within Cwmcarn Scenic Drive cannot be moved or diverted without the proper application for an order and relevant consultation.

Discussions took place around the significant tree felling which is being undertaken across the borough and queries were raised whether similar issues are being experienced in other Local Authority areas. Officers explained that these issues are not unique to Caerphilly, however due to the high numbers of Larch being felled, the issues are worse.

The Local Access Forum were asked to note that the Committee Services Officer has recently married and has secured a new job. The Forum congratulated Charlotte on her marriage and new role, thanked her for the sterling service she has provided and wished her all the best for the future.

The Chair thanked all parties present for their attendance and contributions and the meeting closed at 12.26 pm.