



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON FRIDAY, 17TH JUNE 2022 AT 10.00 A.M.



PRESENT:

M. Benjamin – Chair

B. Clarke, A. Edwards, D. Hale, Councillor C. Morgan - (Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure & Green Spaces), J. Morgan, R. Stones, W. Williams, N. Yates.

By Invitation: B. Campbell, G. Drinkwater and S. Tindall (Natural Resources Wales)

Together with:

P. Griffiths (Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager), S. Denbury (Countryside and Rights of Way Assistant), A. Fleming (Countryside and Rights of Way Officer), D. Jones (Health and Well-being Officer), J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer), A. Afzal (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being filmed for administrative purposes only. Members were advised that voting on decisions would take place via a show of Hands Up.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from K. Donovan, A. Evans, E. Gwynne, D. Llewelyn, L. Howells, M. Pointon, M. Thomas, 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 – 4TH MARCH 2022

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 4th March, 2022 be approved as a correct record and a show of Hands Up (and in noting there were 7 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Caerphilly Local Access Forum held on 4th March

2022 (minute nos. 1 – 10) be approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

A Local Access Forum Member sought clarification in relation to items 8 and 15 of the minutes. The Member wished to clarify whom the obligation to keep rights of way in a usable condition was aimed at. Mr Phil Griffiths, (Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager), confirmed this was the landowner's obligation. The Member also referred to the meeting requirements going forward with Welsh Government requirements are for Local Access Forum meetings to be held in person. The Member advised this could fall foul of equality as far as people with disabilities are concerned, due to not being able to attend in person. Mr Griffiths advised the Forum that this situation is currently being looked into but in the meantime WG are currently giving flexibility on this section of legislation which states LAFs have a requirement to meet in person. Mr Griffiths advised Members that he is expecting the legislation to be amended but as it is tied in with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act this will take some time. There is also the Local Government Reform Act which states how Councils have to operate and hold their meetings. Mr Griffiths is currently looking to speak with the National Local Access Chair to find out whether this legislation is relevant to the Local Access Forums. Following discussions with other colleagues Mr Griffiths is of the understanding that it isn't and is independent of the Act as the LAF is an independent forum.

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager and the Chair welcomed the new Councillor Mr Chris Morgan. Mr Griffiths advised the Members, the Forum is currently without a Vice-Chair. However, it was not his intention to hold an election to replace the previous Vice-Chair at present and requested consent of the LAF to hold this election at the next meeting.

Mr Griffiths advised the Local Access Forum Members that unfortunately the presentation which had been requested by a Member from Parks has to be deferred to the next meeting due to the Officer not being available to attend this meeting.

Mr Griffiths advised The LAF as per item 12 of the minutes, a further update regarding the cyclist on footpaths could also not take place at his meeting due to the Officer who gave the initial report has now left the Authority. Therefore, this item will need to be deferred.

The Forum thanked the Officer and noted the updates provided.

Following on from the Chairs request to give a background presentation from each LAF Member Mr Barry Clarke gave a brief background into his involvement and interest in being involved in the Local Access Forum. Mr Clarke advised The Local Access Forum his primary involvement is improving the access for disabled people in the countryside making it accessible for all.

The Chair thanked Mr Clarke for his interesting presentation.

5. CHAIR'S REPORT

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager advised the Local Access Forum Members that there had been a National Forum held on the 19th May. Unfortunately, neither the Chair nor Mr Griffiths was able to attend this meeting. Mr Griffiths advised the Forum that he has not yet received any detailed minutes back. The main items on that agenda were the changes to the Local Access Forum Legislation, the maintenance budgets across Wales for general rights of way and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

In relation to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, it was highlighted that the main issues were how few Local Authorities were taking this forward. WG and NRW are looking to having an improvement plan tied into any future grant bid.

6. GWENT GREEN GRID

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager introduced the item and advised the LAF that this is a partnership between four Local Authorities working collaboratively on various environmental schemes one of which will include Access Schemes. It covers a whole range of countryside environmental issues such as biodiversity, environmental developments.

There will be a strategy developed which will be adopted through the whole of the County and there is currently a brief out for the preparation of regional strategy.

The LAF noted there is a Project Team in place which is primarily based in Monmouthshire with the Access Team being based in Torfaen. The lead for the project is Richard Garner. Mr Griffiths suggested asking Mr Garner to join the next meeting to give a presentation and update.

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager requested two Forum Member to volunteer to be part of the Regional Local Access Forum meeting which will be held on the 14th July 2022. Councillor Chris Morgan and Mrs June Morgan volunteered to be actively involved in the brief.

The Forum thanked the Officer and noted the updates provided.

7. HEALTH AND WELL-BEING INITIATIVES

The Chair welcomed Mr D. Jones to the Local Access Forum Meeting.

Mr Jones - (Health and Well-being Co-ordinator), introduced himself and gave the Forum a brief background into his role. Mr Jones advised the Members that the role was part of the Gwent Green Grid Project. Mr Jones will be focusing on facilitating and implementing projects that encourage individuals to become more active within green spaces to improve their health and wellbeing. The Forum was advised Mr Jones will be working on projects around areas which have been designated as having significant health inequalities within Caerphilly. Those areas cover Bargoed, Upper Rhymney Valley and around Risca area.

The Local Access Forum noted one of the projects Mr Jones is involved in within Caerphilly is the delivery of a project John Hole from the Country Parks Team is involved in. The Countryside Service are currently working collaboratively with the Mental Health Board who have a project working with Primary Schools. Which involves taking children to Parc Penallta for nature themed work four times a year. The Mental Health Nurses also do some work around mindfulness and mental health and well-being.

The Chair Thanked Mr Jones. The Local Access Forum noted the update.

8. GENERAL RIGHTS OF WAY UPDATE

Andy Fleming (Countryside and Rights of Way Officer) provided the LAF with an update on recent developments within Countryside and Rights of Way.

The Forum noted that work that is currently a priority for the Countryside and Rights of Way Team is routes to schools, employment areas and community hubs. Since the Local Access Forum met in March, where the Members were informed the Team were currently behind schedule on issues with bridges flooding, due to the extreme weather and COVID Restrictions The Officer was pleased to advise the Members progress has been made and three new wooden bridges have been installed in the Pengam area.

The Countryside Rights of Way Officer also advised the Local Access Forum that as part of the works with Field Fair Trust, when stiles are broken or need replacing the Team work with the landowners to replace them with kissing gates or DDA Gates. However, there are legislative rules that they are required to follow. The Members were assured the Team also work with the landowners where there is damaged furniture on routes to make the routes more efficient for all users.

The Forum thanked the Officer for his update and discussion ensued.

9. NATURAL RESOURCES WALES UPDATES

The Local Access Forum also welcomed Ms Geminie Drinkwater (Natural Resources Wales) who provided the Forum with a review of the proposed Rights of Way project at Cwmcarn Scenic Drive. The Forum noted the project was almost complete with only one site requiring completion. Ms Drinkwater explained that NRW are now in the process of adding way marker posts so that Rights of Ways are more visible. Ms Drinkwater informed the LAF the NRW almost ready to submit Modification Orders to Caerphilly County Borough Council.

The Local Access Forum were advised that Mr Campbell had provided a written update for the Forum to note.

The Forum were given an update on the South East Land Management team and noted the new leader is : Rhys Handley rhys.handley@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk is now in post and managing the area due to Peter Cloke's retirement at the end of June.

The Local Access forum were also informed in order to contact the LM Team they would be required to use the teams specific NRW e mail address:

coedwigoeddannaturdeddwyrain@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk
forestsandnaturesoutheast@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

The Forum noted the following points provided by Mr Campbell;

- Team are caring out normal day to day vegetation and maintenance works in the area.
- Several blocked (or uncleared after felling operations) PRow's have been reported recently in the area and they are being put in to the work program to be cleared as soon as we can get to them.
- The official opening of the Forest Drive at Cwm Carn is planned for the 6th July. There is a meeting later today with CCBC and I will pass on relevant info from that.
- The PRow review in the Cwmcarn forest is still underway and recent focus has been on the Cwmcarn North area including Abercarn and also on producing improved walking maps and panels on site at Cwmarn.

- There is new NRW 'No Cycling' signage in production that will be piloted in Cwmcarn forest along with the updated CCBC PRow signage to try and reduce cyclists using footpaths and other promoted walking routes.

Mr Campbell also provided the Forum on and update for Forest Operations which included;

- The Wylie operations have slowed down a touch due to the issues at the contractors end and I will have a better update next week after a site meeting.
- The Wylie the community liaison group is getting together to represent all users of that area to look at the reinstatement and any developments on the site post the forest operations.

The Local Access Forum also welcomed Ms Sarah Tindal (Natural Resources Wales)

The Forum noted there was currently only one live consultation which was the Coal Tip Safety consultation from Welsh Government based on the need to consult on a report published by The Law Commission which recommended a new management regime in coal tip safety. The Forum noted the consultation is open until the 4th August 2022.

The Local Access Forum noted an update on the Access Reform where all consultations and reports have been completed and WG are currently considering all the advice and information received from the consultations. There is currently no time scales when this will conclude. However, the WG have recruited two Members of staff who will continue the programme. They will be based at the NRW.

The Forum noted that Juliet Michael is the new Manager of the Land Management Team and The People and Places Team.

The Local Access Forum thanked Ms Drinkwater and Ms Tindal for the update. The update was noted.

10. PRIORITY ORDERS

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager reminded the Local Access Forum that in the March meeting a Member of the Forum, Maggie Thomas, wanted to question the Councils order in which they deal with modifications to the Rights of Way Map. Mr Griffiths requested Ms Thomas prepare a report for the June meeting for the LAF could discuss. Ms Thomas has provided Mr Griffiths with this report, it has been distributed to his staff for their consideration and comments. However, unfortunately Ms Thomas has had to give her apologise for this meeting. Therefore, Mr Griffiths requested the item be deferred to the September, when Ms Thomas can present her report.

Although it was agreed that the item be deferred to the September meeting. The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager wanted to make the Forum aware of the main points from Ms Thomas's report which will be discussed in the September meeting.

Following from Mr Griffiths request the Countryside and Rights of Way Assistant outlined the main points from the report. The Forum noted Ms Thomas was querying the number of outstanding applications for adding footpaths to the definitive map under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Mr Denbury advised the Members there are currently 97 outstanding applications. However, there are 96 that have been closed because they do not meet the necessary requirements. The Forum was informed the Team are around halfway through the

applications. The oldest order is dates to 1982. The issues with applications that date back this far is that evidence can be lost by the users who originally applied.

The Local Access Forum were advised that in 2014 there was a report submitted to the Rights of Way Cabinet Committee. This outlined how the Officers should be dealing with the applications as they are received, and points given to which ones should take priority. For example, the RoW Cabinet Committee advise where an application is affected by Planning Applications for a site, where develop is proposed and the route could be lost then this would be a high priority.

The Forum thanked the Officer and noted the update.

11. ACCESS REFORM PROGRAMME

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager provided the Local Access Forum with an update on the Access Reform Programme. The Forum was advised the report has been received for the Group One Reform which covers the Review of the Operations of Local Access Forms. This was signed off at the end of March 2022. Mr Griffiths advised the Members that only sixteen of the twenty-two Local Access Forums are in place, and most haven't held a meeting since 2017. This is what the legislation is looking to address. The Forum noted were twelve recommendations put forward in the report, which Mr Griffiths discussed.

The Forum thanked the Officer and noted the update.

12. TRANSPORT FOR WALES LEVEL CROSSINGS

Stefan Denbury (Countryside and Rights of Way Assistant) provided the Forum with an update on the intention to electrify the Rhymney to Cardiff track. The Officer advised the LAF that CCBC are in contact with a consultant for Transport for Wales (TfW) and discussions are taking place with regards to five footpaths that have been identified as high risk beyond an acceptable level to public safety due to the frequency, speed and the reduced sound of the new electric trains.

The Officer provided the Members of the Forum with a Map of the area at Wern Ddu where Members would be taking part in a site visit following the meeting were they would be discussing any possible solutions to the issues that have been raised by TfW.

Members of the Forum confirmed they would be attending the site visit and thanked the Officer and noted the update.

13. GRANTS

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager provided the Local Access Forum with a brief update on Grant developments.

The Forum noted that the access improvement work is still being carried out at the Mynydd Maen site above Cwmcarn.

The Forum noted that funding is currently being sought from a grant called the Shared Prosperity Fund which is a replacement for European Funding. Applications need to be submitted by August. The Council are currently looking at the main priorities. Three of the current top priorities are the continued funding for posts in the Rural Development Programme.

Funding for the works at Cwmcarn Scenic Drive and also to secure funding in relation to the Gwent Green Grid Programme to extend the post of the Health and Well-being Co-ordinator.

The Forum noted WG have agreed a three-year funding for the Access Improvement Grant.

The Forum noted that the Rural Development Programme (RDP) Fund is still being utilised and were pleased to note that Welsh Government has confirmed that further funding will become available.

It was noted by the Forum that Caerphilly has secured a Levelling Up Grant. This will allow further funding for Cwmcarn Scenic Drive. The Forum will be kept informed of the project to turn the area into a tourist hub and there is also a project for a renewed leisure provision at Caerphilly, which the Forum can benefit from.

The Forum thanked the Officer and noted the update.

14. CHALLENGE WALK 2022

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager provided the Forum with an update and confirmed that the Challenge Walk that was Twmbarlwm Walk 350 people took part and was very Successful.

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

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager advised the Forum Mr Michael Pointon requested the Forum note in his absence his concerns for the wildlife and the decline in many species in Caerphilly. Mr Pointon would like it taken back the National Access Forum Chair that consideration should be given to excluding not only dogs but people to areas at certain times of the year to maintain the countryside and its wildlife.

A Local Access Forum Member advised the LAF The Police Inspector for Blackwood Andrew Boucher has now left. Therefore, new working relationships will need to be formed with the new Inspector. It was noted by the Forum the excellent collaborative work Andrew Boucher was involved within the area.

The Chair thanked all parties present for their attendance and contributions and the meeting closed at 11.54 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 24th February 2023.

CHAIR