



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON FRIDAY 24TH FEBRUARY 2023 AT 10.00 A.M.



PRESENT:

M. Benjamin – Chair

B. Clarke, D. Hale, Councillor C. Morgan - (Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure & Green Spaces), L. Howells, J. Morgan, A. Palmer, M. Pointon, M. Thomas, N. Yates, W. Williams.

By Invitation: B. Campbell, and S. Tindall (Natural Resources Wales), R. Garner (Monmouthshire County Council)

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), M. Gibbings (Rights of Way Warden), J. Thomas (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 G. Drinkwater, R. Stones, A. Edwards, A. Evans, D. Llewelyn, E. Gwynne, K. Donovan, G. Davies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 17TH JUNE 2022

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th June 2022 be approved as a correct record and a show of Hands Up (and in noting there were 17 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 17th June 2022 (minute nos. 3—8) be approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Mr Phil Griffiths the Caerphilly Local Access Forum Secretary brought to the LAF Members attention that the vacancy for a Vice-Chair was still yet to be filled and that to date no nominations had been received. The Members were advised that the Vice Chair was usually the Cabinet Member. In this case it would be Councillor Chris Morgan. It was agreed by the Members present that the appointment of a Vice Chair would be taken under any other business the last agenda item in this meeting.

The Members were reminded that the Chair had previously requested a brief five-minute presentation on each Local Access Forum Member. The Members were informed that the Chair would be contacting individuals prior to the next meeting to request them to give their presentation on their background and the Association that they represent.

5. LAF CHAIR'S NATIONAL ACCESS MEEETING - CHAIRS REPORT

The Chair gave a summary of the National LAFs Chairs report which took place at the end of 2022.

Members noted that under information relating to Ramblers – there is a 'Paths to Well-Being Community' based project underway which includes training and volunteering opportunities across 18 Communities within Wales. The Members noted that the project is currently on target to exceed the previously agreed set target. Members were made aware that further funding is being sought to continue in the future.

The Chair also made the Forum Members aware of the concerns from the Ramblers with regards the inflexible approach by Network Rail regarding the closure of Level Crossings around the UK with unsuitable route alternatives being provided. The Members noted that the Ramblers are challenging Network Rail and an application submitted to Conway Council by Network Rail has been rejected and WG supports the Council's decision. The Ramblers have requested to hear from other Authorities in relation to their dealings with Network Rail.

Members also noted from the report that the Ramblers are requesting funding to provide courses on "Walk Leader" training and pledges of support sought for increased funding and conditions on the rights of way.

Members were informed that the NRW gave an update at the meeting advising Members that there is a Recreation Strategy which is in the early stages of development and engagement started in January 2023.

The Chair informed Members that WG directly funded some work carried out as part of the Countryside Code Reform Programme which promotes the future direction on the Country Side Code.

Members noted that as part of the Resilient Community Grant, which is a programme which focuses on building community involvement in nature to increase health and well-being, the NRW had received over 210 applications costing in the excess of £20 million. Out of these 210 applications there were 21 winners that will be notified at a later date.

The NRW gave an update on the Forestry Standard Review which is aimed at foresters and not the general public. Members noted that this was a technical paper for sustainable forestry.

The Local Access Forum Members also noted from the report that WG is looking at Countryside Access Reform and looking at dealing with dogs being kept on leads in accordance with the Countryside Code.

Following consideration, the report was noted.

6. GWENT GREEN GRID PARTNERSHIP – ACCESS DEVELOPMENT

Mr Griffiths introduced his report to inform the Local Access Forum of the developments under the access theme of the Gwent Green Grid Partnership.

The Forum noted that there are five main themes which are about providing improved green and blue infrastructure and the ability to access them. Mr Griffiths advised Members there is a strategic development green corridors access plan which is particularly relevant to Caerphilly.

The Members noted that Lepus Consultancy have been employed to prepare a Regional Access Strategy.

Members noted that as a LAF there will be a significant role to be involved with the revised Rights of Way Improvement Plan process.

Members were advised that the Active Travel Plan is currently out for consultation. Which contains around 400 proposals. Mr Griffiths encouraged the Members to view the document. The Members were advised that this Active Travel Plan is aimed toward daily life travel rather than recreational travel.

The Local Access Forum welcomed Richard Garner the Regional Access Officer.

Mr Garner updated the LAF Members on the Regional Access Strategy which covers the whole of Gwent.

Members noted the initial piece of work carried out by the Consultants (Lepus) has been an assessment of Gwent and the strengths and weaknesses within access provision and how each Authority compares.

Members were made aware that the next stage will be looking at Gwent as a whole and looking at the primary green corridors and their locations that meet several different criteria.

The Officer advised the Members that the Consultants findings would be forwarded on to all LAF's which will identify the Key Green Corridors. The Officer then requested that Members provide feedback on any of these key locations that have missing links or links that may require improvement. The Consultants will then use this information to select a number of improvements throughout Gwent, in order to use these routes in the future to obtain grant funding in order to carry out any work.

The Officer provided the Members with information on an additional piece of work being undertaken by the Regional Group. The 'Regional Design Guide' that looks at all the furniture that the Authorities install such as styles, bridges, gates and putting into place a minimum standard that will be acceptable throughout the Gwent region.

The Forum thanked the Mr Garner for his update.

Following consideration and discussion the report and updates were noted.

7. RIGHTS OF WAY UPDATE

Mr Stefan Denbury (Countryside and Rights of Way Assistant) provided the LAF with an update on recent developments within Countryside and Rights of Way.

The Forum noted that a number of requests were received in relation to the installation of structures to prevent unlawful use of the RoWs. As a result, there was a public consultation which received a number of responses. There was enough to gauge the general opinion by lawful RoW users. Who were of the opinion that the barriers that have historically been used were more of a hinderance, specifically for users with large wheelchairs or mobility vehicles. Subsequently, the RoW Department spoke with the Chair for the Disabled Ramblers, who fed back that if there is a necessity for any structure to be in place, then the preferred option would be a disabled access kissing gate with a RADAR lock. Members noted, any person registered disabled or holding a blue badge are entitled to a key free of charge to enable them to gain access.

The Officer informed the Members that following the responses, there is a policy being drafted which will include changing a vast number of existing structures to allow less restrictive access to lawful users in the future.

The Officer also updated the Local Access Forum on the project with Caerphilly RoW Department and NRW with regards to sign posting. NRW have installed 110 timber way markers post within their estate, largely within Cwmcarn Forest Drive. The new signs will include the footpath number along with grid reference. The LAF were pleased to note that 66 have currently been installed.

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

Following a concern raised by a Member regarding CRSK/FP177/1 (formerly Footpath 177 Risca) – Path from the rear of Carlton Terrace to the Canal towpath. The LAF were advised that the Engineering Team have been asked to design new hand railings for this particular area once the designs have been approved, they will go to the fabricators to be constructed.

A Member sought clarification on what structure type will be used on bridal ways and restricted byways once the new policy is implemented. The Officer explained to the LAF that this policy was only in respect of footpaths and a separate policy would need to be drafted in relation to bridal ways. In relation to restricted byways, the Members were advised the legislation does not permit the Council to authorise a new structure which are currently in place, therefore these structures would remain the same.

8. NATURAL RESOURCES WALES – FORESTRY OPERATIONS AND ACCESS

The Local Access Forum also welcomed Mr Robert Campbell (Natural Resources Wales) who provided the Forum with an update on current projects being undertaken by the NRW.

The Forum was advised that the Integrated Engineering team is carrying out ongoing forestry repairs, this is something that is on going every year.

The Forum was advised there is a new Land and Assist Manager Iwan Williams. There is also a new post which is a Biodiversity Officer called Eleanor Yoxall who will be responsible for managing a wide range of jobs. However, initially the officer will be primarily responsible for

Managing Invasive Species. Mr Campbell will forward all contact details on for the new members of staff following today's meeting.

The Local Access Forum thanked Mr Campbell for the update. The update was noted.

9. RIGHTS OF WAY MAINTENANCE PRESENTATION

The Local Access Forum welcomed Mr Mark Gibbings the Rights of Way Warden who presented the Members with an overview of the Right of Way team and the problems, solutions and maintenance they have been dealing with since November 2022.

The Members noted the problems that the RoW team are currently tackling are due to wear and tear of infrastructure, obstructions, these are natural obstructions from fallen down trees, there are also issues due to inclement weather such as flooding. Vandalism is also a problem the team are facing.

In tackling these problems, the team are carrying out proactive work, such as inspections and surveys. The team also monitor well used RoWs such as routes to schools to ensure that they remain safe. The RoW team are always looking at initiatives for fundraising and any grants that maybe available to them. Another solution is collaboration with landowners, other departments and other organisations.

The presentation also gave Members examples of the type of maintenance the team carry out, such as fixing bridges, and styles. Cutting back trees. There are also volunteers that walk the footpaths to identify any issues as they present themselves and feeding them back to the team. The team also carry out any improvements as required which are prioritised in order of urgency.

The Local Access Forum Members thanks Mr Gibbings for the presentation and discussion ensued.

Following queries raised by Members, Mr Gibbings advised the Members that any issues they have should be reported to the Andy Fleming or Stefan Denbury in the Rights of Way Office where a service request can be logged, and the RoW team will be allocated the work. Mr Gibbings also advised that if there were any individuals that may wish to volunteer, please contact the RoW department and they can be pointed in the right direction.

Alison Palmer from GAVO advised the Members that they would be delighted to put any volunteering opportunities onto the Volunteering Wales website.

Councillor Chris Morgan advised Mr Gibbings that as the Cabinet Member for this area he would be very interested in going out for the day with the team.

Following discussion, the presentation was noted.

10. GRANT PROGRAMMES AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Caerphilly Local Access Forum Secretary 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 as part of the Triangle Project is near completion.

The Forum were pleased to note that Caerphilly has received support from WG funding for a Covid Memorial Woodland which will be situated at Ynys Hywel Farm, Cwmfelinfach. The Forum noted that the first phase of tree planting took place last year and the next phase is creation of paths which will take place this year.

The Members noted that the route for the annual Caerphilly Challenge Event has been determined with the event focus being in the Caerphilly Basin area this year.

The Chair requested that the Members be made aware of a Sustrans Initiative to supply and install wooden benches along cycle ways. The benches are free, but they will be in limited supply. The Members should relay any interest to the Secretary.

The Forum thanked the Secretary and noted the update.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Lorraine Howells requested the forum help to promote responsible behaviour from dog walkers keeping their dogs under control preferably on leads especially around lambing season. The Chair and Secretary agreed they would support the farming community as much as possible. Alison Palmer requested that Mr Griffiths pass on any messages that he intends to put through the CCBC Communication team to her team to add to all the social network platforms.

The Secretary for the Local Access Forum nominate Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure & Green Spaces, Councillor Chris Morgan to be appointed as Vice-Chair to this Forum. The Secretary suggested that the appointment be made at this meeting due to the high number in attendance. All Members present agreed.

It was moved and seconded that Councillor C. Morgan be appointed as Vice Chair of Caerphilly Local Access Forum and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

Mr Griffiths also sought clarity on which Members on whether June Morgan still wished to remain as the Regional Representative for Caerphilly and attending the Greater Gwent Partnership.

The Chair thanked all parties present for their attendance and contributions and the meeting closed at 12.18 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 28th July 2023.

CHAIR