



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN,
YSTRAD MYNACH, ON FRIDAY 9TH DECEMBER 2016 AT 10:00

PRESENT:

William Lindsay – (Chair)

Barry Clarke, Michael Benjamin, Glyn Davies, Keith Donovan, Roger Evans, Elaine Gwynne, Alison Palmer, David Parry and Maggie Thomas.

Together with: Officers – Phil Griffiths (Secretary/Principal Planner), Andy Powell (ROW and Countryside Access Officer) and Amy Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ken James, Andrew Edwards, Chris Heaps (Natural Resources Wales), Lorraine Howells, Sartha Rajoo, Garry Lewis – (Vice-Chair), Ruth Stones and Nigel Yates.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 9th September 2016 were approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Minute No. 4)

The Forum was advised that Paul Cooke (Senior Policy Officer) would not be delivering a presentation on the new Act at this meeting. It was felt that it would benefit the Forum for him to deliver the presentation at the next meeting in March 2017. It was explained that the Draft Wellbeing Plan had been presented to the Public Services Board (PSB) this week and following a period of consultation, the Plan would be presented to full Council in March 2017. The Forum was reminded that the purpose of the Wellbeing Plan is that bodies of the PSB must now think more about the long-term, work better with local people, communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined up approach in a sustainable way.

Volunteers (Minute No. 11)

Andy Powell confirmed that a meeting with Keeping Wales Tidy will be arranged shortly and that a group of volunteers that will undertake duties such as maintenance on Public Rights of Way has been formed in the Rudry area.

5. DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

Andy Powell advised that final comments had been received from Tim Stephens (Acting Head of Planning) in relation to the recently produced document relating to development and public rights of way. Some slight amendments were made due to recent legislative changes in Wales. It is anticipated that the document will be signed off by Mr Stephens prior to Christmas. The document will be formatted into a print friendly version and placed on the Council's website for the public/developers to access. A limited number of hard copies will be made available for officers and LAF members. Planning Officers will be informed that the document can be used as an advisory note to be considered by those who wish to carry out development.

Andy thanked the LAF with their assistance in the creation of this document that is intended to assist the work of both the Rights of Way Team and Planning Officers of Caerphilly County Borough Council in the coming years.

6. LANDSCAPE CRIME TOOLKIT

Phil Griffiths updated the Forum in relation to the South-East Wales Uplands Landscape Crime Toolkit. He confirmed the toolkit was commissioned to tackle landscape crime within an area encompassed by Torfaen County Borough Council, Caerphilly County Borough Council and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. The principle landscape crimes addressed by this toolkit are arson, fly-tipping and illegal off-roading. A recent meeting was held with the partners and Phil confirmed that off-roading will be dealt with by the police, who are both supportive and along with each of the authorities have signed up to the project BERNIE initiative for the next year. He confirmed that Jeff Cuthbert (Police and Crime Commissioner for the Gwent Police Force Area) was today meeting with MP's to discuss and raise awareness in this area.

Phil confirmed he attended an event with colleagues from Torfaen County Borough Council held at the Liberty Stadium to raise the profile of the uplands project.

7. ROWIP FUNDING UPDATE

Andy Powell provided the Forum with an update in terms of funding and confirmed that Caerphilly County Borough Council received just over £37,000 from Welsh Government (WG), for the financial year 2016/17. The Rights of Way Team recently submitted a claim to draw down 40 per cent of the claim as required by WG, amounting to approximately £15,000. The team has committed to spend a further £12,000 on projects that include metal bridal way finger posts (one of which was handed around) replacing wooden posts across the borough. Approximately £10,000 will be allocated early in the New Year with the final claim being submitted in mid to late February.

8. ROWIP REVIEW

Andy Powell reminded the Forum of the update he provided at the last meeting regarding the requirement of the Local Highway Authority to produce a new ROWIP. It is up to the Authority to decide whether or not to amend the current ROWIP or produce a new version no more than 10 years after publishing their previous plan. This is a requirement of Section 60 (3) and (4) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). He explained that in Wales all Authorities must now comply with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) act 2015, Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 and the Equality Act 2010. It is anticipated that the Highway Authority will be amending their current ROWIP as a result of these significant pieces of legislation.

It was suggested that the LAF forms a sub group to look at the existing ROWIP with a view to deciding whether or not to amend the current version or produce a new document. An email will be sent to Members following the meeting asking for volunteers to form the sub group. The group will be consulted on the setting out of the terms of reference for the full review and also highlight any significant differences from the approach taken in the earlier ROWIP. An outline and timetable will also be discussed at the meeting to be arranged by Andy in early February. The findings will then be reported back to the Forum at the meeting scheduled in March 2017, where it is hoped the terms of reference and timetable will be endorsed. The Forum was advised that this is the most important document the LAF will be involved with. The Council has received over £400,000 in funding in the last 10 years to implement the existing plan. In future terms, without a plan in place will mean that funding cannot be applied for as the Council must produce an annual report that is submitted to National Resources Wales and WG.

9. FUNDING UPDATE

Phil Griffiths updated the Forum in relation to current funding and confirmed that 2 substantial bids have been submitted under the Rural Development Programme Sustainable Management Scheme. Both have elements relating to improving access as do a number of other bids submitted under the Rural Community Development Scheme. Several of these incorporate elements of the Toolkit. A private application has also been submitted in relation to the Machen Agricultural Show (something the LAF may wish to consider attending) and a regional bid for Uplands.

Members were referred to maps highlighting extensive recreation land across the Borough and the Forum was advised of the City Deal whereby Caerphilly with 9 other Local Authorities are signing up to a Metro System that will improve access across South Wales. Phil confirmed that Welsh Government are driving this forward.

Access works have been included within the Countryside element of a corporate bid, for revenue support funding, made to Welsh Government.

10. GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES ON PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

Andy Powell referred Members to a Guidance Note produced by Welsh Government (WG) in October 2016, for Local Authorities on Public Rights of Way. He confirmed the advice and guidance sets out the Welsh Government's policy on public rights of way and its view of the law. It does not take the place of primary legislation, but seeks to give an overview of it within a policy context. It replaces a number of Welsh Office circulars and sets out advice to authorities in relation to the following aspects of public rights of way including:

- Managing the network
- Maintaining the network
- Protecting the network
- Recording the network
- Changing the network
- Planning permission and the network

Due to the length of the document the Forum were advised of the link to Welsh Government website for further consideration of the guidance.

11. LAF CONFERENCE

Phil Griffiths and the Chair attended the annual conference in October 2016 that was chaired by John Watkins (Welsh Government's Head of Landscape and Outdoor Recreation). He updated the Conference on where the Welsh Government is heading in terms of access and confirmed the new Minister is keen on urban green spaces and green corridors. The Open Spaces Society has voiced concern that Wales is heading towards wiping off paths that are not currently in much use, and the Conference heard cost-cutting phrases like "reducing the burden".

NRW (Natural Resources Wales) provided an update on the Outdoor Recreation Survey 2016 that received 5,800 responses. Walking is most popular for health and exercise. Reference was also made to the psychological benefits of outdoor recreation.

The Conference heard the views from NFU-Cymru (National Farming Union of Wales) Rachel Lewis-Davies, including raising the attractions to landowners of modernising, prioritising and rationalising the path network. She emphasised the importance of LAF's and Councils working in partnership with landowners who have been very engaged with the Green Paper. The British Horse Society (BHS) showed the video for their "Dead Slow" campaign. She stated the police do not record horse accidents unless someone goes to hospital from the scene, although BHS will do record the incidents. The LAF's also heard excellent talks from the Ramblers and Cycling UK (advocating for access to more open space).

12. LAF CHAIRS CONFERENCE

The Chair gave permission for this item to be deferred to the next meeting.

13. DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed that future meetings would be held on the 2nd Friday of March, June, September and December 2017. Further details would be emailed to the Forum following this meeting.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The meeting closed at 12.20pm.

The Chair wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.