



CAERPHILLY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN, YSTRAD MYNACH ON FRIDAY, 13TH MARCH 2015 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

William Lindsay - Chair
Garry Lewis - Deputy Chair

Barry Clarke, Glyn Davies, J.R. Davies, Roger Evans, Elaine Gwynne, Lorraine Howells, Robert Jones, David Parry, Maggie Thomas, Nigel Yates.

Together with:

Philip Griffiths (Secretary and Principal Planner), June Piper (CROW Support Officer), Sharon Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Sylvia Dolbear, Keith Donovan, Andrew Edwards, Councillor Ken James, Alison Palmer, Andy Powell and Sarah Tindal.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest. Lorraine Howells had previously advised that she would need to declare an interest during any discussion on the Nant Llesg open cast proposals.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th December 2014 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Fly Tipping

Arising from further discussion on fly tipping, reference was made to an independent website called FixmyStreet.com which enables you to report a problem in your area such as fly tipping, graffiti etc. by entering a nearby postcode and providing details of the incident. The matter is then forwarded to the appropriate Council to pursue.

Phil Griffiths confirmed that he would write to the Council on behalf of the LAF expressing concerns about the increase in fly tipping since the charge on small vans and trailers depositing waste at CAS was introduced.

It was agreed that Maggie Thomas would liaise with Andy Powell to arrange the meeting with the Development Control Manager in relation to the diversion of footpaths on new developments.

Local Development Strategy

Phil Griffiths advised that the steering group is currently developing programmes. Further details would be reported back to the LAF in due course.

Member Input

Following on from the last meeting when members were asked to consider topics of a strategic nature that they would like discussed at future LAF meetings, Phil Griffiths advised that he had arranged for a representative of Gwent Police to attend the next meeting to talk about issues around off road motor cycling, in particular, in terms of our uplands.

It was agreed that fly tipping was an ongoing topic for discussion and the Chair also suggested that provision for bicycles on trains, especially in terms of cyclists wishing to access the countryside, could be included on the forward work programme.

A request was made for consideration to be given to timetabling an item on the improvements that have been made in the countryside for people with disability problems. Following discussion, it was agreed that it would be beneficial to compare the implications of the Equality Act with the DDA in terms of the standards that have to be met when undertaking access projects in the countryside.

5. CHAIRS' MEETING

The Chair briefed the Forum on the topics that were discussed at the recent Chair's meeting. The period of office of LAFs was raised and noted that this would probably be fixed at 4 years in future. Discussion ensued on ways in which LAFs could raise their profile with a view to encouraging more applications for membership and to raise the public's awareness of their existence. Reference was also made to the roles of the Chair, the Secretary and members and their possible training requirements and the need for LAFs to be more proactive by initiating ideas and establishing partnerships with other organisations.

Discussion also took place at the Chairs' meeting on the requirement for LAFs to produce an Annual Report. It appeared that many LAFs reproduced minutes of their meetings in a report format to evidence their achievements throughout the year rather than writing a separate report. The question of whether the LAF itself should compile the Annual Report rather than delegating the task to officers was also discussed. It was agreed that this matter would be placed on an agenda for a future meeting of the Caerphilly LAF.

In terms of training for new members, Phil Griffiths advised that the inaugural meeting of a newly established Caerphilly LAF was part of the training for new members. There are also guidance documents available from NRW. The Chair reflected on the benefits he had gained from the DDA training event led by the Fieldfare Trust which had been held for members of the Forum at Parc Cwm Darran in 2009. The event had helped members appreciate some of the access difficulties experienced by people with disabilities. It was agreed that consideration would be given to organising a similar event in the future.

Reference was then made to the LAFs' relationship with other bodies such as the Local Authority, NRW, Welsh Government and community councils. The Chair advised that John Morgan, Chair of Ceredigion LAF, is preparing a Code of Best Practice for LAFs which can be considered by the LAF when it has been produced. Whilst it was felt that the potential for what LAFs can achieve is huge, the ability for Members to commit extra time to the LAF

might be difficult in some cases. Other topics discussed at the Conference included NRW funding programmes - the ROWIP, coastal path funding and SPLASH. In terms of the Dog Walking guidance, 43 replies had been received during the consultation process. The main criticism related to the wordiness of the document. The afternoon session focussed on the various projects that LAFs had been looking at during the past year and included discussion on the ongoing problems caused by fly tipping and off roading.

Following the Chair's report, the Secretary advised the Forum that he would consider organising another disability training event for members to tie in with the report on the Equality Act/DDA.

6. LAF REPORT BY NATURAL RESOURCES WALES (NRW)

Phil Griffiths updated the Forum on the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken by NRW on the review of LAF working practices.

It was noted that of the 25 LAFs consulted, 11 had not responded. In terms of LAF membership, numbers ranged from 10 – 22, with 15 being the average. The LAFs that responded felt that they were under-represented by certain categories, including the less able and young people. The Secretary referred to the likelihood of community councils having a more prominent role in local governance in the future and to their being represented on future LAFs. In this respect, it was agreed that the Secretary would forward copies of the LAF's most recent Annual Report to the community council clerks.

LAFs generally understood their role and most appointed an Acting Secretary to support the Secretary. In this respect, it was agreed to appoint Andy Powell as Acting Secretary to the Caerphilly LAF.

Most LAFs felt that they were supported in their role and 95% had an elected Member in their membership. Most rotate their venues but only two hold their meetings in the morning. Only one LAF felt that it was more proactive than reactive. All the LAFs formed sub groups to examine different issues and 9 out of 14 produced an annual report. It was agreed that the profile of LAFs could be improved and in this respect Phil Griffiths suggested that members of the Caerphilly LAF could attend CCBC events when there is a countryside presence. All LAFs felt that their resources were diminishing and Caerphilly was no exception having experienced a 25% reduction in staff within the Countryside Division in recent years.

7. ACTIVE TRAVEL UPDATE

June Piper gave an update on progress with the Active Travel Plan proposals for the County Borough.

Sustrans are still working on the draft routes and CCBC Highways Department is identifying an active plan route on which they are required to consult with local communities and formal groups such as the Ramblers. Routes have to be utility routes with links to communities, access to shops, work etc. Gradients need to be suitable for people with disabilities. No funding for any improvements had been identified as yet and Highways have to advise Welsh Government of the routes by September. Officers from the Highways Division have indicated that they will be happy to attend the next LAF meeting to discuss the Plan in more detail.

It was suggested that a sub group of the LAF be set up as soon as the maps are ready.

8. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP)

CCBC received £37,480 from Welsh Government to deliver targeted elements of the ROWIP in 2014/15.

The year 2014/15 had been very successful and significant improvements had been made to the rights of way network in the County Borough. Seventeen kissing gates were successfully installed and a new footbridge was installed on the Machen Forge Trail. Two flights of steps had been refurbished and 3 urban paths had been surfaced. The Department had also assisted the Rudry Commons Trust Volunteer Group with access projects in the Rudry area.

Confirmation had been received from Natural Resources Wales that funding will be available in 2015/16 on a similar level to the last financial year. Although the final figure had yet to be confirmed, a sum in the region of £35,000 was expected.

Officers advised that copies of the ROWIP are available in printed format and online.

9. FUNDING

The Forum received an update on current funding bids from Phil Griffiths.

Both the Pollinators and Uplands projects were progressing. No funding had been granted via the WG Nature Fund for the Invasive Species project but bids submitted to NRW for projects relating to Mynydd Maen, Upper Sirhowy Valley and Invasive Species had all been successful. In addition, partnership funding, similar to ROWIP, is received from NRW and money is also coming in via the Single Integrated Plan for the rights of way network. There is also money from the Forestry Commission relating to a joint study to look at how they might better integrate their woodlands which are adjacent to country parks. .

The Forum congratulated officers on the successful bids. During the course of the ensuing discussion, reference was made to the community partnerships' use of grant monies and an update was provided on the control of invasive plant species within the county borough.

10. VOLUNTEERS

There are two established volunteer groups in Caerphilly i.e. Islwyn Bramblebusters and Rudry Commons Trust. Both have undertaken much valued work to the network which is very much appreciated by the Rights of Way Team. In addition, there are several individuals who give up their time to assist the Team and recently, the Youth Offending Service has been helping to carry out repairs and clearance works. The Team is always looking for volunteers to assist with surveying and other tasks.

11. HORSE RIDING

Phil Griffiths and Andy Powell had met with Mike Burrows, the new SAFE representative for Caerphilly. Mr Burrows is arranging to meet with other SAFE representatives with a view to expanding the horse riding group throughout the County Borough. It was anticipated that a further meeting of the group would be held in April.

12. WALK EVENT

This year's Walk Event is being held on 9th May at Twmbarlwm. CCBC's Countryside and Landscape Section is being assisted by Ramblers Cymru and the Caerphilly Adventure Group. Bookings have been brisk and to date approximately 300 applications have been

received. A stand alone website containing maps, photos and detailed information about the event, has been developed.

There will be walks for all abilities, ranging from a one mile stroll along the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal to the 21 mile challenge of the Twmbarlwm Trek.

13. URDD

This year's Urdd Eisteddfod is being held at Llancaiach Fawr from 25th to 30th May. The Countryside Section will be organising a walk from Penallta to showcase the historical and landscape features in the area.

14. WALES RIGHTS OF WAY MANAGERS WORKING GROUP (WROWMWG)

In the absence of Andy Powell who had tendered his apologies for the meeting, this item was deferred to the next meeting.

15. VISITOR COUNTER DATA

Phil Griffiths informed the Forum of the results of the monitoring of visitor numbers that had been undertaken in the country parks. The findings show that visitor numbers to the country parks had previously been under estimated with significant growth in all from 2013/14. It was reported that numbers had not reduced as much as anticipated since the introduction of parking charges.

The following visitor nos. had been recorded: Pen y fan – 518,000; Penallta – 350,000; Parc Cwm Darren – 192,000; Bedwas Riverside Park – 147,000; Bargoed – 142,000 and Sirhowy 139,000.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Reference was made to an area of land at the start of a cycleway in the Sirhowy Valley part of which is used by a local garage owner to advertise cars for sale. Phil Griffiths advised that this was an ongoing issue which had been referred to the Authority's Legal Services Department.

Advice was sought on whether there were any specific plans for Cwmcarn Fforest Drive following the tree felling. Phil Griffiths responded that he wasn't aware of any plans in terms of developing further routes and that anything requiring planning consent would appear on the weekly planning list.

It was reported that consultation on the Local Development Plan had commenced and road shows were taking place around the County Borough. The six week consultation period ends on 25th March 2015.

In terms of the RDP, the initial submission on the LDS has been approved by Welsh Government. A letter confirming the continued funding of the posts was awaited.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were reminded that future meetings of the LAF would be held on the following dates:

- Friday, 12th June 2015 at 10 am
- Friday, 11th September 2015 at 10 am
- Friday, 11th December 2015 at 10 am

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and closed the meeting at 12.20 pm.