

VALE OF GLAMORGAN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES of a meeting held on 6th September, 2006 at the Heritage Coast Visitor Centre, Southerndown.

Present: Mr. M.R. Harvey (Chairman); Mr. J.V. Custance, Mrs. V.M. Hartrey, Mrs. H. March, Mr. N. Moss, Mr. R. Pittard and Mr. R. Traherne.

Miss S. Tindall (CCW), Mr. F. Coleman, Mr. S. Latham, and Mrs. S. Thomas (VOGC).

Prior to the meeting Members had undertaken a walk to the castle site to view access to the path/garden and Tir Gofal. The walk had been facilitated by Mr. Paul Dunn and his team, whose efforts were much appreciated by Members of the Forum.

(a) Apologies for absence -

These were received from Mr. D.J. Field, Mr. J.J. Herbert, Mr. D.T. Hopkin, Mr. H.S. McMillan, Mrs. M. Morgan, Mr. R. Simpson, Mrs. V. Warlow, and Mr. D. Williams; Mr. C. Jones-Jenkins and Mr. J. Wyatt (Secretary) (VOGC).

(b) Resignation -

The Forum was informed of the recent resignation of Mrs. Jacqlyn Spence.

(c) Minutes -

AGREED - T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 7th June, 2006 be approved as a correct record subject to following:

- the reference to Mr. L. Pittard in the list of those present being amended to read Mr. R.L. Pittard
- the final sentence of the second paragraph in Minute No. (g) being amended to read "other non-routine maintenance work included the repair/replacement of stiles and gates and also the resurfacing of paths, and contractors were employed by the Council or Valeways where appropriate to generally carry out these works".

(d) Update of Coastal Access Policy -

The WAG had considered the report on coastal access prepared by CCW and, following consultation, had resolved to develop a new coastal access improvement programme. Further details were given in the papers attached to the agenda, namely a letter from the Minister outlining the intention, a

briefing note for a Stakeholders meeting held in July, and the minutes of that Stakeholders meeting. Frank Coleman had attended the Stakeholder meeting, being one of only four Council representatives thereat. Mr. Coleman drew attention to specific issues raised at that meeting including the necessity of specific definitions being drawn up relating to “access to coastal land” and “secure access”. The importance of such terms being clearly defined and tied in with the Coastal Tourism Strategy (currently in the throes of preparation) was fully recognised. WAG would then try to put together a Strategic Project Plan for the whole of Wales which would contain, inter alia, guidelines for attracting funding. At that first meeting of Stakeholders, it had been announced that the intention was to draw in new resources for the programme through a bid in the next WAG budget round as well as investigating opportunities for drawing in EU Structural and Rural Development Plan funds. It was considered that the new programme should also significantly assist in the ROWIP implementation process for the 16 coastal local highway authorities. The role that LAFs had in the development of the programme locally and in assisting their authorities to take the initiative forward was also discussed, and it was agreed that specific guidance could be usefully produced to assist local authorities in taking the initiative forward through local partnerships.

The document prepared as a basis for discussion at the Stakeholder meeting contained more detailed information in respect of the above and related matters including the key objectives of the programme, the benefits and outputs to be achieved, cross cutting opportunities, delivery mechanisms, timetable, and funding. Discussion ensued on one of the key objectives namely “improve access to the coast to local communities and visitors through local path improvements, including new circular routes at the coast, and secure improved opportunities for wheelchair and pram access for the coastal environment for the benefit of the disabled and families with young children”. Reference was made to the need for urgent action to be taken in respect of access to the beach at Llantwit Major although it was recognised that, not only did the technical feasibility of undertaking any necessary works need to be assessed, the Vale had sizeable coastline and there was the need to assess priorities in order to make the best use of limited resources. This Forum would assist the Council in delivering the programme although it was accepted that the availability of sufficient funding would be critical if the ambitious outputs for the programme were ever to be delivered. Discussion then focussed on coastal access within the Vale and the opportunities for partnership working with businesses located along the coast and private land owners to achieve improved access. In order to attract WAG funding, it was evident that clear priorities for improvement would need to be defined, and that “deliverability” within a specified timescale would need to be taken into account. To that end, it was agreed that a list of current deficiencies in coastal access throughout the Vale be submitted to the next meeting. It was recognised too that improved public transport to and from coastal paths would be of benefit, although it was reported that the Council currently spent a very significant sum on subsidised transport at present. The opportunity to use any of the current Strategies in preparation, such as the Local Development Plan, the Tourism Strategy and the Transport Strategy, to forward the case for funding to be made available for coastal access would be fully investigated.

Following further discussion, it was

AGREED - T H A T the position be noted and a list identifying all deficiencies relating to coastal access submitted at the next meeting.

(e) ROWIP Timetable -

It was anticipated that the draft ROWIP would be ready by the end of September following which a brief internal consultation exercise would commence. It was proposed that this Forum would meet to discuss the draft ROWIP on 19th October following which comments would then be fed into the Council's Scrutiny Committee (Economy and Environment) and Cabinet on 24th and 25th October, 2006 respectively. The draft would then be finalised, translated and printed in November/December 2006 and published for widespread consultation in January 2007 for twelve weeks. Following the collation of responses and any necessary modifications to the draft, the final draft version would be reported back to this Forum, the relevant Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet during June 2007. That would result in final modifications being made during July and August 2007 with the ROWIP itself being printed in September 2007 and its publication promoted with an official launch.

AGREED - T H A T the timetable be accepted.

(f) ROWIP - Criteria for Assessing the Value of Maintenance and Improvement Actions -

The need to arrive at the criteria to be used to assess the value of actions to look after, or to improve, routes in order to help judge priorities was recognised. Such criteria would then be used as guidance to inform the work programme. The need, too, to identify criteria which were practical and achievable as opposed to purely visionary was widely accepted. It was suggested, for example, that the Community Strategy might prove a useful starting point.

Discussion ensued on the paper circulated for consideration which contained a number of proposed criteria separated into the headings of

- health and safety
- access for all
- community value
- features of interest
- contribution to the wider network.

Debate ensued not only on the merits of those categories themselves but also on expanding both the contents listed under each and to increasing the number of those categories. The desirability, for example, of identifying deficiencies in the current provision was raised in order that consideration

could be given as to whether the needs of horse riders, cyclists, and four-wheeled vehicle drivers should be taken into account when prioritising improvement actions, given that it could be said that the able bodied were fairly well catered for already. Not only would a priority list based on compliance with the specific criteria assist in the equitable allocation of Council's limited resources, the demonstration of a strategic approach to maintenance and improvement would also facilitate the attraction and award of grant aid from CCW and others.

Following discussion on the above and related matters, it was

AGREED - T H A T, whilst the list shown below would require further refinement, the following be adopted as provisional criteria for assessing the value of maintenance and improvement actions:

Health and Safety

- Is the proposed action necessary for health and safety?
- Will it make a positive contribution to health and safety?

Access for All

- Will the proposed action enable or improve use by people with mobility problems or any other physical or mental impairment?
- Will it improve the route in terms of providing the least restrictive access?
- Will it enable use by cyclists and/or riders?
- Will it enable more effective use of the network, or use by more people?

Community Value

- Is this a popular and well used route?
- Will the proposed action improve access to schools, community facilities and/or public transport?
- Will it enable better access around, within or between local communities?
- Will the route be adopted by the local community and potentially be maintained by that community?

Features of Interest

- Will the proposed action enable better access to features of natural or man-made interest?
- Will the proposed action result in a proliferation of signage?
- Will the proposed action, and the potential increase in visitor numbers, be detrimental to such features and, in particular, natural habitats?

Contribution to the Wider Network

- Will the proposed action make a contribution to a circular route or trail - directly, or as a link?

Economic Value

- Will the planned programme of improvement or maintenance result in long-term savings or assist future sustainability?
- Will affording a scheme priority where the route was part of a wider scheme or network improve the chances of attracting grant aid?
- Can the improvements be undertaken in partnership?
- Can the improvements encourage visitors to an area and thereby help boost the local economy?

(g) Strategic Planning of Water-Related Sports and Recreation in Wales -

Correspondence from the Environment Agency Wales was circulated in respect of the above. Over the next 12 months, Environment Agency Wales would lead a Steering Group comprising the WAG, CCW and others to develop a strategic plan for water-related sports and recreation in Wales. The strategic plan would stress some of the perceived weaknesses in planning guidance, imbalances in supply of water resources, barriers to participation, conflicts between different recreational uses of water and perceptions of incompatibility between some activities and the environment. The participation of local authorities was seen as key to the success of the plan and the letter had been made available to Members of the Forum as part of the consultation process. Members were invited either to respond individually to the Environment Agency Wales or to Frank Coleman who would then incorporate their views into the Council's response.

AGREED - T H A T the position be noted.

(h) Date of Next Meeting -

It was announced that there would be an extraordinary meeting of the Forum on 19th October, 2006 to consider the draft ROWIP and that the next scheduled meeting would take place on 17th January, 2007.