

Vale of Glamorgan Local Access Forum

Annual Report 2019/20 2020/21



Foreword

As the Chairman and the Secretary, we are pleased to present the latest Annual Report of the Vale of Glamorgan Local Access Forum.

The report is a very brief summary of the Forum's work, and due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, is a composite overview for 2019/20 and 2020/21. Further details, including agendas, reports and minutes, are available on the Vale of Glamorgan Council's website.

As we have seen across all walks of life over the past 12 months, the impact of Covid-19 has had a significant impact on open-air recreations and out-door activities. It is, nevertheless, very pleasing to acknowledge the Forum's constructive relationship with the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

The Forum is required to be reappointed every three years and the current membership has been in place since February 2019. However, many of the Forum members have been in place for much longer than that and continue to lend their experience to the Forum's work. It is with great sadness, that during the past year the Forum has had to pay its respects to the passing of two long standing members, Mr. Roland Pittard and Mr. Robin Simpson. Both were highly committed individuals who had served on the Forum for a number of years. Their contributions, knowledge, wit, and good humour will be sorely missed.

Finally, in addition to thanking Forum members for their efforts during the year, we again wish to place on record our appreciation of the support provided by the various officers involved during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly the Public Rights of Way (PROW) team.

Eddie Williams (Chairman)
Gareth Davies (Secretary)

What is the Local Access Forum (LAF)?

The function of the Vale of Glamorgan Local Access Forum is to provide advice to the Council, Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Government and others as appropriate. Its remit covers the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area in ways which take account of land management, social, economic, environmental and educational interests.

Meetings

The new Forum met on two occasions during 2019/20 – in February and December 2019 and, due to Welsh Government restrictions as a result of Covid-19, once during 2020/21 in March 2021.

A Summary of the work of the Forum

Covid-19 impacts

At the meeting held in March 2021, the Forum considered the impact as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The work of the Public Rights of Way Team was noted particularly during the initial phase of the pandemic and in response to national lockdowns. This included:

- Carrying out a public information campaign.
- Providing information, advice and guidance to landowners regarding Welsh Government legal regulations relating to countryside access.
- Facilitating the closure of certain paths for public health reasons.

One positive aspect seen during the past year, was the amount of external grant monies received. Therefore, the Council had been busy progressing schemes, but some had been constrained by the ability of contractors to access sites.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan is now due for republication and to that end the PROW team have been making preparations for it. During 2019/20, the Forum considered an updated ROWIP which included updated actions and priorities. Subject to public consultation, the new ROWIP is expected to be produced in draft during 2021/22.

Coastal Access Improvement Programme (CAIP)

The Forum monitors progress on CAIP through regular reports from officers.

CAIP projects during 2019/20 included:

- Maintenance including annual cuts, Llantwit Steps and Kissing Gates;
- Aberthaw – drainage;
- Nash Point to St. Donats – roll back of path;
- Monknash – design work for repair of path;
- Porthkerry – realignment of path.

Some of the above projects had been pushed into 2020/21, such as Aberthaw drainage. Other projects during 2020/21 included the realignment of the path between Nash Point and St. Donats, and design work to address a slope leading west from Porthkerry park.

Maintenance Priorities

At each meeting, the Forum received reports covering the Council's Public Rights of Way (PROWs), comprising some 570kms. Maintenance issues are divided into six categories to provide a statistical breakdown. Officers also submit to each meeting an update on Modification and Legal Orders.

Access Improvement Grant 2020/21

During 2020-21 funding was provided to local authorities from the Welsh Government through an Access Improvement Grant. The purpose of the grant was to support improvement of access to our Public Rights of Way network, open access land and green space.

For the Vale of Glamorgan, the total grant amount for 2020/21 was £72.9k which funded several projects including:

- Porthkerry Park – beach to car park resurfacing, path edging and board walk materials.
- Waymarking disks county wide.
- Newton House (nr Cowbridge) surface and drainage improvement.

Welsh Government – Access Reform

In 2020/21, the Forum considered a briefing note on Welsh Government proposals regarding wider recreational access to the countryside.

The Deputy Welsh Government Minister was committed to establish an 'Access Reform Advisory Group' consisting of a Steering Group and three Expert Groups (made up of cross-sector representatives) to consider these proposals further and make recommendations on their implementation. The role of ARAG would be to consider in detail, how Welsh Government's more significant proposals to reform access rights should be implemented, plus the improved recording and planning of public access.

A published report of the findings of the ARAG was expected in July 2021.

Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing in Wales (ENRaW) – Bridle and Bike.Way

The Forum was briefed on a bid submitted for funding from the Welsh Government Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing in Wales project. The Vale's bid included a bridle and mountain bike scheme which included the following:

- A review of existing bridle and bike provision and targeted opportunities for route creation;
- Proposal and costing of a programme of work;
- Collaboration with the user, local and nature conservation groups to implement, sustain and promote the network.

The aim of the scheme was to produce a plan for the delivery of a long distance horse and mountain bike trail that linked hubs of bridleway access across the programmed area.

The Forum was pleased to learn the expression of interest for the next

stage of the project had been successful, and a full application therefore submitted.

The expression of interest stage represented the competitive element of the process and therefore it was now anticipated for an offer of the full amount to enable the delivery to continue. The value of the grant was £1,046,400 until June 2023.

Member Workshop

During December 2019 the Forum held a workshop to consider the updated Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan. This provided opportunity for the Forum to help shape the contents and priorities for the new Plan prior to public consultation.

Membership 2019 to 2021

Eddie Williams (Chairman)

Roland Pittard (R.I.P) (Vice-Chairman 2019)

Frank Coleman

Susan Davies

Rebecca Exley

Ian Fraser

Sean Gaffney

Jerry Herbert

Catherine Lucas

Stuart McMillan

Robin Simpson (R.I.P)

Geraint Thomas

Gareth Davies (Secretary)

Further information in relation to the Vale of Glamorgan Local Access Forum can be found at

http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/living/environment/countryside/public_rights_of_way/local_access_forum.aspx