

Cabinet Members are asked to draw particular attention to Agenda Item (f) and the consultation response to Welsh Government's – 'Taking Forward Wales' Sustainable Management of Natural Resources'

GLAMORGAN HERITAGE COAST ADVISORY GROUP

Minutes of a meeting held on 24th November, 2017.

Present: Councillor S.T. Edwards (Chairman); Councillor A.C. Parker (Vice-Chairman); Councillors J.C. Bird, L. Burnett, S. Hanks, N.C. Thomas and S.T. William (Vale of Glamorgan Council); Mr. N.A. Lewis (Glamorgan Wild Life Trust), Ms. G.M. Barter (Natural Resources Wales), Mr. R. McLaggen (Merthyr Mawr Estates), Mr. B. Acott (Friends of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast) and Councillor R. Gant (One Voice Wales).

Also present: Mr. B. Guy (Operational Manager), Mr. P. Lock (Glamorgan Heritage Coast Site Ranger) and Mr. G. Teague (Public Rights of Way Officer).

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Mrs. H. March (Friends of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast) and Mr. J. Golunski (Dunraven Estates).

(b) Minutes –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 7th April, 2017 be agreed as a correct record.

(c) Presentation by the Site Ranger – Mr. P. Lock – Achievements and Issues Since the Last Meeting –

In commenting on the work over the past six months, Mr. Lock outlined the following:

- the team was now part of an integrated Countryside Service which had allowed more conservation work to be undertaken. This also meant that the team had access to a wide range of tools and equipment such as ride-on mowers. This made the work of the team easier and more varied;
- the team had been busy with a lot of Rights of Way work, particularly around repairing and replacing way-markers;
- in addition, the team had been repairing benches. Mr. Lock advised that vandalism may be a cause for this although sheep and livestock would also have a part to play. Mr. Lock stated that most of the benches were around 30 years old and so were starting to deteriorate. New benches had therefore

been installed which were made of sustainable oak. This meant that all benches would be uniform;

- Mr. Lock praised the work and fund raising by volunteers from Lloyds Bank;
- for the wider work of the team, Mr. Lock stated that as an integrated service, a lot more work inland was being carried out and he referred to the building of a kissing gate at Llancadle. This meant that the team would be seeing other more varied parts of the Vale;
- in terms of staff, one new starter had joined the team. This person had previously worked for the National Trust;
- work of community groups in Penllyn and Monk Nash was highlighted, with volunteers helping to maintain paths. The team had been assisting these groups to generate income and acquire grant funding;
- maintaining the gardens during the summertime had involved the valuable help of volunteers from Lloyds Bank. However, due to access, only one single pedestrian mower could be used to maintain over 7.5 of gardens;
- a range of events had taken place over the summer months, for example, over a weekend a children's 'bug hotel' had been held;
- for a period of two weeks a crafts fair had been arranged; and
- recently, the team had been able to undertake more habitat management work.

Mr. Lock also outlined that over the summer months, the team welcomed visits from as many schools as possible, although this had been limited by the sea tides. An important element of the work with schools was raising awareness with children as to what the coast had to offer.

In terms of visitors, Mr. Lock advised that over the summer months there had been some very busy days with Bank Holidays and weekends of fine weather helping to attract visitors. Mr. Lock stated that during one Bank Holiday Monday, as the tide was in for most of the day, this had meant that people were scattered around the coastal area. This had created a problem for litter collection. Mr. Lock also outlined that the risk of rock fall was a worry where visitors stay near the foot of cliffs, which represented a significant health and safety concern. Lifeguards had been active in encouraging people to move from areas of risk.

Finally Mr. Lock commented that due to the stormy weather, a lot of sea life had been seen on the beaches. Also, every five years, starfish would be washed up and also this summer a number of Portuguese Man-of-War, Jelly fish, had been seen.

The Operational Manager Mr. Bob Guy also outlined that £120k grant money had been secured from Visit Wales, which would be used to resurface the car park and to refurbish the bathroom and wet room. This was therefore very useful with match funding to be provided by Dunraven Estates.

The Chairman took the opportunity to congratulate the team on the hard work and commitment that they had shown.

(d) Coastal Access Programme – Verbal Update –

Mr. Gwyn Teague, Public Rights of Way Officer, provided the Group with an update on a number of matters relating to the Heritage Coast and the major projects that had been undertaken to date together with details of those planned for the year ahead.

The current round of the Coastal Access Improvement Programme (CAIP) was funded by Welsh Government which had commenced in April 2015 with £900k provided. Programme managed by Natural Resources Wales who gave commitment to provide £4.5m (£900k/annum) between 2015-2020.

The improvement programme was delivered by Local Authorities, with funding distributed through two mechanisms:

- Formula for maintenance based on amount per km (75% grant)
- Specific bids for improvement and development projects (100% grant)

Mr. Teague, in summarising the key activities, outlined the following:

- for improvement works at Gileston, the path had been fully completed following negotiations with the two land owners, one through an order and the other by agreement. There had also been path resurfacing and parts of the path had been fenced off. A kit bridge had also been installed;
- for Dimhole, the work had been completed during 2016/17 with a new surface and footpath created. Positive feedback relating to improved accessibility had been received;
- for Monknash, there had been significant storm damage, which had meant that much of the path in this area was inaccessible. A topographical survey had been carried out which would assist with the work to repair the path.

The Group was advised of legal orders undertaken during the past six months. This included an area east of Nash Point which required the roll back of the path from the cliff edge due to erosion and areas of weakness. A second order had been placed for west of Tresilian Bay which was a location of previous fall and a geographical survey was being undertaken. A third legal order was needed at Summerhouse Point, as the path needed to be rolled back and so there was a need to formalise an alternative route.

Finally, annual clearance work to maintain paths had cleared over 19 kilometres of coastal path.

Following a query from a Member regarding Summerhouse Point, Mr. Teague confirmed that the continuation of the route to the east was still accessed via the pebble crossing. The status of the route that leads past Boverton Mill was queried and Mr. Teague, in outlining some of the legal difficulty for this route, advised that authority for an order had been granted but there had since been a change of land owner and negotiations had broken down.

With regard to a query regarding restrictions on disability access, Mr. Teague advised that sections of the path had points of access, while other parts of the path were more inaccessible, for example because of the use of stiles. He added that the Wales Coast Path was mainly a promotional tool and the majority of underlying legal rights were footpath rights. The Council had been able to invest some money to improve disability access, but there were constraints around geography with a few areas of the path inaccessible. Therefore consideration had been given to placing gates next to stiles.

A Member asked whether any assessment had been undertaken around the likely areas to be affected by cliff falls. Mr. Teague stated that this was difficult and that the authority works to an assumption that falls will require roll back of 3 to 5 metres. Mr. Teague highlighted two areas recently affected, these being west of Tresilian Bay and the other at Fontygary Caravan Park where surveys had been undertaken and health and safety assessments were to follow. The work of Officers would be reactive as it was not easy to predict where cliff falls would occur, and because the path was well walked, any problems would be reported very quickly.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked Mr. Teague for his informative presentation.

(e) Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review – Verbal Update –

Mr. Gwyn Teague, Public Rights of Way Officer, provided the Group with an update with the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Improvement Plans were 10 year plans outlining how Local Authorities intended to manage and improve Rights of Way access in their areas. The Vale of Glamorgan published its first ROWIP during 2007, with Welsh Government guidance anticipating that all ROWIPs in Wales to be published between 2017 and 2019.

The scope of the Improvement Plan for the Vale of Glamorgan included 570 kms of footpaths, bridleways, restricted by-ways and by-ways open to all traffic. The Plan set out responsibilities for the following:

- management
- promotion
- information
- maintaining
- protection
- recording
- changing.

The Vale of Glamorgan's existing ROWIP set out contextual information that was categorised into three main groups of working. The first area of work was management, which included legal, path maintenance, resourcing and volunteer involvement. The second area of work was around stakeholders and included consideration of the range of users, land owners and occupiers and other interested bodies. The third area of work was around information, communication and promotion.

In addition, a Statement of Action was required which, for the Vale, included 38 actions derived from the assessment and linked to the three main groupings of work.

Mr. Teague advised that the new ROWIP would differ from earlier ROWIPs in the following ways:

1. Additional delivery plans would need to be produced that would be annexed to the main Plan and linked to the Statement of Actions contained within the main ROWIP.
2. Assessment of the previous ROWIP – this would be an assessment of the progress around actions within the previous ROWIP and an evaluation of outstanding actions to be taken forward.
3. Review of limitations and authorised structures – there was a need to review and provide a summary of limitations and authorised structures on Public Rights of Way to inform the public.
4. Link to new plans / strategies – there was a need to link to other targets of relevance in other plans / strategies that had come on board since the first ROWIP and also to use the ROWIP as a means to assist delivery.
5. Focus on non-participants – there was a requirement to try and take into account the needs of the wider public, including those who currently did not participate in outdoor recreation regularly. Therefore, as wide as possible consultation would be needed to be carried out.
6. Focus on blind / partially sighted / mobility users – emphasis on taking into account the needs of the blind / partially sighted and those with mobility issues. Need to consult with such users.

In terms of publication of the new ROWIP, Mr. Teague advised that following an assessment of findings of the engagement exercise, it was currently planned for the new ROWIP to be published sometime during September / October 2018.

With regard to engagement, Mr. Teague outlined that workshops had been completed, which were well attended and provided useful discussion. Telephone interviews were also being carried in order to provide opportunity to participate upon request

Mr. Acott raised that there was a need for a way marker to be placed at the entrance to the path at St. John's Well in St. Athan.

A Member queried the feedback received from the consultation exercise. In reply, Mr. Teague stated that an assessment of the outcomes would be forthcoming, but a general feeling that came out of the workshops was around better signage. In addition, the way that issues were reported was also raised. In commenting on signage, the Member stated that if there were no signs then people would not be

aware that a path existed. Mr. Teague stated that there were some mixed messages, with comments be made that signs were informative but that there should be better use of way markers.

(f) Consultation Response – Taking Forward Wales’ Sustainable Management of Natural Resources –

The Group was asked to consider the Vale of Glamorgan’s response to Welsh Government consultation document “Taking Forward Wales’ Sustainable Management of Natural Resources”. Mr. Teague, the Public Rights of Way Officer, outlined that the main aspect relevant to the Heritage Coast were proposals that would allow cyclists and horse riders access to any footpaths. There were also proposal to allow wild camping, increase access to open land and expansion of land around inland waterways.

Specifically to the expansion to cyclists and horse riders, Mr. Teague advised that this was opposed as it would raise expectations with regard to the use of public paths and because it would increase the demand for maintenance.

Mr. Bob Guy, the Operational Manager, in commenting on the Council’s response, stated that his main concern around the proposal to extend the use of footpaths to cyclists and horse riders related to health and safety. This was because the coastal path was not designed with these users in mind. He stated that some parts of the coastal path contained 90° bends which made it very difficult to see what was around the next corner. In addition, Welsh Government had stated that the proposal would not place any higher expectations on local authorities. Whilst this may be the immediate intention, there would be considerable pressure on Councils from cyclists and horse riders to maintain paths to suitable standards for such use, which may eventually even become a legal obligation. It would be very difficult for any local authority to have the resources currently in place to meet the higher demands for maintaining pathways, and cycle/horse use would cause significant damage to surfaces which would need to be maintained.

A Member stated that the proposal for free camping would be a huge drain on resources and would lead to greater problems around littering.

Mr. R. McLaggen of Merthyr Mawr Estates stated that the Welsh Government Consultation document was poorly put together. One issue from a land owner’s point of view was access to inland water ways, which he felt could cause a huge amount of problems. He added that increased use of public rights of way had been driven by the health agenda, but there had been a lack of understanding on the demand as open access had not led to an increase in uptake.

A Member queried whether the proposal would lead to the replacement of kissing gates. Mr Teague stated that there was caveat with the proposal that there would not be any correction to the duty placed on local authorities, although members queried that this could change in the future. Mr Teague referred to the degradation to the state of footpaths that would occur from cyclists and horse riders. In addition,

he stated that there may be an issue around field gates, which may mean that these would have to be left open or may result in a stile being installed.

A Member suggested that contact should be made with Highland Council and North Coast 500 in Scotland in order to gauge their experiences. It was noted that this was Scotland's equivalent to Route 66. The Member stated that it was evident that many road users of the North Coast 500 were not stopping to use local facilities, and so, communities were not seeing the financial benefit.

AGREED –

(1) T H A T the Glamorgan Heritage Coast Advisory Group agrees and strongly supports the views provided in the consultation document, particularly in relation to an objection to the expansion that would allow cycling and horse riding on footpaths.

(2) T H A T Cabinet be requested to endorse the consultation response to the Welsh Government document "Taking Forward Wales' Sustainable Management of Natural Resources".

Reason for decisions

(1&2) In order to outline the Glamorgan Heritage Coast Advisory Group's support for the response provided by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

(g) Matters Raised By Bridgend County Borough Council –

No matters were raised.

(h) Matters Raised by Natural Resources Wales –

Ms. Barter of Natural Resources Wales wished to offer thanks and appreciation to the team, especially for their valuable work to help maintain wildlife habitats.

(i) Matters Raised by the Friends of Glamorgan Heritage Coast –

Mr. Acott raised progress in relation to the transfer of the Sea Watch Centre and advised that at present, there were two interested parties. Mr. Acott stated that hopefully very soon, the Centre would once again be used for educational purposes.

(j) Date of Next Meeting –

The Chairman advised that the next meeting of the Group would take place in April 2018, the date and time of which was to be confirmed.