

VALE OF GLAMORGAN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on 25th September, 2018.

Present: Councillor E. Williams (Chairman), Ms. C. Lucas, Mr. H.S. McMillan, Mr. R. Pittard, Mr. R. Simpson and Mr. G. Thomas.

Also present: Mr. G. Davies, Mr. S. Pickering, Mr. G. Teague (Vale of Glamorgan Council) and Mrs. A. Roberts (Natural Resources Wales).

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Mr. F. Coleman and Mrs. M. Miyata-Lee (Natural Resources Wales).

(b) Minutes –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd May, 2018 be approved as a correct record.

Mr. Teague, in referring to funding for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, stated that no funding had been allocated and a report on this would be presented at the next meeting.

(c) Coastal Access Improvement Programme – Background and Update –

The Coastal Access Improvement Programme (CAIP) was a scheme funded by the Welsh Government via Natural Resources Wales and delivered through Local Authorities.

Since the Wales Coastal Path officially opened on 5th May, 2012, the scheme had continued to fund the development and improvement of the route. The current programme was initiated by a Ministerial announcement that committed £900k worth of funding per annum for the next five years. The current scheme differed from previous in so much as funding was divided between improvements and maintenance, to reflect the maturing nature of the coastal path.

Mr. Teague advised that of the projects progressing, most of these related to Legal Orders initiated in order to roll back the path from the cliff edges.

The Forum was advised that it had been anticipated that work would commence on improvements around Monkash but Natural Resources Wales had advised that further consultation and amendments were required to the scheme design before approval was granted. It was therefore anticipated that works would happen in the next financial year.

In terms of maintenance, three projects had begun which included works to reopen the path near Fontygary Caravan Park, the annual clearance of vegetation along the coastal path and provision of steps at Cwm Bach.

Mrs. A. Roberts, from Natural Resources Wales, also provided an update on the Wales Coastal Path Annual Quality Standards Survey for 2017/18. This related to the number and quality of structures and furniture along with the number of issues identified. It was noted that around 25% of structures did not meet the required standards, which was mainly to do with missing signs and logos. The improvements required had been put into a regional maintenance plan which covered the period to the end of March 2020.

Mr. McMillan queried whether the Council required volunteers in order help address the issues of missing signs. In reply, Mr. Teague stated that this would depend on the type of work required and he cited the example of a missing stone wall which required metal pieces of furniture. If however the work was appropriate for volunteers, then this could be considered otherwise the work would have to be undertaken by a suitably qualified contractor.

The Forum queried whether funding was available. In reply, Mr. Teague confirmed that the Council was able to submit a bid to access grant funding. This was awarded on a priority basis. In addition, each year the Council received a maintenance allocation, which was in the region of £20k, so as the signs came under maintenance, then Mr. Teague was confident that this money would be forthcoming.

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(d) Maintenance Report –

The Forum was provided with an update in relation to maintenance work carried out up to 30th September, 2018.

General discussion ensued around the drop in the number of issues resolved per during 2017 and 2018. In reply, Mr. Teague advised that information for the current quarter had yet to be inputted yet, so this distorted the current figures. Mr. Teague advised that Wardens had been carrying out a lot of maintenance work, particularly over the past couple of months.

AGREED – T H A T the maintenance report be noted.

(e) Legal Orders –

The Forum was presented with an update on the Legal Orders and Modification Orders across the Vale of Glamorgan. These were noted by the Forum.

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(f) Performance Information Survey Returns 2017/18 – Public Rights of Way-

Mr. Teague advised that as mentioned in the May report, the aim from the 2017/18 survey year was to increase the annual 10% survey to 20%. This would be with LAF Members maintaining a 5% spring and 5% autumn survey and PROW team picking up the remaining 10%. Unfortunately, the 2017/18 20% target had not been achieved.

The aim for 2018/19 was to reach the 20% target and to make up for as much of the lost 2017/18 survey as possible. This spring / summer 15.10% of the network had been surveyed and so the Council was on course to make up last year's loss. As with previous years, LAF Members had played a big part in helping to reach this target, with additional help from Mr. Mark O'Shaughnessy, Porthceri Park Volunteer. The pass rate for this year's survey was 66% which was in line with last year's results of 67% and the average from the previous five years of 65.8%.

The gradual decline in signposting from the road picked up in the last report continued with a pass rate of 66% from this survey. The Public Rights of Way Team intended to focus on this issue with it not being expected to be reflected in the autumn survey.

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(g) Rights of Way Improvement Plan Re-Publication –

The Forum was asked to consider whether the principles and aims of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) required revision.

To begin with, the Forum was asked to consider whether the ROWIP's vision was current and up to date. The Forum was in agreement that the Vision Statement was still relevant and did not require amending.

With regard to the principles of the Plan, the Forum was split into two groups. Group 1 was asked to consider Principles 1, 2 and 3 around access, management and sustainable improvements; and Group 2 considered Principles 4, 5 and 6 relating to better information, improved network routes and the wider context.

In relation to access, Group 1 considered that wording should be sensitive to the issues of car parking and visitor facilities. In addition, it was felt that access for all should be re-emphasised, particularly in relation to the removal of obstructions. Mr. Teague commented that the Plan probably needed to have more awareness of facilities as opposed to specific improvements to car parks, for which there was no funding allocated. The Forum agreed that a form of wording around maintaining the existing infrastructure should be added. Mr. Pittard queried whether there should be something separate and specific in relation to the infrastructure for the Coastal Path, referring to whether the Plan should be revised to consider whether it could be enhanced by the inclusion of additional routes. Mr. Teague stated that there was the Coastal Access Fund but this was not allocated for car parks, with the money there to maintain signs and improve public transport.

Around the management strategy, Group 1 felt that it was difficult for there to be a long term vision when funding was delivered on a short term basis. Any long term plan could only be executed with proper funding of improvements. For Principle 3, relating to sustainable improvement, the Group felt that the wording ran well and true. The Forum did consider that something could be added to recognise the change in agricultural policy and the impact this could have on Rights of Way access.

Group 2 was asked to consider Principles 4, 5 and 6. Principle 4 and better information, it was felt that reference should be made to the use of new technology and the possible consideration of using third party apps like View Ranger as a way of improving access to information. The Group also suggested that the Council should look at improving and updating its website making the relevant pages more accessible.

In terms of Principle 5 and improved network routes, the Group considered that the management criteria needed to be defined, with less emphasis required on the potential for multi-use, as this had on the whole been achieved. With regard to new routes, it was felt that this aspect could be better 'framed' around new policies such as Active Travel. Mr. McMillan asked where did bridleways sit in the context of Active Travel, referring to the high number of horse riders in the Vale. In reply, Mr. Teague outlined that Active Travel related more to cycle routes, but the importance of leaving bridleways in the Plan was recognised. The Group considered that wording around impact on landowners and occupiers held the right balance and so no amendments were suggested.

For Principle 6 and the wider context, Group 2 felt that this should be more closely linked to the Council's Corporate Plan and also for there to be greater regard to other neighbouring Authorities' Rights of Way Improvement Plans. The Forum also felt that there should be reference to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Mr. Pittard stated that it seemed that the Plan was in isolation and he queried whether the access plan should include the context around Active Travel. Mr. Pittard also made reference to the bidding process for the transport strategy, asking what steps had been used to join that up to the ROWIP. In reply, Mr. Teague stated that Active Travel would be referred to any updated Plan, but the work around Active Travel had been delayed as the relevant officer had been seconded to a post working with the Cardiff City Deal project. Mr. Teague added that it would right for the connection to Active Travel to be made.

In terms of the principles of the Plan, the Forum agreed that there were none that were missing.

The Forum as a whole was then asked to consider the aims of the Improvement Plan, which were grouped into three themes. These being Management, Stakeholders and Information, Communication & Promotion. Mr. McMillan queried whether there was a greater range of partner organisations and bodies that the Council could work with, particularly from the perspective of encouraging healthy lifestyles. In reply, Mr. Teague confirmed that the Council was active in seeking new

partners to work with, but it would be good to foster relationships with specific organisations within the Health Sector.

With regard to volunteer involvement, the Forum suggested that a form of wording should be used to encompass all volunteer groups. The Forum then agreed that Mr. Teague would update the aims of the Improvement Plan based on up to date information and guidelines, and for this to be presented at the Forum's next meeting.

AGREED – T H A T a revised Rights of Way Improvement Plan be considered by the Forum at its next meeting.

(h) Member Briefing – Changing the Network –

The Forum agreed that this item would be deferred to the next Forum meeting.