

Vale of Glamorgan Local Access Forum

Annual Report 2023/24



Foreword

As the Secretary, I am pleased to present the latest Annual Report of the Vale of Glamorgan Local Access Forum.

The report is a summary of the Forum's work and the key areas it has looked at, and covers the second year of the current Forum. Further details, including agendas, reports and minutes, are available on the Vale of Glamorgan Council's website.

The forum has continued to operate with membership above the statutory minimum. The LAF members continued to contribute to the resolution and development of countryside access issues and policy in the Vale of Glamorgan. We are very grateful for their voluntary input and for the experience and advice they provide and their commitment to the work of the forum. The forum has been supported through the continuing commitment of officers from Natural Resource Wales and the Public Rights of Way Team.

As we have said in previous Annual Reports, these continue to be challenging times for all those involved in the public sector. Whilst the impact of Covid is hopefully behind us, budget pressures continue to impact on services, we nevertheless, are again pleased to acknowledge the Forum's constructive relationship with the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

The Forum is required to be re-appointed every three years. Membership was renewed in November 2022 and so the current LAF appointment will run to November 2025. The re-appointment process will commence during the latter half of 2025, and we look forward to receiving applications from all that have a keen interest in countryside access.

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 within the Rights of Way Team plus all the volunteers that assist with ensuring that routes and paths are as accessible as possible. Many thanks to all.

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

Meetings were held face to face in accordance with the local access forum regulations, Meetings were held on 23rd November and 24th July 2024, with public agendas available on the Council's web site.

A Summary of the work of the Forum

Legal Orders and Evidential Modification Orders Update

Officers submit to each meeting an update on Modification and Legal Orders of the rights of way network across the Vale of Glamorgan.

Maintenance Priorities

At each meeting, the Forum received reports covering the Council's Public Rights of Way (PROWs), comprising some 570kms. The PROW Team had cleared vegetation from 35kms of paths and scores of stiles and kissing gates repaired or replaced.

Access Improvement Grant 2023/24 and Maintenance work

During 2023-24 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 2023/24 was £40k which funded several projects including:

- Roadside waymark posts and discs.
- Route furniture kits
- 2 x pedestrian footbridge.



Presentation from External Witness – Tricia Cottnam, Natural Resources Wales – The Wales Coast Path

T. Cottnam, Natural Resources Wales provided an overview presentation of the Wales Coastal Path. The presentation began by outlining that the coastal path around Wales was around 870 miles in length and was officially opened on 5th May 2012.

In terms of the Vale of Glamorgan area, the coastal path was 38 miles in length. Natural Resources Wales provided an annual grant to the Council for maintenance and further grant money had been provided for the erection of structures such as footbridges.

The Natural Resources Wales grant for 2024 had been used for the realignment of the paths at Lavernock, St. Donats and Summerhouse Bay and the fitting of new Wales Coastal Path signs and logos. The work being carried out in conjunction between the PROW Team and the Council Rangers.

Accessibility and Nature path pilot

At its meeting on 24th July, 2024, the Forum was advised of the Accessibility and Nature Path pilot scheme undertaken by Natural Resources Wales. The pilot project involved two routes in the Vale of Glamorgan that had been identified for inclusion. The pilot scheme would result in a surveying of routes in order to assess their accessibility for people with a disability and would allow them to understand the route before they arrived at their destination. The first route chosen for the Vale of Glamorgan was around West Aberthaw to Cwm Colhuw and it had been identified that new gates which were easier to open were required. The second route was around Penarth and Swanbridge, and again it had been identified for new gates be installed and also a better surface due to soggy and muddy areas.

Presentation from External Witness - C. Grimes, Managing Director for Experience Community - Least Restrictive Access

Mr. Grimes provided a PowerPoint presentation on Least Restrictive Access to Public Rights of Way network of a pilot project to assess accessibility:

- It had been identified that some of the information for disabled people to assist with access to the countryside was quite prescriptive, fairly short and did not provide a true reflection of the challenges that they might face.
- As a result, Experience Community, back in 2019, had developed a route grading system from 1 to 5 with 5 being the surface where disabled people might come across potentially impassable barriers and where assistance from non-disabled people may be required.
- In terms of grading the routes, this included photos of any potential barriers that disabled people may face and whether a radar key gate was installed as sometimes a key was not always available and so a disabled person would need to clarify before commencing the route.
- Information was also collated around the minimum path width as this was particularly important for people in wheelchairs.
- Natural Resources Wales had undertaken an audit to highlight the section of the Wales Coastal Path which could be improved, and this had led to a promotional campaign for disabled people that included six basic questions that would help a person assess whether a route was suitable.
- Both elevated and downslope gradients had been recorded and this assisted people requiring mobility equipment.
- Finally, the Experience Community organisation had devised an accessible public toilet of which there were many examples across the country, which was one of the recommendations made for the Council to progress.



It was pleasing to note that further information would be provided to the Public Rights of Way Team to progress and improve access for people with a disability.

Membership 2023/2024

Ian Perry (Chair)

William Hennessy (Vice-Chair)

Stuart Bain

Ian Buckley

Samantha Campbell

Judith Cole

Frank Coleman

Lorry Davies

Rebecca Exley

Ian Fraser

Sean Gaffney

Jerry Herbert

Catherine Lucas

Stuart McMillan

Geraint Thomas

Councillor Eddie Williams

Gareth Davies (Secretary)

Contacts

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Agenda, reports and minutes on the Council's Local Access Forum meetings can be found via the link below:

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/Council-Structure/minutes_agendas_and_reports/agendas/local_access_forum/local_access_forum.aspx

