

VALE OF GLAMORGAN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on 23rd October, 2025

Present: I.A.N. Perry (Chair); W.A. Hennessy (Vice-Chair);
I. Fraser, K. Lucas, S. McMillan, G. Thomas and Councillor E. Williams.

Also present: G. Davies (Secretary), D. Hunt and S. Thomas (Vale of Glamorgan Council), A. Davies (Welsh Government) and R. Hewitt (Natural Resources Wales).

(a) Apology for Absence –

This was received from S. Campbell.

(b) Minutes –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 9th April, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Presentation – National Forest and New Trail – Andrew Davies, Welsh Government –

The Forum received a PowerPoint presentation on plans to create a national forest and a new nature trail. For this the Forum welcomed Andrew Davies from Welsh Government and Rhodri Hewitt from Natural Resources Wales.

The aim was to create a connected woodland trail across Wales. A pilot section with a length of 185 kilometres had been earmarked to begin in Porthkerry and finish in the Brecon Beacons, passing through Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taff, and Neath Port Talbot.

The benefits of the trail were environmental, economic, and would assist with strong community engagement. There were some challenges including landowner cooperation, accessibility, infrastructure.

The project timeline was ambitious, with a goal to complete the pilot by March 2026. Feedback was welcomed from members of the Forum on the proposed route, access, and sustainability.

The Forum was shown a video of a flyover demonstration of the proposed trail.

The Forum discussed some alternative routes, land access issues, and potential improvements and provided some suggestions including the installation of water refill stations, improved accessibility (e.g. gates vs. stiles) and sustainable transport options (e.g. cycling).

(d) LAF Annual Report 2023/24 –

The Secretary, G. Davies, presented the Local Access Forum (LAF) Annual Report for 2023/24 which provided a summary of key activities covered during the reporting period.

The topics covered within the report included Legal orders, Access Improvement Grants, Natural Resources Wales' presentations and the nature path pilot. The aim of the report was to showcase the work of the LAF to the public and to outline the work of the Forum to any potential new members.

AGREED – T H A T the draft LAF Annual Report be endorsed for publication.

(e) Maintenance Update –

An update on maintenance activities would be provided under Agenda Item G – ROWIP Update.

(f) Legal Orders Update –

An update on Legal Orders would be provided under Agenda Item G – ROWIP Update.

(g) ROWIP Update 2024/25 –

David Hunt (Rights of Way Officer) provided an update of the progress with the Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The Plan included 44 action points in total ranging from service management, legal work, maintenance and accessibility.

During 2024/25, 237 new gates and 7 new footbridges had been installed plus 55 new way marker posts built and over 100 kilometres of vegetation had been cleared. In addition, the Great Glamorgan Trail was progressing well with over 8 kilometres of new trails agreed. That all represented a significant amount of work for the Rights of Way Team, which was mainly achievable through grant money received via Natural Resources Wales, the Access Improvement Grant and the Shared Prosperity Funding. Most of the funding was due to end next year, so the Team would not be able to install new furniture to the levels recently achieved.

Community engagement was highlighted as an area of strength, with regular meetings with 8 cluster groups of Community or Town Councils. In addition, there were strong ties with volunteer groups and organisations such as the National Trust.

David Hunt praised the support of the volunteers that had assisted over 120 rights of way projects across the Vale of Glamorgan.

With regard to legal orders, footpath 72/73 (Boverton Mill) was currently with PEDW for determination.

The Forum praised the amount of work undertaken by the Rights of Way Team and raised a concern regarding the possible reduction in funding and the current level of uncertainty around whether the Access Improvement Grant would continue beyond next year.

(h) Future LAF Arrangements – possible joint LAF with Cardiff –

The Secretary raised that there had been preliminary discussions about a proposal to merge the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff Local Access Forums.

The rationale supporting that was strategic collaboration with a neighbouring Authority and because Cardiff had struggled to establish its own Forum for a number of years. There was also the potential for shared resources and broader representation.

In discussing the proposal LAF members raised some concerns:

- Risk of interests of the Vale of Glamorgan being overshadowed;
- Need for balanced membership and rural representation;
- Importance of maintaining local focus and autonomy.

Members of the Forum were asked to submit feedback to the Secretary via email for management consideration, before determining whether there was merit in taking proposals forward.