

GLAMORGAN HERITAGE COAST ADVISORY GROUP

Minutes of a meeting held on 11th October, 2024.

Present: Councillor C. Stallard (Chair); Councillors A.M. Ernest and S.M. Hanks (Vale of Glamorgan Council); Ms. T. Cottnam (Natural Resources Wales), Mr. R. Sheppard (Friends of Glamorgan Heritage Coast) and J. Golunski (Dunraven Estates),

Also present: Mr. D. Hunt, Mr. P. Lock, Mr. S. Pickering and M. Fairclough (Officers – Vale of Glamorgan Council) and R. Frowen (Officer – Bridgend County Borough Council).

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillor E. Goodjohn (Vale of Glamorgan Council), Councillor N. Farr (Bridgend County Borough Council), T. Davies (Crown Estates) and L. Hancocks (Natural Resources Wales).

(b) Minutes –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 12th April, 2024 be approved as a correct record, subject to it being noted that issues around access to the Sea Watch Centre had not been resolved.

(c) Update on Work Undertaken on the Heritage Coast by the Countryside Rangers – Paul Lock, Site Ranger, Glamorgan Heritage Coast –

Mr. Lock, Site Ranger, provided an update since the previous meeting held on 12th April, 2024. Mr. Lock advised the Group:

- The summer months had been extremely busy with the Rangers dealing with a number of issues due to a high number of visitors to the beach and the Coastal Path.
- The weather had been a real issue which had impacted on the Rangers work to keep the paths open and clear of obstructions.
- Since Covid, the number of visitors to the Coastal Path had increased which meant that the Rangers were far busier, and the Path had attracted a lot more local visitors such as dog owners.
- The increase in visitors had caused some issues in that some people were not following etiquette and there was a particular challenge relating to people that wanted to stay overnight in undesignated parking areas.
- Overall, the Rangers were struggling to meet the demand and volume of work particularly in relation to litter picking and all the other regular activities they were required to undertake.

Mr. Pickering added that money through the Shared Prosperity Fund had been used to improve Rights of Way paths in the area with over 200 new structures such as gates now in place. Mr Pickering expressed great thanks to Paul Lock for managing and undertaking these works even though it was an added strain on resources.

Mr. Golunski referred to plans for new boulders to restrict access to common land for vehicles, for which permission from the Welsh Government would be sought (under S38 of the Commons Act). There were a number of areas of concern, particularly around Portobello and Norton Hill, so access needed to be controlled.

Councillor Ernest stated that it was a difficult situation as the Vale of Glamorgan Council actively promoted visitors and tourism.

The Group agreed for a progress report to be provided at the next meeting by Mike Clogg of the Council's Highways department.

(d) Vale Coastal Project – Presentation by M. Fairclough, Coastal Project Development Officer –

M. Fairclough had been invited to the meeting of the Group to provide an update on the Vale Coastal Project. M. Fairclough's presentation included the following areas:

- The Vale Coastal Project was initiated by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and funded by the Welsh Government Coastal Capacity Fund.
- The Project's purpose was to identify and tackle the challenges affecting the Vale coastline.
- There were three main areas to the Project, the first being to create a Forum made up of local stakeholders, the second to develop pilot projects and the third to identify and designate sites of important biodiversity.
- Following engagement activity with local stakeholders it had been identified that there were communication gaps and a number of barriers to access, which would provide the main focus for the Project's activities.
- Improving how areas of importance for nature were connected was also a focus, to support diverse wildlife and communities by attracting visitors and residents as well as local businesses.
- There was a need to balance the impact of tourism as there was a concern about over-exploitation, so collaboration with the tourist industry was crucial for making sustainable decisions. In addition, communication and partnership working were also vital.
- A number of pilot projects would be considered which would cover ocean literacy and coastal safety, coastal access assessments, interactive nature signage, improved litter picking initiatives and finally a coastal features rubbing trail.
- In terms of next steps, the Project would aim to put pilot plans into action, raise the public image of the Coastal Project, develop a vision for the Vale Coastal Forum, identify potential Chairs for the Forum and finally collect evidence to support bids for future funding.

R. Sheppard raised that it would be good to have representation from the Friends of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast.

P. Lock, Site Ranger, commented that tackling litter was a major concern particularly as not all litter was dropped by visitors, as a large proportion is due to the river catchment areas. In addition, litter could be washed up on shore from far away.

In terms of identifying sites for nature conservation, S. Pickering advised that that work would be undertaken as part of the Council's Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) and it would also be important to make land owners aware that they had a role to help biodiversity.

(e) Matters to be Raised by Bridgend County Borough Council (if any) –

R. Frowen advised that a bridge that had been closed for about 18 months had been repaired and was now open. With regards to Porthcawl, work on improving the seafront at Treco Bay was underway for example with plans for a full cycle way, but there were challenges in relation to funding and in terms of obtaining agreement with the landowner. Work was also underway to redevelop the fair ground with Visit Wales to develop a community corner. Works on the closed Pavilion were now complete.

The Group were also advised that, for Kenfig Nature Reserve, work had begun to install overview, interpretation and signage, and a new digital project had been commissioned, both would help people use their phones and GIS to get around the reserve.

Discussion ensued around poor phone signal connectivity in the western area of the Vale of Glamorgan that needed improvement, and for which, Councillors Carys Stallard and Joanne Protheroe had had discussions with the Director of Place around possible funding for a mapping project.

(f) Matters to be Raised by Natural Resources Wales –

As L. Hancocks was unable to attend the meeting, an update on the Glamorgan Coastal Community Capacity Building Fund was deferred to the next meeting.

The Group welcomed T. Cottnam (Wales Coastal Path Officer – Natural Resources Wales (NRW)) who had been invited to provide a presentation on the Wales Coastal Path. T. Cottnam provided an overview presentation of the Wales Coastal Path. The presentation outlined the following:

- The Coastal Path around Wales was around 870 miles in length and was officially opened on 5th May, 2012.
- 2022 marked the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Coastal Path and there had been lots of activities to celebrate the milestone, including a visit by Prince Charles to the Pembrokeshire area of the Path. There were also extra

circular routes advertised to link up to Heritage sites such as churches and forts.

- Over the past 12 years, NRW had worked closely with local authorities to improve services, furniture and signage. Routes had been revised in order to bring them closer to the coast, while some routes diverted due to coastal erosion.
- There had been lots of promotional work undertaken including the development of a website which included a 'Hall of Fame' to showcase some of those people that had walked the entire length of the Coastal Path.
- Funding had been provided to local authorities to maintain and improve the Coastal Path by cutting back vegetation and replacing signs and way markers.
- NRW had also created more accessible paths and routes and it had worked to improve biodiversity and nature recovery.
- An important piece of work had been the development of circular walks, and these would be enhanced through access via Google Street View to assist walkers to assess and choose their walking routes.
- NRW had also undertaken a Business Survey to assess whether local businesses had seen an uplift in trade since the creation of the Coastal Path.

With regards to the South Wales section of the Path, T. Cottnam advised that it covered seven local authority boundary areas, stretching approximately 180 miles. The Path would be surveyed on an annual basis to check accessibility and suitability, and NRW would assist with maintenance through the provision of grant funding. NRW would also manage and respond to public complaints and would also carry out promotional activity. At present, there were three key projects being undertaken by NRW:

- Two sites selected to assess accessibility
- Google Street View
- Extra signage with links to key routes.

In terms of the Vale of Glamorgan area, the Coastal Path was 38 miles in length. NRW 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 NRW grant for 2024/25 had been used for the realignment of the Path at Lavernock and St. Donats as well as for the fitting of new Wales Coastal Path signs and logos. T. Cottnam also highlighted that on 5th September, 2024 there had been the Vale Walking Festival from Llantwit Major Beach to Nashpoint which was a success.

Councillor Ernest asked how many people used the Coastal Path. In reply, T. Cottnam advised that counters were no longer used although periodic reviews of people data accumulated via surveys was available online.

The Group was advised that the water refill project was still up and running.

The Chair of the Group, Councillor C. Stallard, offered thanks and appreciation to T. Cottnam for the presentation.

(g) Matters to be Raised by The Friends of Glamorgan Heritage Coast –

R. Sheppard advised that the Friends of the Heritage Coast would be undertaking a promotional and awareness campaign about the Friends of the Heritage Coast. The Group's Constitution had been updated. R. Sheppard raised a concern regarding the level of pollution within rivers with that being brought up at a recent meeting of the Group. It was noted that the matter had been referred to Welsh Water and an update on the current situation and future plans was expected.

(h) Date of Next Meeting –

To be arranged.