

VALE OF GLAMORGAN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on 24th July, 2024.

Present: I.A.N. Perry (Chair); W.A. Hennessy (Vice-Chair); S. Bain, J. Cole, R. Exley, 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) and T. Cottnam (Natural Resources Wales).

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from I. Buckley, S. Campbell, F. Coleman, S. Gaffney and P. Walsh.

(b) Minutes –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd November, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Maintenance Report –

D. Hunt provided an update on the maintenance work undertaken by the Rights of Way Team.

He began by praising the work and input of volunteers, particularly in relation to the reporting of issues and in terms of obstacles to be cleared.

With regards to crop enforcement, D. Hunt advised that with landowners there had been a reasonable level of compliance with just a few letters sent reminding landowners to keep their paths clear. He reiterated that the reporting of obstacles through volunteers was a critical piece of work which freed up officer time.

(d) Legal Orders and Evidential Modification Orders Updates –

S. Thomas provided an update of the Legal Orders and Evidential Modification Orders currently in the process of being completed.

S. Thomas advised that three Legal Orders were underway in relation to path roll back due to coastal erosion. The three paths related to Lavernock Point – No. 2, St. Donats – 5 and 6, and Summerhouse Point.

With regard to Lavernock Point, S. Thomas advised that there were two sections that were close to the edge of the cliff so they would be diverted inland. It was hoped for the Order to be completed this year. For St. Donats 5 and 6, this related to a damaged section of path close to Atlantic College and again the aim was to roll back

the path inland. With regard to Summerhouse Point, the path section had been closed temporarily and a diversion put in place due to the proximity to the cliff edge. The Council was working with CADW around the make up of the new path and further discussion was ongoing.

There were two sites around which consideration was being given around integration onto the Definitive Map. The two sites relating to Brocastle Farm and Footpath 4 and Lilypond Farm in Bonvilston. With regard to Brocastle Farm, the current path went through the middle of a farm yard and so an alternative work around was being looked into. For Lilypond Farm, again due to the proximity to a farm, an alternative route was being considered.

S. Thomas further advised that currently the PROW team had six open files for applications with one being considered earlier in the year by the Public Rights of Way Sub-Committee. That application had also been lodged as an appeal with PEDW. The other five open applications involved considerable officer time and some of these may be brought to the LAF for consultation.

(e) Grant Funding Overview –

D. Hunt referred to the Access Improvement Grant which was 100% funded received from Natural Resources Wales. Through that, 50 stiles and kissing gates had been installed including two new foot bridges and over 150 way markers. Funding for 2024/25 had also been allocated and that funding would be used to install a further two foot bridges.

(f) Evaluation and Feedback on the Previous Local Access Forum Workshop –

D. Hunt referred to the accessibility and nature path pilot scheme undertaken by Natural Resources Wales and he advised that two routes in the Vale of Glamorgan 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.

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

T. Cottnam, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) provided an overview presentation of the Wales Coastal Path. The presentation began by outlining 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 a lot of promotional work undertaken including the development of a website and this 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 in order 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 route.
- NRW had also undertaken a business survey to assess whether local businesses had seen an uplift in trade.

With regards to the South Wales section, T. Cottnam advised that it covered 7 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 also carry out promotional activity. At present, there were 3 key projects being undertaken by NRW:

1. 2 sites selected to assess accessibility;
2. Google Street View;
3. 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 paths at Lavernock, St. Donats and Summerhouse Bay and the fitting of new Wales Coastal Path signs and logos.

T. Cottnam highlighted that on 5th September there would be the Vale Walking Festival from Llantwit Major beach to Nash Point.

A Forum member queried how many people were walking the coastal path from end to end. In reply, T. Cottnam stated that it was very difficult to ascertain but there was the Hall of Fame, so NRW were aware of lots of people who had completed it. It was however very difficult to work out actual numbers unless there were people with

counters. What was known was that Visit Wales had conducted an economic study of the impact since the Coastal Path was opened and Lonely Planet had showcased the Path as one of the places to visit.

In terms of future funding prospects, T. Cottnam outlined that the Coastal Path was still very much on the agenda of Welsh Government and funding for maintenance had actually gone up year on year for the last three years. Welsh Government would also allocate grant funding for large projects, based on proposals put forward by local authorities. Funding for the path would likely continue with increased focus on better accessibility and improving biodiversity.

The Chair thanked T. Cottnam for her presentation.