

**GLAMORGAN HERITAGE COAST ADVISORY GROUP**

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2023.

Present: Councillor C. Stallard (Chair); Councillors A.M. Ernest and S.M. Hanks (Vale of Glamorgan Council), Ms. L. Hancocks (Natural Resources Wales), Councillor N. Farr (Bridgend County Borough Council), Mr. R. Sheppard (Friends of Glamorgan Heritage Coast) and Councillor A. Trousdell (One Voice Wales).

Also present: Mr. D. Hunt, Mrs. N. Hollins, Mr. P. Lock and Mr. S. Pickering (Officers – Vale of Glamorgan Council).

(a) Apologies For Absence –

These were received from Councillors E.J. Goodjohn (Vice-Chair), R. Fisher and C.P. Franks (Vale of Glamorgan Council) and J. Golunski (Dunraven Estates) and T. Davies (Crown Estates)

(b) Minutes –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Update and Overview, Achievements and Site Update, Since Last Meeting - Paul Lock, Site Ranger, Glamorgan Heritage Coast -

Mr. Lock, Site Ranger, provided an update of activities since the last meeting held in April 2023. Mr. Lock stated that over the past six months the Rangers had been very busy with conservation work and ensuring that the paths were open and accessible. The summer months had been extremely wet so had meant that vegetation grew very quickly which had led to there being four separate cuts of grass. When there was fine weather there had been a large number of visitors with many people more willing to visit wildlife centres and reserves particularly since Covid.

A particular positive over the previous few months was the Tour of Britain which had created a lot of interest in the coastal path and had generated a lot of chatter on social media.

Mr. Lock highlighted that there were increased costs associated with maintaining paths and this was a particular challenge. The Heritage Coast was due to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2025 and some of the information and promotion leaflets were very old and needed to be updated, but again as the budget situation was tight, that would be a challenge.

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In addition, there were budgetary pressures on landowners to maintain permissive paths as funding was being withdrawn from Welsh Government, if funding could not be sourced access would be denied in future. The Council did not fund landowners with regards providing permissive paths but could help if the landowner was willing to legally change the paths designation to that of a Public Right of Way.

A particular positive was the reconstitution of the Friends of the Heritage Coast which would hopefully provide an income stream for future projects across Heritage Coast, and that had been missed following the impact of Covid.

In terms of accessing grant money, Mr. S. Pickering stated that at present the Council managed a total sum of £3.1m in order to deliver a wide range of biodiversity enhancement projects as well as Prow Rights of Way Improvements across the Vale of Glamorgan. However, staff resources meant that the Council was not always able to apply for further grant funding as there was insufficient resources to manage and look after funding. Other organisations may be able to administer grant funding, but they would likely face the same challenges.

Councillor Ernest queried the impact of school visits and the issues around increased costs for minibus hire etc. In reply, Mr. Lock stated that some schools had struggled to pay for the transport for visits but as the costs were seasonal, advice had been given for schools to visit outside of the summer months particularly during autumn and winter when minibus hire costs were lower. Mr. Lock stated that there had not been a decrease in the number of schools visiting the Heritage Coast.

Councillor Hanks queried whether the Friends of the Heritage Coast could apply for grant money particularly from the Strong Communities Grant Fund. In reply, Mr. Sheppard stated that he was unsure, but he would clarify this with the Group and whether it was feasible.

The Members of the Group were keen for greater linkages and networking between Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan particularly in relation to accessing grant money. Members of the Group agreed for the Chair of the Heritage Coast to write to Welsh Government to outline the need for greater funding for designated landmarks such as the Heritage Coast.

(d) Update on Public Rights of Way Work – David Hunt, Countryside Access Manager -

Mr. Hunt, Countryside Access Manager, provided a brief update on the maintenance work undertaken over the past six months. He began by referring to the progress made in implementing a new Rights of Way Improvement Plan which had been considered by the Vale of Glamorgan's Local Access Forum and was now currently out for public consultation. Consultation was due to end by the end of November following which it would be sent to Cabinet for approval and final adoption.

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In terms of the Coastal Access Improvement Programme, Mr. Hunt referred to maintenance work being undertaken around St. Donats and the roll back of the path around Atlantic College with a route now being legally formalised. In addition, grant money had been used to install new stiles and kissing gates with 80 new pieces of furniture installed and five new foot bridges built.

The Chair queried whether when rolling back paths would consideration be given to 20 or 30 years in the future. In reply, Mr. Hunt stated that long term planning was considered, and the largest buffer zones would be looked at, but that would depend on compensation to land owners and their agreement.

(e) Matters to be Raised by Bridgend County Borough Council -

Councillor N. Farr referred to new developments taking place around Porthcawl highlighted that funding had been awarded to develop the Pavilion in Porthcawl during 2024. Work would need to be completed by 2025 so there was a fairly tight turnaround. The area's Regeneration Plan was ongoing with five retail units currently rented out. There was also a new all-weather tennis court and there were plans relating to the Women's Open Golf Tournament in 2025 with one issue being the number of hotels in the Bridgend area so there would be opportunities for accommodation based in the Vale of Glamorgan.

There was discussion regarding Bridgend's Heritage Coast Advisory Group, and it was agreed that Councillor C. Stallard would be invited to attend meetings as an observer.

(f) Matters to be Raised by Natural Resources Wales (Liz Hancocks) – Coastal Funding Update –

L. Hancocks provided an update on the Coastal Community Capacity Building Fund project highlighting that funding had been provided by Welsh Government but there was a need to be mindful of the budget deficits that were currently being experienced and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

The funding received had been used to hold engagement sessions to outline the opportunities for new projects as well as some of the key challenges. A report on the discussions and outcomes of these sessions would be shared when completed. Natural Resources Wales was keen to work closely with all countryside teams in order to help nature recovery plans and to help effective nature management. Therefore, the Countryside Recovery Plan had been completed and signed off and so actions were now being progressed such as the development of corridors that would let nature move from one area to the next. As total funding was in the region of £500k for the whole of Wales, the number and type of projects that would be progressed required careful consideration which meant that meaningful community engagement and networking was important. Therefore, applications would be prioritised particularly those which would close gaps highlighted within the Recovery Plan. In addition, there was the Nature Network Fund which had been reduced for next year and was specific to protection sites. Further funding was available through capital funds administered

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to local authorities, but these had to meet specific criteria, so with budgetary challenges, it was recognised that the next two years would be extremely difficult.

Finally, L. Hancocks referred to the Sustainable Farming Scheme which would aid habitat management and this was now open for applications but was mainly aimed at sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSIs). With regard to SSIs, Natural Resources Wales were in the process of developing performance indicators and a suite of RAG statuses to indicate how effective local management work had been.

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

The Advisory Group welcomed R. Sheppard (Chair of the Friends of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast). R. Sheppard advised that the Friends Group had been unable to meet due to the Covid pandemic, but as new members had recently been appointed, the Group was looking to hold a relaunch on 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2023. Members of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast Group would be welcomed to attend.

One issue had been identified in relation to funding provided from Dunraven Estates from the production of films, documentaries and T.V. series. That money was no longer being received and there was no indication as to why. The Chair of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast Advisory Group stated that it would be worthwhile for a letter to be sent to Dunraven Estate to clarify the situation.

(h) Update regarding Merthyr Mawr Nature Reserve –

The Reserve Manager for Merthyr Mawr Nature Reserve provided a brief verbal update on developments and activities taking place. The updated included the installation of new signs and way makers, the Sands of LIFE dune rejuvenation project, habitat management and the work of volunteers.

(i) Date of Next Meeting –

To be arranged.