



24 Mount Pleasant Terrace, Pontywaun, Crosskeys, NP11 7GH

David Rowlands AM
Chair – Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales,
Ty Hywel,
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[REDACTED]

Monday 1st January 2018

David

Thank you very much for forwarding the letter from Kevin Ingram, Interim Chief Executive, of NRW's dated 15 November 2017. I am pleased to confirm that I have now spoken to John Hogg, the south Wales Regional manager for NRW, on several occasions and he has promised to keep our society updated regarding developments at the Cwmcarn Forest Drive. In addition I have also received two emails from Derek Stephen, NRW's Commercial Business Development Manager, who is now troubleshooting the issues at Cwmcarn on behalf of the South East Wales region of NRW. Unfortunately we have yet to speak to him face to face and I hope to remedy this situation later this month. We will be linking up for a telephone conversation next Monday 8th January and we also hope to arrange a public meeting at Cwmcarn village in March. Derek is aiming to draft a Project Initiation Document [PID] before the end of January and he has indicated that he needs to fully understanding the issues and concerns we have surrounding the future of the facilities at Cwmcarn.

We continue to have concerns about the opening up of new 'elite' mountain bike trail while the majority of people are being overlooked in favour of the needs of a relatively small number of mountain bikers. This matter was brought to the fore by

our committee member Mrs Maggie Thomas who wrote to NRW about her concerns that these cycle tracks would pass over public rights of way, back in July. She has yet to receive a response. She has also informed me that she asked in one of our public meetings about the reinstatement of all public rights of way after the felling was complete. Ms Sally Tansey gave an assurance at our public meeting last March, which you attended, that they would all be cleared along the legal line. She has recently walked on some of these routes and found that that FP 119 & FP 115 in the community of Abercarn were not visible on the ground and have not been fully cleared. Whilst it is accepted that rights of way can be closed temporarily for felling purposes, they must be reopened at the earliest opportunity by law. She has also received no response to this request. Given that the Forest Drive remains closed it is of utmost importance that walkers have places where they can walk in safety. It is also vital that every public footpath is unobstructed and easy to use, whether they have been obstructed for years or whether the obstructions have been as a result of the recent felling. We have found consistently that paths used by cyclists are cleared immediately after felling but those dedicated to walkers often take months to properly reinstated or remain indefinitely closed or impassable.

There is one matter that is very close to my heart that I would also like to raise at this time. I have always said that I started the campaign to get the Drive re-instated to ensure that those with mobility issues can once again visit the Drive to enjoy its magnificent scenic views. Unfortunately in early October I suffered an arthritis attack on my knees which has left me functionally immobile so I can no longer (at least for the time being) walk from my home in Pontywaun up onto the Forest Drive. Up to the time of my attack I was regularly able to survey the condition of the Drive on foot, however I am no longer able to do this and I have asked John Hogg whether it might be possible for me to become a key holder for the barrier which blocks access to the Drive. I believe that this is essential if the Friends of Cwmcarn Forest Drive are able to assess the condition of the Forest Drive, monitoring usage by cyclists and walkers, and to determine other factors that may be important to building a cogent case for a re-opening. Currently the Drive can be accessed by NRW staff and contractors, the driver of the Cwmdown minibus who takes cyclists up to the top of the steep downhill track on Mynydd Medart, CCBC Cwmcarn visitor centre staff, Mrs Barbara White who lives at Ty'n y Ffynnon farm and the Lewis family who keep

sheep at the farm and on surrounding hillsides. I would like to ask if you would be supportive of our group becoming key holding as not being able to access the Drive at all puts us at a major disadvantage in our campaign to get the Drive re-opened.

Finally the question raised by our petition asks for the Welsh Government to help source the finances required to re-open the Forest Drive and if there is a requirement to draw on European Union (WEFO) funding then time is now of the essence and it should be done as soon as possible. The Welsh government were consulted on the closure of the Forest Drive and as an aspect of this they should have insisted upon NRW ring-fencing a re-instatement fund. As they failed to do this our society considers that the problems surrounding this issue were caused by the Welsh government's lack of due diligence on this matter and hold them accountable. As a consequence of this we feel that this issue requires the oversight of your committee until at least the time of our public meeting in March and for this reason we would like to request that you keep our petition open. We continue to believe that this is essential if we are to get a positive outcome for 'the many' and not just for 'the few' and we repeat our desire that the Welsh Government will provide the resources to ensure that the drive is once again open to the general public in private cars.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Southall', written in a cursive style.

Robert Southall

Chair, Friends of Cwmcarn Forest Drive