

David J Rowlands AC/AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

22nd February 2018

Dear Mr Rowlands,

PETITION P-05-759 : Re-Open the Cwmcarn Forest Drive at Easter 2018

Thank you for your letter of 25th January 2018 requesting a progress report for your Committee. You have asked that we write to you with an update following the public meeting planned for Spring 2018, which we will do.

I can provide a short interim update now which you might find helpful.

To provide the necessary impetus and focus that this issue requires I have appointed one of my management tier staff, who comes with a background of delivering large scale energy projects on the Welsh Government's Woodland Estate, to act as a Project Executive and establish the work required as a formal Project. This will include a proposal to reinstate and open the Forest Drive to the community and public.

He has already started to establish relationships with Caerphilly County Borough Council staff and Mr Rob Southall (Friends of Cwmcarn Forest Drive), and met with Mr Southall on Friday 7th February.

In trying to achieve our aim we must also take a longer-term view of the entire recreational facility at Cwmcarn and, jointly with Caerphilly County Borough Council, have the objective of making it financially sustainable. This will inevitably see a project of change and investment lasting several years.

Public Meeting – Spring 2018

The spring public meeting you refer to is scheduled for 7th March and the necessary and appropriate members of staff from Natural Resources Wales will be in attendance and will provide an update on progress.

We will provide you with a more detailed briefing after that meeting as requested.

Welsh Government Funding Options

As stated in my letter of 17th November 2017, the reinstatement of the Forest Drive will need significant capital investment. This is due to the unusual impact of concentrated forest operations forced upon us by the need to remove large areas of infected larch trees and a need to reinstate in accordance with current safety standards.

Before we can discuss detailed capital funding options with Welsh Government we must first commission a structural engineering survey to determine as accurate an estimate of cost for reinstatement as we can. Our civil engineering expertise is in lower specification forest roads whilst Caerphilly County Borough Council will have expertise in highways more akin to a Forest Drive and so we will explore the possibility of CCBC undertaking the structural survey but failing this we will aim to tender and have this completed by June 2018, subject to operational funding being available.

Looking Forward

The Cwmcarn Project needs the next three months to become properly established with the clear long term objective of a financially sustainable operational facility. This will only be achieved by NRW and Caerphilly County Borough Council determining a sustainable long-term relationship that provides appropriate stakeholders, including the Friends of Cwmcarn, the opportunity to influence the future of the facility.

We will provide a further update after the public meeting on 7th March but I hope that this reassures you in the meantime that we are progressing this matter as we have previously committed to do.

Yours sincerely,



Kevin Ingram
Interim Chief Executive