

Shropshire Local Access Forum	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u>
17 July 2009	5	A
10.00 am		

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SHROPSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HELD ON 30 APRIL 2009 AT 10.00 A.M. AT THE SHIREHALL, ABBEY FOREGATE, SHREWSBURY

Present

Members

Mr Stephen Bell, Mr Gareph Boxley, Mr Chris Chillingworth, Mr Richard Cotham, Mr David Cowell, Mrs Barbara Craig, Mr John Gibson, Mr Bob Hill, Mrs Jane Ing, Mr Clive Leworthy, Dr Jane Morris, Mr Dennis Nisbet, Ms Sula Rayska (Chair), Mrs Zia Robins, Mr David Shelley and Mr Mark Weston.

Officers

Mr Jonathan Felton (Natural England), Ms Carmel Heggarty, Walking for Life Project Assistant, Mr Joe Penfold, Shropshire Outdoors Projects Officer, Mr Jim Stabler, Shropshire Way Project Officer, Mr Neil Willcox, Head of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation and Mr David Wise, Forum Secretary

1. Chair's announcements

The Chair referred to the recent departure of Mrs Karen Wilson, who had been with the Countryside Access Team since their inception. In conveying the Forum's thanks for all her hard work and best wishes for the future, she would be presenting Karen shortly with a copy of 'Victorian Farm' and members' written personal comments would also be included. Other members associated themselves with the Chair's tribute to her services.

The Chair reported that this was the last meeting to be attended by Mr John Gibson. Members joined with her in thanking him for his sterling work as a member.

The Chair also reported that Deb Hughes was absent from work and she wished her a speedy recovery.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mrs Caroline Bedell and Mr Roger Plowden.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED : That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 29 January 2009 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record subject to the insertion of 'be' in the penultimate line of item 10.

Arising thereon:

4.1 Feedback from other forums and items for noting (Item 12)

The Forum received an exchange of correspondence with Natural England.

4.2 Items for next agenda and list of dates (Item13)

Members requested that permissive access under DEFRA environmental management schemes should feature on the next agenda.

5. Public Question Time

It was reported that no questions or statements had been received from members of the public.

6. Shropshire Outdoors Project

Mr Joe Penfold gave a power point presentation on the work of the Shropshire Outdoors Project Partnership between Shropshire Council, Shropshire Primary Care Trust and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, which was funded by the Big Lottery "Living Well in the West Midlands". He explained the project had a £150,000 budget, with £50,000 of that being used to improve access to countryside sites.

Mr Penfold stated that he had addressed the Forum in January 2008, shortly after the three year partnership project had commenced. He gave information on the project's aims and objectives, self-funded activities, active volunteering and what had been achieved to date.

He explained that while the project encouraged sedentary people to get out and enjoy the Shropshire countryside, it concentrated on the needs of adults with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health problems. He also had to be realistic about what could be achieved. This project was engaged in walking and conservation activities and while he accepted the point made by one member that horse riding was a beneficial physical activity for health, there were other schemes which could assist. It also did not provide activities for children. He had links with the Shropshire Impairment Group which assisted people with

sensory impairments, such as the blind and deaf. The PCT were also funding 'Action for Health'.

Mr Penfold explained that volunteers, who were engaged in the project's activities, were limited in their hours and could be involved without any detrimental effect on their benefits. He had not sent leaflets to employment centres and had focussed on direct promotion but would look into that aspect.

With regard to the future he explained that one of the aims of the project was to encourage users to progress to mainstream countryside activities and he hoped this work would be continued by the PCT.

7. Walking for Life! Project

Ms Carmel Hegarty, Walking for Life! Project Assistant showed the Forum a dvd which gave a brief overview of the Walking for Life Project. It featured three project beneficiaries; a walker from Worthen whose health had improved since joining the scheme; a walker leader from Hadnall who had become much more involved in the community since walking with the group and a Parish Paths Partnership volunteer in Pontesbury who had been involved in his local walking for health group and led walks for them. Each individual's story was linked together through the 'Cobbler and the Giant' who introduced each of the video clips and linked all of it back to the Walking for Life project.

She explained that the dvd had received positive feedback and would be used with other material on the outcomes of the project to promote the idea to other councils and bodies. Copies could also be made available to Forum members.

Members questioned what would happen after the Walking for Life Project finished. They noted that Walking the Way to Health was a national initiative and that Walking for Life was specific to Shropshire Council. The Forum was informed that Natural England had provided funding for three Walking for Health Co-ordinators to be appointed under three year contracts, to develop schemes in Shropshire. The Shropshire Active Volunteering Partnership was intended to continue and the Walking for Health County Networking Group had resulted in a network of co-ordinators across the whole of the county.

Members accepted comments made by Mr Shelley that there still remained the danger of this work finishing in three years time and that the provision of long-term funding was essential.

8. England Access Forum

The order of the agenda was changed to enable Mr Jonathan Felton to update members before leaving the meeting.

Mr Felton explained that Natural England were trying to set up a system of regional co-ordinators which should improve communications and relationships

between the England Access Forum and Local Access Forums. They were also in the process of seeking re-nominations on EAF groups.

He confirmed that more information on gating orders could be provided. The Forum was informed by Mr Wise that consideration of a gating order for the 70 Steps, Shrewsbury was in abeyance at present.

With regard to the ROWIP awards Shropshire County Council had been nominated for an award and while they had not won they should still be congratulated on being nominated.

With regard to the letter from Mr Felton members noted that meetings of EAF would remain closed to the public on practical grounds, but information on their activities was made available on the website.

9. Shropshire Council

Mr Neil Willcox gave a detailed power point presentation on the Outdoor Recreation Service, which formed part of the Culture and Leisure Division of Shropshire Council.

He drew the Forum's attention to the development of a vision for encouraging walking, cycling, horse riding and other recreational activities through the provision of facilities e.g. at country side sites and other means. Internet information about services had been increased and could be found on the Shropshire Council website and Discover Shropshire2.

In answering questions from members on the rights of way revenue budget Mr Willcox confirmed that the Council were trying to improve front line services and the first priority was to equalise services across the county. In view of the recession economic regeneration and affordable housing would be one of the priorities, and the grant settlement to Councils might be less next year.

A request was made for all the Shropshire Council countryside sites to be open access land in the future.

Reference was made to the regulatory functions of Shropshire Council in dealing with public rights of way stopping up and diversion applications, and the determination of claimed rights of way. A request was made that the increased powers delegated to the Countryside Access Manager should be made known to the Forum at their next meeting.

10. LAF UCR Working Group update

The Forum received the minutes of the last meeting of the UCR Working Group held on 20 March 2009.

Mr Boxley reported on behalf of the Working Group that while they were making progress they had a number of concerns and issues. The Forum noted that no one person in Highways had a responsibility to liaise with the Access Team and to administer the list of streets and there was a lack of continuity in record

keeping. The list of streets was a work in progress and not a definitive list of roads with vehicular access.

While county road maps had been digitised they did not always contain accurate information and it was evident that mistakes had been made, some of which had been repeated. It was pointed out for example that that Mrs Robins had spent an immense amount of time going over the 'small print' of road maps. However, many of her submitted corrections appeared to have been lost. This reinforced the argument that a dedicated person should be employed, as any mistakes were considered unacceptable.

There were concerns over whether the 1929 handover maps, early county highways maps divisional surveyor maps and other paper records were being kept in a safe place, and not discarded.

It was felt that surveys needed to be undertaken and there should be a proper visual record of these routes which should be signposted in black, preferably with 'county road' included.

The width of highways needed to be properly enforced by the Council as it appeared that a 'blind eye' approach was being taken in respect of encroachments.

There was also concern that no Highways representative was attending their meetings.

Following further discussion it was

RESOLVED : That Shropshire Council be recommended to employ a dedicated employee to ensure that the list of streets is maintained to an acceptable standard and that sufficient revenue funding is made available for the maintenance of recreational UCRs and their signposting.

11. Shropshire Way Update

Mr Jim Stabler, Shropshire Way Project Officer updated members on various issues.

He reported that a permissive circular walk had been agreed with the Acton family around Acton Scott. Linear walks were on the Shropshire Walking website. Shropshire MIND were using the route for a sponsored walk in May. The project would finish on 9 July and he had put a marketing plan together for the current and following year. It was hoped that the Shropshire Way Liaison Group would continue in existence.

With regard to the requested Plowden diversion he had met Mr Roger Plowden on site and the proposed solution was a multi-purpose route through the old station yard which would bring it out sixty metres before the turn off at Choulton Bridge. It was proposed to widen the verge to two metres and establish a new fence for the last sixty metres.

Mr Shelley also raised concerns about the line of the diverted route which avoided Sheet village, as the diversion along minor roads missed out Caynham Camp. Mr Stabler replied that the original route through Sheet village was still available, but it would no longer be signed as part of the Shropshire Way.

12. Feedback from other forums and items for noting

The Forum received minutes of the Shropshire Riders and Carriage Drivers Groups held on 13 October 2008, Shropshire Cycle Forum held on 18 March 2009 and Shropshire Hills AONB Access and Tourism Group held on 17 March 2009. Access newsletter issue No. 38 was also circulated.

13. Items for next agenda and list of dates

No further agenda items were suggested for consideration at the next meeting.

It was reported that a request had been received from Mr Plowden to change the date of the next meeting and the proposed meeting on 27 January 2010. The enlarged lounge at Craven Arms Community Centre was available on the 20, 22 and 23 July. Following discussion it was

RESOLVED :

- a) That the date of the annual meeting to be held at Craven Arms Community Centre on 17 July 2009 shall remain unchanged.
- b) That future meetings be held on Tuesday 20 October 2009, 4 February 2010 and Tuesday 27 April 2010.

Chair.....

Date

The meeting closed at 12.45 p.m.