

Shropshire Local Access Forum	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u>
21 October 2010	<b>4</b>	<b>B</b>
10.00 a.m.		

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SHROPSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM  
HELD ON 15 JULY 2010 AT CRAVEN ARMS COMMUNITY CENTRE,  
NEWINGTON WAY, CRAVEN ARMS**

**Present**

**Members**

Mr Stephen Bell, Mr Gareph Boxley, Mr Chris Chillingworth, Mr Richard Cotham, Mr Bob Hill, Mrs Jane Ing, Mr Stuart Morgan, Dr Jane Morris, Mrs Alison Parker, Mr Roger Plowden, Ms Sula Rayska, Mrs Zia Robins, Mr David Shelley and Mr Mark Weston.

**Officers**

Ms Deb Hughes (Countryside Access Manager), Ms Alison Kennedy (Cycling Town Project Manager), Richard Knight (Access Maintenance Team Leader), Mr Jim Stabler (Access Development Officer) and Mr Martin Stevens (Committee Officer).

**1. Election of Chair**

**RESOLVED**: That Mrs Jane Ing be elected Chair of the Shropshire Local Access Forum for the ensuing year.

**2. Apologies for Absence and Welcome to New Members**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Steve Charmley, Mr Clive Leworthy, Mr David Cowell and Mr Mike Owen.

The Chair was pleased to announce that Mr Stuart Morgan, Mrs Alison Parker and Mr Mike Owen had been appointed to serve on the forum.

**3. Election of Vice-Chair**

**RESOLVED**: That Mr Mark Weston be elected Vice Chair of the Shropshire Local Access Forum for the ensuing year.

#### **4. Declarations of Interest**

Mr Plowden declared a personal interest on item 13, Use of Old Railway Lines within the County as he owned part of an old railway line in Shropshire.

#### **5. Minutes**

**RESOLVED :** That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2010 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

- 5.1 Mr Shelley stated that appendix 5 to the agenda added clarification to the proposed creation of the roadside cycle path at Minsterley which would involve removing a section of hedge. It had been clarified that the roadside route and the old railway route were not seen as alternatives because the roadside route was much shorter. The Cycling Town Project Manager stated that she did not think the required hedge survey had been completed and there were currently negotiations with the planning department and the landowners.
- 5.2 Mr Shelley stated that the surface of the cycle route in Chelmarsh was badly eroded. The Access Maintenance Team Leader responded that this was an issue which they were currently addressing.
- 5.3 Members raised the subject of certain country roads being designated quiet lane status with an advisory 20 miles per hour speed limit. It was requested that this subject be a future agenda item with Hugh Dannatt from the Council invited to attend.

#### **6. Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

#### **7. Feedback from LAF Away Day**

- 7.1 Members suggested that the Councillors in attendance on the away day should next time be formally introduced. The difficulty of the walk should in future be at the level of the least able and the possibility of using name labels explored. Members stated that overall the day had been interesting and worthwhile and hoped there would be further away days in the future. Members asked if the updated Quarry Development Plan could be brought to the next meeting.

#### **8. Task and Finish Group**

- 8.1 The Countryside Access Manager stated that Members of the Task and Finish Group had been in attendance at the LAF Away day as they had been keen to hear LAF Members views on rights of way. During that day the main focus had been on definitive map issues. The Task and Finish Group were very interested in feedback from LAF Members on maintenance and enforcement. The report tabled at the meeting highlighted the current prioritisation system for Shropshire and the proposed hierarchical approach to the network. Routes would be categorised A, B, C or D routes.

- 8.2 The Countryside Access Manager stated Category A routes would include routes in the main towns incorporating walking for health / safe routes to school. In addition A routes would include urban fringe routes (2km from the main town centres), Shropshire Council strategic and promoted circuit routes, defined hotspots, Shropshire Council countryside parks and routes which were within areas designated as having 'walkers welcome' status.
- 8.3 Category B routes would include routes in the Market Towns including key walking for health / safe routes to school. In addition B routes would include routes within 2km of the market towns and key centres, P3 Local circular routes, higher status routes, others sites such as Shropshire Council small holdings, Wildlife Trust Sites, National Nature Reserve's and Local Nature Reserve's and the Forestry Commission. Category C would include everything else not falling within the other categories. Category D included remote routes, cul de sac routes and routes with a low use and considered to have low value.
- 8.4 The Countryside Access Manager stated that the department was about to embark on a survey to assess the complete rights of way network. There would be a local consultation with the Parish and Town Councils to discover what they considered to be their priorities which would alter the set criteria previously mentioned, the system was designed to be flexible to local demand. The surveyors were also being asked to look at potential for route development. The Local Shropshire Council Member had been added to the list of people considered whose complaints should be given a higher priority. LAF Members expressed concern that over half of the routes would be given class C or D status and wondered if issues on these routes would ever be acted upon. In response the Countryside Access Manager stated that that they were only draft figures and the eventual percentages would alter as a response to the condition survey. Also in the future people that had made a complaint would be sent a letter informing them of the level of priority that had been designated to the issue. Whilst C routes and D routes would be considered to have a lower priority this did not mean that action would not be taken but it was more likely to take a greater length of time to act on the problem.
- 8.5 The Access Maintenance Team Leader stated that appendix 6 to the report detailed how the proposed system changed the priority score compared to the old system. The old system gave extra points for repeat offences but the new system did not take this into account.
- 8.6 Mr Shelley stated that he considered walking for health routes in rural areas should be given a high priority in the new scheme. He was concerned that there was too much emphasis on urban areas whose routes, due to usage, were more likely to be maintained anyway. The Countryside Access Manager confirmed all Walking for Health routes would have a high priority regardless and that this would be clarified further within the report. Also that the condition survey would be conducted by Council Staff with an initial pilot phase to ensure consistency in how the survey was conducted.
- 8.7 Mr Mark Weston asked if any consideration had been given to stewardship schemes within the proposed hierarchical system and if any thought had been

given to routes on areas on the county border or just outside. He also asked if consideration had been given to works carried out by other bodies.

- 8.8 In response the Countryside Access Manager stated that she would give some thought to routes that linked with stewardship schemes and those close to the border and how to deal with these effectively. The Council would continue to support the 55 Parish Paths Groups across the county. The local Parish Paths groups would continue to set their own priorities.
- 8.9 Members raised concern that there was no provision for repeat offenders in the scheme. The previous scheme allowed for this and Members felt that this should be continued.
- 8.10 Mr Shelley said that a Enforcement Officer had not been replaced at the Council which concerned him. In response the Countryside Access Manager stated that there was currently a job freeze in the Council but some ideas were being explored.
- 8.11 Mr Plowden raised the subject of permissive paths across the county which were often more valuable than actual rights of way. In response the Countryside Access Manager stated that she was indeed aware of the importance of permissive paths. Officers did not necessarily know where they existed in the county but were supportive of their usage. She thanked the LAF for their input which she would report back to the Task and Finish Group.

## **9. England Access Forum – LAF consultation**

- 9.1 The Access Development Officer referred to the letter from the England Access Forum and Natural England. The letter asked for feedback on a number of questions outlined in the letter.
- 9.2 Members were in agreement that The England Access Forum was an important organisation which linked effectively all the Local Access Forums. There needed to be an overall body linking them together and to take issues forward.
- 9.3 The Access Development Officer stated that the future of the England Access Forum was in doubt.

## **10. LAF Local Transport Plan Integration**

- 10.1 The Access Development Officer stated that the format of the LAF Transport Plan had not yet been decided. Mrs Zia Robins asked if it could be ensured that horse riders considerations were included within the plan.

## **11. Cycling and Other Matters**

- 11.1 The Cycling Town Project Manager stated Shropshire Council was involved in the promotion of cycling, provision of cycle parking and developing and maintaining cycling routes. The website was becoming increasingly important. The website gave info, advice and tips on cycling. Cycle training could be

offered to adults as well as children at differing levels. She was delighted that so many cycle routes had been developed in recent years.

- 11.2 Recent cycling development plans had included in Shrewsbury paths in the Greenfields area which would bring a key link to the school; and the junction improvements on the Welsh bridge. Outside of the Shrewsbury area there were less developments but there had been some new cycle paths in the East Oswestry area. There had been significant developments to the national cycle network over the last ten years.
- 11.3 Mr David Shelley enquired about the cycle route from Minsterley to Pontesbury. He questioned why the route should be on the main road arguing that it would be better to have the route cross country which was a much healthier route. The Cycling Town Project Manager in response stated that the most direct and convenient route had been chosen. Mr Weston asked whether the Minsterley to Pontesbury route would also be able to be used by equestrians. The Cycling Town Project Manager confirmed that equestrians would be able to use the route.
- 11.4 Mrs Zia Robins stated that it was important to mark routes correctly. Maps and leaflets should clearly state whether a route was open to walkers, cyclists and riders. Bridleways should be signed as such and not just signed as cycle routes. She stated that it was important that the surface of bridleway routes were kept in suitable condition for horse riders.

## **12. Shropshire Way Status**

- 12.1 The Access Development Officer stated that the Council had been granted £50,000 Leader funding to establish a ring of circular walks in the Oswestry area with guidebooks, podcasts and website coverage. He was also delighted that £30,000 Leader funding had been granted to establish a ring of walks in the Much Wenlock area. The Countryside Access Manager circulated the Shropshire Council Outdoor Recreation Service Annual Report for Members perusal.

## **13. Use of Old Railway Lines within the County**

- 13.1 It was agreed that the Shropshire LAF submit a formal request that they be consulted on the use of Old Railway Lines within the county.

## **14. Stakeholder Working Group on Unrecorded Public Rights of Way**

- 14.1 Mrs Zia Robins stated that appropriate funding was needed to deal with the deficiencies of the definitive map process. Members asked the Access Development Officer to enquire with Natural England as to the current status of the project. The project could ultimately save money for the Council.

- 14.2 Members requested that in the future agenda items should be allocated set times.

## **15. Budgetary Pressures**

- 15.1 Mrs Zia Robins in summary stated that the importance of tourism to the economy could not be underestimated. The Shrewsbury Chronicle had recently highlighted that tourism brought in £561 million and directly or indirectly provided jobs for 12,000 people around the county. Tourism was likely to increase over the next few years as holidays abroad declined due to the financial climate. The local rural economy was also of importance.
- 15.2 Mrs Robins stated that if rights of way were not maintained, it could impact on tourist revenue and potentially bring a cost to the Council through potential claims for injuries incurred by rights of way users. Neglected routes would cost more to get back if they were not maintained regularly. This meant that the enforcement team were essential as was the support of the Parish paths Partnership Groups, which ultimately saved the Council money. Previous neglect in checking planning applications where rights of way were involved was now having a cost impact on the Council.
- 15.3 Mrs Robins stated that a report in the Shropshire Star on the 23 January 2010 had stated that Shropshire had the third lowest number of Definitive Map staff considering the size of the network. They would be under further pressure if the 2026 cut off date was implemented. It was therefore essential that for Shropshire's health and economy that the Countryside was properly funded.
- 15.4 The Countryside Access Manager circulated the key messages document detailing the funding cuts that the Council would have to make over the next few years. She stated that the Council was currently looking at the implications of the required cuts and more should be known for the next meeting in October. The Council acknowledged the importance of rights of way through the funding given to support the Parish Access Project for the next 5 years. LAF Members were welcome to give their comments to the Chief Executive or Director of Resources. Members raised concern that once again no Shropshire Councillors were present at the meeting.

## **16. Joint Telford & Wrekin – Shropshire LAF Meeting**

- 16.1 The Access Development Officer stated the Telford & Wrekin Local Access Forum would be discussing at their next meeting whether they would like a joint meeting.

## **17. Feedback from other Forums and items for noting**

- 17.1 The Access Development Officer confirmed that the minutes of the Walkers Forum which were marked to follow on the agenda had actually been circulated at the last meeting as the forum had not met since.

17.2 Mrs Robins stated that there was confusion about landowners' responsibilities in relation to countryside stewardship hedge cutting on rights of way. She requested that Natural England should take action on the matter. Members expressed their desire for someone from Natural England to be present at every meeting of the Shropshire Local Access Forum.

17.3 Mrs Robins expressed concern about bird scarers sited alongside roads and rights of way. These were particularly dangerous to horse riders.

**18. Next meeting**

18.1 The date of the next meeting was reported as 21 October 2010.

Chair.....

Date: 21 October 2010

The meeting closed at 12.45 p.m.