

Shropshire Local Access Forum	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u>
13 July 2011	3	A
10.00 a.m.		

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SHROPSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM
HELD ON 13 MAY 2011 AT 10.00 A.M. AT THE SHIREHALL ABBEY
FOREGATE SHREWSBURY**

Present

Mr Stephen Bell, Mr Chris Chillingworth, Mr David Cowell, Mrs Jane Ing (Chair), Mr Stuart Morgan, Dr Jane Morris, Mrs Alison Parker, Mr Roger Plowden, Ms Sula Rayska, Mrs Zia Robins and Mr Mark Weston (Vice-Chair).

1. Election of Chair

RESOLVED : That Mrs Jane Ing be elected Chair for the ensuing year.

2. Apologies for Absence/ Welcome

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mr Gareph Boxley, Mr Richard Cotham, Mr Bob Hill and Mr Mike Owen.

The Chair welcomed Ms Jennifer Parsons Natural England to her first meeting.

Mr William Heywood-Lonsdale was also attending his first meeting as an observer as he was interested in joining the Forum.

3. Election of Vice-Chair

RESOLVED : That Mr Mark Weston be elected Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

4. Confirmation by members of their commitment to serve on the Forum for a further year.

Ms Rayska stated that she would be resigning in the near future.

5. Declarations of Interest

Mrs Robins declared a personal interest in an issue to be raised at agenda item 7.

6. Minutes

RESOLVED : That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 24 January 2011 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Arising thereon:

Mr Jim Stabler, Access Development Officer, gave an update on various matters:

6.1 Contra flow cycling on one-way streets (Paragraph 5)

It was noted that the Walking Forum were happy with proposals to implement contra flow cycling in certain designated one-way streets in Shrewsbury.

6.2 Natural England Organisational Changes (Paragraph 6)

The Forum noted that there had been no further information from Natural England on a new delivery model for the Walking for Health programme involving other sponsors.

Mr Stabler stated that he had been in contact with Mr Phil Lendon, national LAF Co-ordinator for Natural England, but a decision had not yet been reached over whether regional co-ordinators would continue to be funded. The English Access Forum had been dissolved.

6.3 The Sale of the Public Forest Estate in England (Paragraph 9)

The Forum noted that proposals for the sale of the Public Forest Estate had been withdrawn by Mrs Caroline Spelman, Secretary of State for the Environment. However, it was likely that fresh proposals would be made at some stage in the future. Mrs Spelman had established an Independent Panel to advise her on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy and evidence was being sought by that body.

It was agreed that enquiries should be made about the extent of public access to Forestry land in Shropshire, including both official public rights of way and permissive routes. Ms Hughes reported that Forestry land had been examined as part of the preparation for the implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Mrs Robins, Mr Morgan and the Chair indicated their willingness to research the relevant files for information to see what the consequences would be for Shropshire.

6.4 Shropshire Council budget 2011/12 and organisational changes (Paragraph 10)

Ms Deb Hughes reported that there had been no budgetary changes since the previous meeting. She had been appointed Outdoor Recreation Manager and would assume the post shortly. She would be undertaking a staff restructuring exercise as part of the Council's strategy to make savings.

6.5 Lea Quarries Update (paragraph 16)

It was reported that there was no further news over negotiations between the National Trust and Aggregate Industries Ltd over the acquisition of Lea Quarries, Much Wenlock.

7. Public Question Time

Mr J Townsend asked the Forum to support objections to proposed poultry units at Foxholes Farm, Little Ness in view of the detrimental impact on public rights of way, local roads and the Nesscliffe Country Park. He pointed out that the planning application had been refused by the Strategic Planning Committee on 27 May 2010 and a public hearing into an appeal would be conducted by the Planning Inspectorate on 31 May and 1 June 2011.

Differing views were expressed by members over firstly whether the Forum should comment on individual planning applications or confine themselves to strategic or policy issues. Secondly while some members expressed concern about the impact of the proposals on public access, others felt that agricultural developments in the countryside should not be prevented by public rights of way, if such issues could be addressed by appropriate planning conditions.

RESOLVED : That a letter be sent to the Planning Inspectorate stating that more consideration should have been given to the effects of the development on local public rights of way.

(Mrs Robins asked that her abstention from voting should be recorded).

8. Shropshire Local Transport Plan

A presentation was made by Jan Cook, Team Leader Traffic and Transport Studies, on the provisional Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2011-2026, which set out the proposed approach to transport objectives, policies and programmes for Shropshire. The provisional Local Transport Plan Core Strategy set out Shropshire's transport objectives and policies for the next fifteen years and the associated implementation plan for transport delivery covered proposals for the implementation of detailed transport priorities and a capital programme over the next four years.

The views of interested parties on the draft strategy and implementation plan had been requested by the end of July.

Various issues were raised by members including the following:

National speed limits and whether these were appropriate in rural areas. Some but not all 30 mph speed limit zones were being preceded by 40 mph speed limit signs on the approach to slow motorists. Ms Cook explained that the Council were not looking at 20 mph limits in a rural context and she agreed to

ascertain what guidance was used for the introduction of 40 mph speed zones before the 30 mph zone was reached.

Why was there no mention of electric cars? She responded that supporting electric cars was covered by policies to encourage lower carbon transport. It was not considered realistic to include provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the first implementation plan.

The lack of references to rights of ways and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (Countryside Access Strategy for Shropshire) was criticised by several members. Rural leisure use of highways was not included: the focus was on urban areas. Ms Cook replied that the document had been kept very high level and was shorter than the previous plan. It had not been written with a view to exclude rights of way. A series of more detailed supplementary LTP strategies including a walking strategy would be produced later.

Members referred to the economic and environmental benefits in supporting public transport access from urban areas into the Shropshire countryside generally and tourist attractions and questioned whether this was being neglected by Shropshire Council. Ms Cook reported that the Council had been undertaking a bus strategy review of the whole transport network and because of the increasing financial constraints on bus subsidies they had had to prioritise services. The priority for public transport support was everyday essential and strategic journeys. She added that a bid had been submitted for further funding of local sustainable transport. A comprehensive website containing bus information to help increase public usage on services and a guide to tourism and walking would be provided if the funding package was approved.

RESOLVED : That a response be made requesting that further information on public access and rights of way be included in the Local Transport Plan documentation

9. Quiet Lanes

Ms Cook circulated a report on Quiet Lanes which had been a former Countryside Agency initiative for minor rural roads. She explained that there had been two Quiet Lanes demonstration projects in Norfolk and Kent, which had received national funding. There had also been two pilot schemes in Shropshire.

Monitoring had shown no significant tangible benefits, such as a reduction in traffic speeds or accidents involving non-motorist users, which had been disappointing. It was the view of Shropshire Council that it was not a priority to deliver any more schemes at the present time.

It was pointed out that there had been a relatively recent Quiet Lanes Project on rural roads in the Little Wenlock area by Telford and Wrekin Council.

It was noted that it was possible to identify quiet lanes by entry/exit signs.

10. Public Toilet Provision

Mr Steve Brown, Head of Environmental Maintenance, reported that in December Shropshire Council had taken a policy decision to stop maintaining public conveniences because of the pressures on revenue budgets. An exercise had been undertaken with parish and town councils to examine whether they were willing to have this function devolved to them. Following negotiations the net effect was that 37 public toilets would remain open (including three in the former Bridgnorth District Council area which Shropshire Council would maintain until the current contractual arrangements expired in 2013). Four public toilets would close at Prees Heath, Craven Arms, Clee Hill and Cleobury Mortimer.

Mr Brown explained that it might be possible to provide public toilet facilities under a community toilet scheme if some financial support was provided by the Council.

11. Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow

Mr Phil Holden, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Manager gave a presentation on a proposed sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the Shropshire Hills, Ludlow and other market towns in the Ludlow Destination Development Partnership area.

The presentation (a copy of which is on the webpage for this meeting) covered:

- Definition and aims
- Observations from own consultations
- Guiding principles
- Strategic objectives
- Target markets

There would be a formal public consultation period of three months which would be followed by an application for a European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.

12. Natural England Organisation brief

Mrs Lyn Stabler brought the Forum up to date on various matters. She explained that revenue support had been withdrawn for permissive access in new Higher Level Stewardship Schemes, but payments for educational access had been re-inserted and capital works for permissive access retained.

HLS was a competitive scheme. So if applicants were offering to provide 'permissive access' in an area where a council felt that such routes were desirable, then it might help individual applications to be successful. The current schemes would continue, so there would be a slow decline in the number of schemes offering public access over the next ten years.

If public access was agreed in any schemes Natural England would advertise them as voluntary permissive access. There was a small separate budget for

special projects for access works e.g. a bridge, but they would have to be considered at national level. Natural England would continue to have close liaison with the Countryside Access Team to ensure that proposed routes would be useful. She accepted that there was a backlog about permissive access information on the website and the contact phone number needed to be changed.

In view of the large resource reductions at Natural England there had been a staffing re-structuring with four delivery teams based on the themes of Open Access and Rights of Way, National Trails, People and Partnerships and Coastal Access.

Natural England no longer had a regional structure. For the Land Management function of Natural England there were four large area teams. Shropshire was in the Midlands team, led by Rob Menzies, which stretched from Humberside down to Gloucestershire, and was broken up into county teams. Chris Hogarth was the Team Leader for the Shropshire team. Mrs Stabler confirmed that she remained the point of contact for access matters in agri-environment schemes.

The Access and Engagement function within Natural England had team working on Statutory Access as well as a People and Partnerships Team whose remit included engagement with LAFs. Jennifer Parsons was the local contact for this team.

Natural England were no longer responsible for policy changes, so any representations should be directed to DEFRA.

13. LAF member's Handbook

Mr Stabler thanked members for the constructive comments which had been received on the draft handbook and the requests for further information relating to the Definitive Map and Natural England and Shropshire Council useful contacts. This would be actioned for the autumn meeting.

14. DEFRA letter on the future of co-ordinating LAFs and reporting to Natural England/ DEFRA

The Forum received a copy of a letter from Mr Richard Benyon MP, Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries.

A reply had been sent pointing out in general terms that it was felt that there should be a central organisation for LAFs to report to.

15. Feedback from other Forums and items for noting

The Forum received for information:

Minutes of the Byways Liaison Group Minutes of 10 March 2011
Minutes of Shropshire Riding and Carriage Driving Groups held on 4 October 2010
Access newsletter issues 48 and 49

The minutes of the Shropshire Walking Forum meeting held on 20 January and LAF Working Group on 8 April 2001 were tabled at the meeting.

It was pointed out that in addition to the review of statutory duties placed on local government, considered by the LAF Working Group, there was also another Government consultation on the Red Tape Challenge website, which referred to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

16. Items for next agenda

It was reported that an away day for members had been arranged for Thursday 9 June with a Meres and Mosses focus. Mr Stabler gave details of the proposed itinerary.

Members were asked to suggest agenda items for the next meeting which would be held on Wednesday 13 July 2011 at Craven Arms Community Centre. It was agreed that there should be an update on the review of UCRs and an update on the structure of the Outdoor Recreation Team.

The meeting closed at 12.10 a.m.

Signed

Date