

Annual report of the Shropshire Local Access Forum Apr 2012 to Apr 2013

Development and Membership of the Forum

The forum membership continues to develop with some younger members joining and representing local outdoor pursuits and cycling interests. Jane Ing who has been a very successful chair for three year is resigning in the summer of 2013.

Forum meetings and Attendance

Meetings were held on the following dates:

- 01/05/2012 held at Shirehall with 15 members attending
- 09/07/2012 held at Acton Scott with 14 members attending
- 18/10/2012 held at Shirehall with 15 members attending
- 31/01/2013 held at Shirehall with 14 members in attendance

For a record of the agendas and minutes see:

http://shropsdemserv.web.coop/live/dynamic/DemServMeetingsArchived.asp?group_id=E0CF1E5D-AAA5-4B56-BD8B-6F6AC07A9810

Presentations, reports and actions

The following have been given

- Emma Smith, Economic Research Officer of Shropshire Council gave a presentation on “The Economic Value of Walking”
- Councillor Madge Shineton briefed on Place Plans and the “Core Strategy”..
- Jim Stabler, the Access Development Officer gave a presentation on the results of the annual online user survey that gathered information on the use, problems and wishes of rights of way users.
- Councillor Madge Shineton gave the LAF a briefing on the outcomes of the first annual National LAF Conference.
- The new Natural England Paths for Communities fund was outlined to the LAF and their required involvement in supporting projects for bids was explained.
- Mr Andrew Kelly, Chair of the National Highway Records Working Group, explained the work of the group.
- Andy Savage, Highways Development Control Manager, Shropshire Council briefed the meeting on the status and accuracy of the highways maps
- Peter Dunhill, the Shropshire Way Project Officer on the work of the Shropshire Way extensions in the north of the County.

- Shona Butter, Mapping and Enforcement Team Leader, on the status of the “Lost Ways Project” and data.
- Clare Fildes the AONB development Officer updated on the status of the Stiperstones and Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme.
- Jonathan Brown and Nick Holden from the REA Valley Environmental Network (ReaVEN) briefed the meeting on their proposals for a traffic free trail along the Rea valley using the old Minsterley railway line.
- Jo Dimitri, Project Manager, National Trust, was in attendance and provided a presentation on the Trust’s plans for the Lea Quarries at Much Wenlock.
- Peter Moss, Meres and Mosses Project Manager, gave a presentation on the Shropshire Wildlife Trust’s Meres and Mosses Landscape Partnership Scheme and the nature improvement area.
- Tim Ward gave briefing notes on access to commons and rights and responsibilities on commons.
- Alison Kennedy of Shropshire Council highways department reported on shared use cycle tracks.
- The control of dogs report was discussed.
- Tim Coleshaw of Natural England briefed the meeting on the dedication of access on National Nature Reserves.

Interaction with Natural England

This year has seen little involvement with Natural England LAF representative who in past years used to attend nearly all of the meetings.

Advice given to section 94 Bodies

Responses to consultations were given to the following bodies:

- Natural England’s review of the management of National Trails.
- The triennial Review of the Environment Agency and Natural England
- The content of the annual Shropshire Council Outdoor Survey
- Shropshire Council - Planning application for Gap Site, Raven Meadows.
- Department of Transport - Penfold Review
- A response to the DEFRA consultation on “improvement to the legal framework for public rights of way”.
- Response to the consultation on “stopping up and diversion orders – reform of the application process for local highways”.

Problems encountered

- Dissemination of info in palatable chunks is not always achieved Huddle is working better thanks mainly to Rob Leek but it is not an easy site for a non-expert to use. Any topics on Huddle, considered relevant, are then passed onto other members using Yammer; the

closed group social media site. It is also used for the electronic delivery of agendas and minutes. Some members still do not use email effectively so printed copies of all papers are still having to be provided.

- The LAF were not consulted on the Apr 2012 Government consultation on traffic regulation orders!
- It was brought to the LAF's attention that many sections of grass verge are being "acquired" by local landowners to the detriment of users who traditionally have walked or ridden on the verges. The matter is being pursued with the Highways Authority.
- Not all major planning applications are being raised with the LAF who should be a statutory consultee. The matter has been raised with Shropshire Council's Planning Authority.
- The Paths for Communities bids have encountered many problems and have taken an inordinate time to proceed to full bid applications after much confusion about the rules and regulations for the projects.
- Failure to meet with Telford and Wrekin LAF. One member sits on both LAFs which gives some feedback.

Feedback from other Forums

The LAF were informed that three local Walking Forums had been established in the north, centre and south of the County; these were being run by the Outdoor Recreation Officers and would present their minutes to the LAF.

Shropshire Riding and Carriage Driving Forum and Shropshire Cycling Forum continue to present their minutes to LAF and items of concern are raised and acted on by the LAF.

Working Groups/Interaction with other Forums

No working groups required. Discussion has been achieved in LAF meetings or via e-mail/written comment and one person has been responsible for collation and writing up and sending any report to the appropriate body.

LAF members are present on all 5 forums mentioned above which helps in feedback

Site visits and other activities

A very successful visit was made to Roger Plowden's Estate at Plowden Hall on the 14th of June where the LAF were given an insight into the influences behind the running of a farm and management of the countryside.

Members of the Forum were invited to the launch of the new sections of the Shropshire Way on Fri 2nd Nov 2012.

Members of the LAF attended the second National LAF Conference on the 27th Feb 2013 and ran a workshop on health and the role of LAFs with Miranda Ashwell from Shropshire Council's Public Health and Dr Jane Morris from the LAF.

Progress against last year's priorities

Membership is now more balanced with cycling represented and one councillor regularly attending. Young people and ethnic minorities are not yet represented.

UCR working group work has not been carried forward.

Priorities for next year

Establish better liaison with NE and Telford and Wrekin LAF.

Continue to help update ROWIP in light of budget cuts and reduction of manpower. Monitor the effect of service reductions and broader outcomes for health and well being

Attempt to be proactive rather than reactive. Sorting out waymarking issues would be a good example to try.

The LAF need to sort out with the Highways department the verge problems that continue to occur

Achieve a better working relation with SC Highways and Planning departments.

Continuing the work on UCRs, their mapping and maintenance and the recording of minor highways.

Other Points of Note

Jim Stabler the Access Development Officer has acted as West Midlands Regional LAF Coordinator for the year. In this role he ensured that information of note was passed to all LAFs even though most were on the Huddle System. This will cease in the next year with hopefully another member of the Outdoor Recreation Staff taking on the role.