

# Shropshire Local Access Forum

<b><u>Committee and Date</u></b>
Shropshire Local Access Forum
15 October 2015

## **MINUTES OF THE SHROPSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 2 JULY 2015 10.00 AM - 1.01 PM**

**Responsible Officer:** Linda Jeavons  
Email: linda.jeavons@shropshire.gov.uk    Tel: 01743 257716

### **Present**

Roger Plowden (Chairman)  
Trevor Allison, Stephen Bell, Gareph Boxley, Peter Carr, Alex Carson-Taylor,  
Lee Chapman, Chris Chillingworth, Janet Mees-Robinson, Steward Pickering, Zia Robins  
and Mark Weston (Vice Chairman)

### **30 Welcome, Introductions and Membership**

The Chairman introduced the new members and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### **31 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Pauline Dee and Les Winwood.

### **32 Minutes and any matters arising**

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 5 February 2015 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

#### Matters Arising

With reference to Minute No. 28, Shona Butter reported that a representative of the Canals and River Trust (CART) would be in attendance at the meeting scheduled for 15 October 2015.

### **33 Public Question Time**

It was reported that a public question (a copy of which along with the response would be attached to the signed minutes) relating to the Lost Ways of Shropshire had been received from Mr Stuart Morgan. Mr Morgan was invited to read out his question to which the Mapping and Enforcement Team Leader had provided a response but due to the complex matter of the topic, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That,

- (i) A copy of the question and the response from the Mapping and Enforcement Team Leader be circulated to all members of this Forum forthwith; and
- (ii) The Lost Ways of Shropshire be an agenda item and discussed at the next meeting of this Forum.

Arising from a discussion, Mark Weston reported that, given that all under-recorded and unrecorded rights of way/bridleways might be extinguished come 2026, the British Horse Society and The Ramblers had arranged for a series of training days entitled "2026 : Restoring the Record Training" to take place in August in an effort to empower rights of way researchers to make definitive map modification order applications to ensure that routes that would be extinguished in 2026 would be saved from the cut-off date. He also provided an update on the position to date with regard to the Deregulation Bill.

It was **AGREED**: That web links to the appropriate British Horse Society webpages and a briefing note providing an update on the Deregulation Bill be forwarded to all members of this Forum following this meeting.

#### 34 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 35 **Feedback on Annual Performance and User Surveys**

Clare Fildes, Outdoor Partnerships Development Team Leader, provided feedback and circulated a summary of the results following the recent annual Shropshire Outdoor Partnerships user satisfaction survey. A copy of the summary would be appended to the signed minutes.

CF also provided feedback and circulated an overview of the outcomes and trends of the annual performance monitoring for 2014/15, a copy of which would be appended to the signed minutes.

In response to comments, Shona Butter explained that:

- A recently published leaflet will remind landowners of their responsibilities and what they could or could not do with regard to the rights of way network:
- All diversions are logged and available to view on Shropshire Council's website along with Public Path Orders, guidance notes, temporary closures; and
- The majority of landowners/farmers ensure rights of way are maintained, kept free of obstruction and of the correct width. However, repeat offenders would and will continue to be prosecuted or alternatively, work could be undertaken by Shropshire Council and the landowner charged.

From the floor, members of the Forum expressed the view that the following were important:

- Good way marking and signage;
- Links to public transport; and

- Printed leaflets - although much information was available on-line, many people still preferred the printed form.

### 36 Access Strategy - 5-Year Review

Shona Butter, Mapping and Enforcement Team Leader, provided feedback on the 5 Year Review of the Access Strategy by way of a presentation, a copy of which would be appended to the signed minutes, and answered questions from the floor.

From the floor, members of the Forum raised concern regarding the incorrect use of coloured way markings, and the use of kissing gates which could restrict disabled access and also have an impact on pushchairs users etc.

### 37 Team Plan for 15/16 Overview

Shona Butter, Mapping and Enforcement Team Leader, provided an overview of the Team Plan for 15/16. The plan set out the team's aims and priorities and demonstrated that customers were being listened to. The following points were highlighted:

**Priorities** – To improve people's health and wellbeing and to support local communities to get active outdoors. The team would support the natural environment and tourism economy, through the management and development of recreational access in Shropshire. This would be done via the public rights of way network, countryside parks and sites, green spaces and play areas and open access land.

#### **This would be achieved by:**

- Increasing active participation for all in a broad range of outdoor recreational activities and community volunteering to maximise health benefit:
  - Actions
    - Continued support to existing groups;
    - Grow current volunteering across the service; and
    - Develop a programme of new volunteering opportunities within the service
- Developing and supporting local partnership approaches to the management, development and enhancement of local rights of way networks, countryside sites, greenspaces and the natural/historic heritage of Shropshire:
  - Actions
    - Develop a series of external funding bids to support growth of local partnerships;
    - Establish local priorities for rights of way improvements and developments through discussions with P3 groups; and
    - Continue to develop local partnerships with Parish and Town Councils in the management of greenspaces in urban areas.

- Maintaining the infrastructure that underpins all types of recreational access and ensuring that the Council's statutory duties in relation to them are complied with:
  - Actions
    - Rights of Way networks maintained;
    - Country Parks, Sites and Greenspaces maintained; and
    - Play infrastructure maintained.
- Continuing to listen to local communities and ensuring that we meet community need in developing community recreational opportunities and externally funded projects:
  - Actions
    - Continue to listen and respond to our customers and locally identified need; and
    - Engage and support local communities and active volunteer groups on projects and external funding bids to develop and improve local access routes.
- Working in partnership with statutory and non-statutory bodies in the management of access and special habitats in Shropshire to ensure that our rich and varied landscapes, and access to them, are protected and enhanced:
  - Actions
    - Deliver agreed actions within the Meres and Mosses HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme and NIA project; and
    - Deliver agreed actions within the Stiperstones and Corndon HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme.
- Ensuring that Shropshire's reputation as a great place to live, and visit is widely recognised and promoted and work to link different areas in such a way that they provide coordinated opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding as well as 'green corridors' for wildlife:
  - Actions
    - Shropshire is promoted as a welcoming destination and local businesses are supported;
    - Develop, brand and promote a number of new short circular walks and rides to increase people's use of the rights of way network; and
    - Development of the Shropshire's Great Outdoors website to promote and co-ordinate all outdoor activity and opportunities.
- Providing specialist and technical advice to conserve rights of way access, landscape features and wildlife habitats;
  - Actions
    - Ensure that the Definitive Map is accurate and up-to-date; and
    - Ensure that the Council's statutory duties are carried out in relation to the public rights of way – issue resolution & enforcement.
- Continuing to deliver good quality, value for money services aligned to Shropshire Council's new model of delivery:
  - Actions
    - Business planning preparation for Outdoor Partnerships Service operation within a Commissioning Council.

SB and CF answered questions from the floor. Arising from the ensuing discussion, CF would contact Alex Carson-Taylor to discuss corporate volunteering and sponsorship.

Suggestions put forward to improve the development of recreational access and exercise included the provision of higher impact play areas to encourage teenagers and exercise areas for older people. The importance of access for health benefits, rural economy and tourism and the need for more linked-up promoted routes was emphasised.

### 38 **New Ways of Working - ROW Maintenance**

Richard Knight, Rights of Way Team Leader, provided an overview of the position to date with regard to the new ways of working within the Rights of Way Maintenance Team. The following points were highlighted:

- He reiterated that the Outdoor Partnerships service was under huge pressure to make savings and do things differently – as was the whole of Shropshire Council;
- The RoW Team had restructured in 2011/12 as a result of the loss of substantial capital funding which supported both RoW management and site management. This had resulted in the loss of some staff and a larger revenue budget to be used to try to manage larger structures on the network which had previously been managed and funded through capital funds;
- The service had been further restructured to reflect the support from Public Health funding;
- In an attempt to gauge the extent of the structures issue, a biannual survey of larger structures had been undertaken by the Highways bridge inspecting contractor. The result of this survey (of only the largest 50 structures) had indicated that an estimated cost of £330,000 for repairs/replacement of varying priority was required. Bridges not included in this survey and other surfacing and draining issues would also incur costs and amounted to possibly double this figure;
- An agreed Business Plan would now enable the service to extend its income generating work beyond that already needed to support budgets (£16k this financial year). Skills would now be used to generate income which would be put into reserves and used to tackle some of the bigger issues;
- Projects completed to date included:
  - The repair of Offa's Dyke Monument – which had been funded by Natural England and English Heritage;
  - Access improvement work to hill forts, castles and other places of interest for Shropshire Council Landscape Partnerships Programme; and
  - Various improvements funded by the Sustainable Transport Fund.
- Upcoming projects included:
  - More SCLPS projects;

- Work with NE and EH on specialised projects;
- Access improvements for communities; and
- Memorial gates (Church Stretton Pilot).
- The intention would be to build up a reserve of money which could be invested in the repair/replacement of larger high cost items.

Since the commencement of this process a capital allocation of £100k for this year and hopefully for a further two years has been received. This had been allocated to help to reduce the £330k needed for repairs and Shropshire Council was currently working with Mouchel to implement prioritised repairs.

It was imperative that this work was carried out without detriment to the team's core work and so far the team had been able to complete more individual improvements to the RoW network than the previous year and had achieved this alongside the income generating work. This had been achieved through the investment of new machinery and would be closely monitored to ensure both areas of work continued without any adverse effect on the other.

Members of the Forum congratulated the team on their achievements but raised concerns with regard to the reserved funding and they hoped that the ring-fenced funding would be protected and not lost in the future.

### 39 Shropshire UCRs

Richard Knight, Rights of Way Team Leader, provided an overview of the position to date. The following points were highlighted:

- Following a survey of routes, it was agreed that the Outdoor Partnerships team would manage some of the UCR routes where good links could be achieved within the existing RoW network;
- Routes that had a sealed tarmaced surface or the presence of large structures would remain within the remit of the highways network managers along with any necessary legal work or enforcement;
- As a result of a survey (phase 1) undertaken in 2008/09, it was agreed that the management of 95 UCRs (65km) would be undertaken by the RoW team and this would be funded by Highways via an annual payment of £35,000. To date money had been spent on resurfacing of the worst routes, clearance and signage and had focussed on those routes that would give the most public benefit and had good links with the RoW network;
- A further 133 UCRs had been surveyed in phase 2 of the survey. This represented those routes that had not fallen into the criteria for the first survey although issues to how the routes had been labelled had been identified;
- Currently, it is being recommended that 34 of these routes (totalling 29km) should be adopted by the Outdoor Partnerships team or a shared responsibility was being considered as some routes were part tarmac and part natural. Also a number of status issues had been identified where recorded roads did not link with the surrounding access; and
- A decision on phase 2 had yet to be made. However, when a decision was made and in order to achieve clarity on which team was managing what, the

intention was to request that those routes that had been passed to the Outdoor Partnerships team be reclassified by Highways.

A Member of the Forum expressed concern that the Government funded OS mapping layer available on the Shropshire Council local map contained many errors, particularly with regard to the status of UCRs.

#### 40 **Shropshire Great Outdoors Website and Branding**

Clare Fildes, Outdoor Partnerships Development Team Leader, provided an overview and the position to date with regard to the new branding and the Shropshire Great Outdoors website ([www.shropshiresgreatoutdoors.co.uk](http://www.shropshiresgreatoutdoors.co.uk)) where you could find further information on the following:

- Volunteering;
- Parish Paths Partnership;
- Outdoor Play Spaces;
- Wild Teams;
- Promoted Routes;
- Walking for Health;
- Outdoor Partnerships;
- Volunteer Rangers;
- Rights of Way; and
- Parks, Countryside Sites and Greenspaces.

The site had been search engine proofed and would be linked to external sites.

From the floor, Members of the Forum suggested information relating to the categorisation of waymarking, use of bird scarers and shooting by or near to rights of way should be included.

CF also circulated a copy of the leaflet entitled “Volunteering in Shropshire’s Great Outdoors”.

#### 41 **Parish Paths Partnerships**

Helen Beresford, Shropshire Outdoor Development Officer, provided an overview of the position to date with regard to Parish Paths Partnership (P3), which had been running for over 20 years in Shropshire. The following points were highlighted:

- The scheme encouraged local groups of volunteers to help manage and maintain their local rights of way network;
- The Outdoor Partnerships Team supported the scheme through the provision of tools, training, materials, expert advice and small grants;
- The Area Rights of Way Officers provided support to the groups within their areas;
- The development of new groups and the reinvigoration of existing groups was a shared role between the Area Rights of Way Officers within the Rights of Way Maintenance Team and the Shropshire Outdoors Development Officer; and

- There were currently 62 P3 Groups, 21 Parish Path Warden schemes and approximately 285 P3 volunteers across the County.

### **Key achievements 2014**

- The number of groups had increased from 56 to 62;
- Reinvigorated and now active groups had been re-established in Kinnerley, Long Mynd Bridleways, Market Drayton and Bishop's Castle;
- The PPW groups in Stoke-on-Term and Beckbury had been upgraded to full groups;
- Volunteer hours had increased from 6393 to 6788;
- 619 individual furniture improvements had been achieved and many stiles had been replaced with gates to create easier access; and
- The volunteer work for 2014 equated to £56,622.

### **Future ambitions/benefits**

- Ongoing support of the scheme would help to maintain the rights of way network;
- Identification of local priorities through P3 groups would ensure that the limited resources could be directed accordingly and effectively;
- Continued promotion of the open and usable rights of way helped to improve tourism and economic benefits;
- Continued promotion of the benefits that access to the countryside brings to both mental and physical health;
- Funding could be sourced at a local level, eg Local Joint Committees;
- The aim was to achieve 90% coverage of Shropshire by 2020;
- Currently of the 202 parishes, 62 participated in the scheme and geographically this equated to and covered 66% of the County;
- Aim to provide more training and to extend the range of activity volunteers could undertake; and
- Priority areas for 2015 included Ellesmere, Wem, Sellatyn & Gobowen, Chelmarsh, Worthen & Shelve, Rushbury, Cardington and Mainstone.

### **Promoting the initiative and recruitment**

- Parish Plans, parish meetings, parish newsletters/notices on notice boards, "Do It" database, word of mouth, take on board the comments made on the on-line survey, new branding would help to promote events, new website would have a dedicated area to promote volunteering opportunities and taster days.

## **42 Ramblers Big Pathwatch**

Peter Carr provided an update on the Ramblers Big Pathwatch which would be launched on 13 July 2015. The aim of the initiative was to encourage communities to explore and survey rights of way in England and Wales and report back their findings via a purpose-built App or the Ramblers' website. Each participant would be invited to choose one or more 1 km grid squares as used by Ordnance Survey maps and walk all the paths in that square and report back their findings. The contact for Shropshire Council would be Shona Butter. Trevor Allison offered his services, particularly as he had walked and surveyed all the rights of way in Shropshire.



From the floor, Members commented on the importance of the survey to identify the condition/suitability of all routes for all users and not just walkers.

#### 43 Feedback from other Forums and items for noting

##### Items for Noting

29 July 2015 **Volunteer Celebration Day** at Wistanstow Village Hall – 10.00 am – 4.00 pm

##### Minutes / Papers:

The following minutes / papers, which were circulated with the agenda for information, were noted:

- (i) Shropshire Riding and Carriage Driving Forum – 7 October 2014
- (ii) Shropshire Riding and Carriage Driving Forum – 16 February 2015
- (iii) Shropshire Cycle Forum – 10 February 2015 (The meeting noted that this would be the last meeting of the Shropshire Cycle Forum.)
- (iv) Central Shropshire Walking Forum – 18 February 2015
- (v) Central Shropshire Walking Forum – 15 May 2015
- (vi) Southern Walking Forum (now known as Shropshire Hills Forum) – 21 April 2015

##### Future meetings:

The following agenda items were suggested for consideration at a future meeting:

- The Use of Towpaths (CART)
- Lost Ways in Shropshire

Future meeting dates:

Thursday, 15 October 2015

Signed ..... (Chairman)

Date: .....