

Shropshire Local Access Forum Review 2016

7th October 2016

This paper sets out the justification for a new structure to ensure a more resilient approach to the management and promotion of Outdoor Recreation in Shropshire. This structure will deliver the functions of a Local Access Forum and assist in the wider development of the Outdoor Partnerships Service for Shropshire Council to secure the future of publically accessible outdoor space and an improved Rights of Way network.

Background

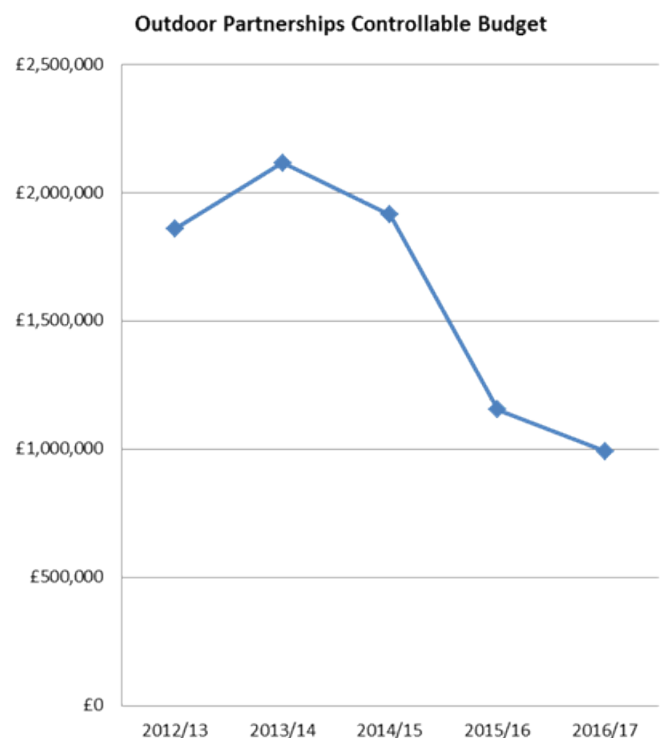
The proposed changes to the LAF have been prompted by the considerable political change across the country, and beyond, in the past twelve months. Political pressures include:

- The UK decision to leave the European Union
- Government austerity measures and the aspiration for Local Authorities to be funded through local Council Tax and Business Rates by 2020
- A move towards localism and the aspiration for devolved authorities
- Focus on economic growth and development, potentially at the detriment of the environment
- Impact of austerity on the NHS, Public Health and Adult and Children Services

As a result there is considerable politically uncertainty and unprecedented financial cuts which need to be addressed by a more sustainable and resilient approach to Service delivery.

The Outdoor Partnerships Service has had its share of the budget cuts and the Country Parks and Countryside Heritage Sites were amongst the services threatened with closure in the Financial Strategy published by Shropshire Council in January 2016.

We are not alone, Natural England are facing 50% cuts in management budgets for the National Nature Reserves, the Forestry Commission has undergone significant restructures and Shropshire Wildlife Trust is concerned about the impact of changes to the Countryside Stewardship schemes following Brexit.



The impact on the quality of outdoor recreation facilities available to residents and visitors in Shropshire as a result of these cuts could be considerable unless action is taken now to diversify income streams, influence policy development and further engage communities.

Influencing Policy

There is a significant opportunity to influence policy over the next twelve months. A number of local policies are being revised including:

- Shropshire Council Corporate Plan and Economic Vision
- Neighbourhood Plans
- Sustainability Transformation Plans

We also need to be working on the development of a new Countryside Access Strategy to be published in 2018.

In the wider context we need to ensure we are influencing across many other policy areas including:

- Public Health
- Adult and Children Services
- Economy- including tourism
- Climate Change
- Planning and development
- Countryside Stewardship
- Public parks

The Shropshire Local Access Forum (LAF) does not currently have the membership to influence at this level or the skills to deliver a more commercially driven, financially diversified service. It has been agreed at previous meetings that the LAF is not well understood outside the Service and the name itself could be discouraging relevant potential members. The aim is for the new structure to inspire and enthuse people who have the authority and expertise to wider our influence beyond the usual networks.

Local Access Forums

Key points from legislation:

- 10-22 members- max of 2 Council members if up to 16 LAF members or max 3 if 17-22 members
- Appointing Authority may appoint members at any time
- Members should represent users, owners and occupiers and any other relevant interests
- Membership should include a good mix of different interests
- Membership vacancies must be advertised in the local paper and on line
- Members should be appointed for a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 3 years but can be re-appointed
- Membership may be terminated if members have not attended for a year or have not disclosed a relevant interest

- There should be at least two meetings a year
- A Chair and Vice Chair must be appointed

The legislation associated with LAFs can be found here:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/268/part/2/made>

Proposal

It is proposed that the Shropshire Local Access Forum becomes the Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board, with a number of sub-groups delivering specific priority actions agreed by the Board.

Aims

The aims of the new Board would be to make outdoor recreation in Shropshire:

- More financially independent and resilient
- More strategically importance across a range of sectors
- More action driven

Priorities

The priorities for the Strategy Board over the next two years reflect the current financial challenges and should include:

- Delivery of the Enterprise Plan- Business Planning, fundraising and income generation, including the development of a charitable organisation and promoting of the contracting team
- Development of the Countryside Access Strategy 2018-2028
- Promotion and marketing
- Increasing awareness of the benefits of outdoor recreation for health, the local economy and the environment
- Influencing and advising other departments, organisations and local and national policy
- Community engagement and volunteering

The Strategy Board would take on the role of the Local Access Forum as well as other duties and this would be reflected in a new Constitution.

Structure

The suggestion is to have a focused non-executive Board that consists of representatives from key organisations and networks who have the authority to make decisions and influence policy, along with the skills, experience and expertise to advise on the strategic direction of Outdoor Recreation in Shropshire.

A range of sub-groups would then be formed that deliver specific priorities identified by the Board. These sub-groups may be on-going or may exist for as long as they were needed and then be disbanded or morph to take on new activities. The advantage of the sub-groups is they will be

focused specifically on delivering key activities and will ensure partners and volunteers are contributing as effectively as possible, without spending time on issues they don't feel are so relevant.

Existing sub-groups such as the Walking Forums should be reviewed to see how they help deliver the agreed priorities, others groups will need to be formed from scratch, for example,

- Shropshire's Great Outdoors Foundation development
- Countryside Access Strategy development

The number and type of sub-groups needs further discussion.

Membership

Membership of the Board should include a key representative from each of the following, although it is hoped individuals may be representing more than one interest:

User groups:

- The Ramblers
- British Horse Society
- Cycling Forum (not currently running)
- Energize- County Sports Partnership

Owners and occupiers:

- CLA
- NFU
- National Trust
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Other relevant interests:

- Local Nature Partnership
- Health and Wellbeing Board
- Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
- Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country LPS

Council Members:

- Portfolio Holder

Individuals with specific expertise:

- Fundraising and income generation
- Outdoor Recreation development and strategy

Other people will be needed in sub-groups to deliver specific activity relevant to their skills and experience.

Timescales

It is envisaged the new structure would be active from January 2017, with a new Chair elected at the first meeting.

Recommendation

This paper is presented to the LAF for consideration and comment.

Contact details

Clare Fildes, Outdoor Partnerships Enterprise Manager

- Telephone: 01743 255067
- Email: clare.fildes@shropshire.gov.uk