

Shropshire Local Access Forum

<u>Committee and Date</u>
Shropshire Local Access Forum
5 February 2015

MINUTES OF THE SHROPSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2014 10.00 AM - 12.36 PM

Responsible Officer: Liz Sidaway
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Present

Roger Plowden (Chairman)
Gareph Boxley, Peter Carr, Alex Carson-Taylor, Pauline Dee, Stuart Morgan, Zia Robins
and Mark Weston (Vice Chairman)

1 Election of Chairman

RESOLVED:

That Mr Roger Plowden be elected Chairman for the ensuring year.

2 Welcome / Introductions / Resignations / Apologies for Absence

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from:

Members:

Stephen Bell, Chris Chillingworth, Richard Cotham, David Cowell and Leslie Winwood.

Officer:

Deb Hughes

The Chairman also reported that Margaret Markland had resigned from the Local Access Forum.

3 Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED:

That Mr Mark Weston be appointed Vice Chairman for the ensuing year.

4 Minutes and any matters arising

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on the 2 July 2014 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

A member asked whether an update could be provided regarding a risk assessment to be undertaken identifying the risks of oilseed rape obstruction. In response, Shona Butter stated that they do ask for a wider reinstatement width but that she was unaware of any statutory legislative requirements and agreed to check and report back to the Forum. Several members of the Forum reported on incidents caused by oilseed rape. It was agreed that oilseed rape obstruction should be treated as a priority and it was agreed that the NFU be contacted to highlight the problem to their members.

5 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

6 Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter in which they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

7 Mid Wales Transmission Line Project - National Grid Presentation

The Chairman welcomed Jackie Fenn from National Grid and Briony Cunningham from Jacobs Engineering to the meeting. The Forum received a presentation which gave details of the proposed route of the Mid Wales Transmission Line Project, a copy of which would be appended to the signed minutes. Further details could be found at www.midwalesconnection.com

Briony Cunningham explained that following detailed studies and consultation with the public and specialist groups, a draft route for the proposed new connection through Powys and Shropshire and a preferred site for the substation west of Cefn Coch had been established. The route and substation site had been carefully developed to limit effects on the local area as much as possible. Around eight miles (13km) of the route in the Meifod Valley was proposed to be placed underground due to the potential effect an overhead 400 kV steel lattice tower line could have on the setting of the valley. The Forum was informed that a tourism survey had already been undertaken with a business survey being undertaken in the near future with stakeholders and confirmed that the views of the BHS and Canals Trust would also be canvassed. Jacqui Fenn also reported that further consultation would take place in respect of rights of way and stated that a map had been published and accessed at www.midwalesconnection.com/searchable-map and also agreed to let Shona Butter have a copy of the detailed map.

A number of concerns were identified and Briony and Jackie answered questions from the floor including why the line would not be underground in Shropshire. In response to a question regarding the visual impact of the pylons Jacqui Fenn explained that as the pylons have to travel over different types of landscape such as hills, valleys, roads, rivers and trees, the heights and spacing of individual pylons will change to suit the location and its features with low height pylons (up to a quarter shorter than conventional pylons) being used along some parts of the route.

The Chairman thanked Jacqui Fenn and Briony Cunningham for their input and attendance at the Forum.

8 Site Allocations and Management Development (SAMDev) Plan and Planning - How Access is Incorporated/Considered

The Chairman reported that this item would be deferred to a future meeting of the Forum to enable a Planning Officer to attend to assist with the discussions.

9 Update on Service Business Plan

Claire Fildes provided an overview by way of a presentation on the work of the Shropshire Outdoor Partnerships over the last twelve months with the following points highlighted:

- £135,000 of planned savings had been achieved with a further £35,500 required for the next financial year, with significant savings being required for the Mere in Ellesmere and the Severn Valley Country Park.
- Greenspace sites were in the process of being transferred to Town Councils (with the exception of those in Ludlow) however, there was no obligation for Town Councils to take on the sites.
- The Rights of Way Team would operate on a more commercial basis with income generation being key. The statutory obligations in respect of Rights of Way would continue to be fulfilled.
- The Walking for Health initiative would continue to be developed in partnership with the public health team.

The Chairman thanked the Outdoor Partnerships Development Team Leader for her update.

10 Launch of Oswalds Trail

Peter Carr presented the newly published Oswald's Trail booklet. He explained that the 12.6 mile trail gave a complete circuit of Oswestry and took in many important historical points of interest along the way. The Trail had been divided into five easily accomplished walks which should be within the capability of most walkers of average fitness and it was hoped that it would promote Oswestry as a walking destination in future.

Peter thanked Officers for their support in the development of the leaflet which had been published in partnership with the Oswestry Group of the Ramblers, Ramblers Holidays Charitable Trust and Shropshire Council.

11 Quinquennial Review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

Jim Stabler, Access Development Officer provided an overview of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan by way of a presentation, copy appended to the signed minutes. He made reference to the Annual Outdoor Recreation Users Survey, the results of which would be shared with the Forum later in the year. He reported that the Survey gave a useful insight to formulate and identify future priorities.

Jim Stabler briefly summarised the current priorities, which included:

- Fewer stiles
- Easy to walk routes and circular walks and bridleways
- Better information
- Better Sites
- Less dog mess

He also drew members' attention to what had already been undertaken in response to the previous year's survey and indicated that the full results of the current survey would be circulated later in the:

- 69 stiles had been replaced with gates alongside many more general improvements
- Creation of a new bridleway at Montford Bridge allowing walkers, riders and cyclists to safely cross the busy A5.
- Upgraded and opened up paths around Oswestry for Oswald's Trail.
- A wheelchair friendly walk and new car park at Whixall.
- Completed the 6 circular walks at Pontesbury and Minsterley and published a new guide book.
- Created guides for 7 new walks around Hodnet
- Completion of the Humphrey Kynaston Way long distance bridleway with 4 new circular rides.
- Undertaken major improvements on the Shropshire riding website making it more map based and with more downloadable guides, maps and routes.
- 23 sites designated as Queen Elizabeth II Fields which aims to protect sites in perpetuity for the purposes of recreation in order to encourage people to use their local parks and open spaces to be more active
- The Severn Valley Country Park and The Mere at Ellesmere both awarded green flag status
- Installation of more dog mess bins.

Mr Stabler reported that lots of promotion had been undertaken in the local media and improvements made to the website. He thanked officers within the Shropshire Outdoor Partnerships Team for all their hard work despite the reduction within the team and in light of the continued budgetary pressures.

A discussion took place in respect of the role of the Local Access Forum and whether any additional measures were required to strengthen its effectiveness. Jim Stabler confirmed that the Council was fulfilling its statutory obligation to consult with the Forum. Zia Robins stated that the bridleways were also used by walkers and cyclists as well as riders and suggested that a Mountain Bike User Group be invited to participate in the Forum. A suggestion was made for more Town and Parish Councillors to become involved with the Forum, Councillor Pauline Dee suggested an approach be made to SALC for expressions of interest. Following a discussion, it was agreed that a letter be sent to the Minister for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Dan Rogerson to request the Local Access Forum Groups become statutory consultees.

The Chairman welcomed the very comprehensive report and thanked officers and members for their input in the discussions.

12 **World War 1 - Updates**

Jim Stabler presented details on the four new World War One Walks which had been recently created commemorating what was happening in Shropshire on the home front 100 years ago. Leaflets were circulated and it was noted that full information was available on the website.

13 **Future Project Development**

A discussion took place regarding project development with the following being highlighted:

- Volunteering - the Volunteer Development Plan would be circulated to the Forum for comments prior to its finalisation.
- Irresistible Offa - the business plan was due for completion by the end of December 2014.
- Severn Valley Countryside Park - investigative work was ongoing to identify ways of operating the park in a more commercial manner at a zero cost to the Council; a business plan would be drafted in time.
- A new comprehensive Shropshire Outdoors digital mapping based website was being developed to amalgamate current information including walking, riding, cycling, leisure and greenspace information within the county.

14 **Potential Member (Will Chambers) - Mountain Biking Representative**

The Chairman introduced Will Chambers and reported that a representative from the cycling community was needed within the Local Access Forum to contribute to issues relating to public rights of way. Mr Chambers provided an overview of the work and his involvement in mountain biking in Shropshire. Members agreed that it was essential for both road cycling and mountain biking communities to be involved with the Forum to ensure their views were put forward in all future discussions.

Claire Fildes agreed to approach the road cycling fraternity to explain the role of the Forum and to invite any interested parties along to attend the next meeting.

15 **Feedback from other Forums and items for noting**

Minutes / Papers:

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

- (i) Shropshire Riding and Carriage Driving Forum - 9 June 2014
- (ii) Shropshire Cycle Forum - 17 June 2014
- (iii) Walk Forum - 28 July 2014
- (iv) Central Shropshire Walking Forum - 16 July 2014

Future meetings:

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

- SamDev and General Planning
- Shropshire Highways - an update on the management of the unclassified county roads by rights of way
- Digitalisation of Highway Maps
- The use of towpaths

Future meeting dates:

5 February 2015
May 2015, date to be confirmed.

16 Farewell Mr Stabler

The Chairman announced that Jim Stabler, the Access Development Officer would be shortly be retiring from the Council. He paid tribute to Mr Stabler’s hard work and contribution to the Forum over the years. The Chairman and Members of the Forum all wished him well for the future and a long and happy retirement.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: 5 February 2015