

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cheshire East Local Access Forum**
held on Thursday, 13th March, 2014 at Council Chamber, Municipal Buildings,
Earle Street, Crewe CW1 2BJ

PRESENT

Forum Members	Bob Anderson (in the Chair) Rhoda Bailey Pat Featherstone Andy Gildon John Handley Dale Langham Linda Rose
Officers	Mike Taylor, Rights of Way Manager Genni Butler, Countryside Access Development Officer Rachel Graves, Democratic Services Officer
Others	Kath Cuthbert Pat Amies, Border Bridleways Association Councillor Ken Edwards

Action

1 WELCOME, APOLOGIES AND INTRODUCTIONS

Apologies were received from Carole Bentley, Chris Driver and Ivor Williams.

2 REPORTS FROM MEMBERS

(a) Minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 December 2013

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2013 be agreed as a correct record.

(b) NorthWest Chairs' meeting/Durham National Conference

The Chairman had attended the North West Regional Chairs meeting on 13 February 2014. The main items on the agenda were a presentation from Eleanor Roaf of Sustrans, a discussion on the situation with LAFs in the Northwest and an update on the position of Natural England Regional Co-ordinators.

The Chairman had also attended the LAF National Conference on 7 March 2014 in Durham, which had included sessions on the Deregulation Bill, Access for All in Lincolnshire, Unrecorded Rights of Way and Farmland, Dogs in the Countryside, and Rail Crossings and

Rights of Way. A briefing note on the event had been circulated to Forum members.

(c) Rural Road Safety

The members of the Rural Road Safety Working Group had met to identify and discuss specific problems which contributed to making rural roads dangerous for vulnerable road users accessing the countryside and had suggested possible solutions to these problems.

Areas of concern included speeding on rural roads, visibility issues, diminishing and obstructed verges, road maintenance, and lack of circuitous off-road routes necessitating the use of highways.

It was suggested that a representative from Highways Maintenance be invited to attend a future meeting of the Forum to discuss some of these issues.

GB

(d) Forum Publicity

To help advertise the work of the Forum, a Notice had been placed in local newspapers giving the date, time and venue for today's meeting.

Meetings were being arranged with interested parties to highlight the work of the Forum. John Handley reported that he had been invited by East Cheshire Ramblers to speak at their meeting and would include the work of the Forum.

(e) Public Rights of Way Future Management: Motion to Council

The following Notice of Motion had been submitted to the Cheshire East Council meeting on 27 February 2014 by Councillor Ken Edwards. The Forum had sent a letter in support of the Motion to Councillor Edwards.

“Cheshire East Council acknowledges that one of their most significant tourist assets is the magnificent scenery and the access to that scenery given by the extensive public rights of way network.

Therefore they call upon the administration to ensure that in any future arrangements for the governance and management of public rights of way that may be commissioned in the exercise of the Councils statutory responsibilities the following principles will be adhered to:

- a) There will be appropriate arrangements made to maintain and where necessary to improve and extend signage, and safe access*
- b) There will be consultative arrangements to enable members of the public to be aware of and involved in any proposed changes to Public Rights of Way*
- c) There will be a continually updated Rights of Way Improvement*

Plan

- d) *There will be an appropriate programme of inspection to ensure safety for users.*
- e) *There will a budget allocated to carry out the above responsibilities.*
- f) *Work on completing the Definitive Map of all designated rights of way will be completed.”*

The Forum noted that the Motion has been referred to Cabinet and resolved to send a letter of support of the Motion to the Cabinet Members.

GB/BA

(f) Local Plan

A response had been submitted to the Local Plan Strategy consultations and it was noted that the Forum’s comments about visitor economy had been included in the final version.

The Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version, had been published for a six week period of public representations from 14 March to 25 April 2014, after which it would be submitted to the Secretary of State. Representations at this stage could only be made in respect to the legal compliance of the Local Plan Strategy and to its soundness.

All representations received would be collated and forwarded to the Secretary of State, along with the Local Plan Strategy and accompanying documents, for consideration by a planning inspector.

3 UPDATES ON ROAD SCHEME PROJECTS

The Forum received an update report on the road schemes in Cheshire East that they had been consulted on:

- SEMMMS A6 – Manchester Airport Relief Road
- Poynton Relief Road
- Congleton Relief Road
- A556 Knutsford to Bowdon Scheme
- Crewe Green Link Road

The Forum had written to the Highways Agency requesting better provision for non-motorised users at certain points on the A556 improvement scheme. A response had been received which members thought was very disappointing and the tone dismissive. It was agreed that Dale Langham and Linda Rose would draft a response and forward to the Chairman for signing.

**DL/LR/
GB/RA**

4 FORUM PRIORITY: WALKS FOR ALL ROUTES AND COUNTRYSIDE ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

Kath Cuthbert spoke to the Forum on her experiences of accessing the

countryside on her handcycle.

Until she had developed MS twenty years ago, she was an active walker, cyclist and skier, but within a few years walking in the hills was no longer possible. When looking into ways to keep active she discovered handcycling.

There were various forms of handcycle and Kath's involved a third wheel with hand cranks, gears and brakes attached to the front of her wheelchair. With all terrain wheels it allowed her to access paths and bridleways.

Finding routes that were accessible and manageable was not as straightforward as it was for able-bodied walkers. A favourite place to visit was the Lake District and the National Park had published a booklet 'Miles without Stiles' which detailed 42 accessible routes. She wished to see more accessible routes for people with disabilities with information on these routes being easily available.

Genni Butler reported that Cheshire East had 1900km of public rights of way but the level of accessibility on these was largely unknown. Barriers to accessibility included the natural terrain, stiles and steps, lack of information, and lack of transport to available routes.

One of the Forum's Priorities was the identification of accessible routes for the Walks for All booklet. The Chairman circulated a guide to help identify possible routes and asked members to forward ideas for possible accessible routes to Genni Butler. The Salt Line was suggested as a possible route and it was agreed that the Chairman and Andy Gildon would visit to assess its suitability.

All

5 DRAFT DEREGULATION BILL: PROPOSED CHANGES TO PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY LEGISLATION

Mike Taylor reported on the Draft Deregulation Bill, which contained proposals to amend the public rights of way administrative processes concerning Definitive Map Modification Orders and Public Path Orders.

The principle proposal dealt with measures to bring the Definitive Map up to date, and effectively close it to the addition of new routes based on historical evidence by 2026. Efforts to expedite completion of the records and close the Definitive Map to such routes had shown that neither a volunteer-led, nor a centralised, systematic approach to gathering evidence and making applications had been shown capable of delivering the required number of applications within the required timeframe with the current legislative framework. Therefore completion of the Definitive Map and Statement by 2026 would not be a viable proposition unless a streamlined approach to recording of public rights of way adopted.

The Stakeholder Working Group published a report entitled “Stepping Forward” in 2010 which detailed 32 proposals to improve processes associated with identifying and recording historical public rights of way. These proposals were consulted upon in 2012 and had now been included in the draft Deregulation Bill.

A second reading of the draft Bill in the House of Commons was heard on 3 February 2014. The Public Bills Committee started meeting on 25 February 2014 and would be receiving submissions until 25 March on the draft Bill.

It was noted that if cases were registered with the Highway Authority they would be protected from being lost at the cut off date of 2026 and Highway Authorities would have the powers to process them after 2026.

6 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT

The draft Annual Report for 2013-14 had been circulated with the agenda.

Members suggested a number of amendments including:

- Priorities of the Forum – 3. Lost Ways: In the last sentence change ‘incoming’ to ‘forthcoming’
- Work of the Forum – Disley Footpaths Society’s Path for Communities Fund application: amend the last sentence to say that there was no money left in the Path for Communities Fund when the application was submitted
- Include in the Report an update on the road schemes that the Forum had been consulted on.

7 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Genni Butler reported on the progress of the current projects in the Cheshire East Rights of Way Improvement Plan. These included:

- Dane Meadow, Holmes Chapel
- The Carrs, Wilmslow
- Crewe Footpath upgrade to Cycle Track Status
- Crange to Holmes Chapel off-road link
- Church Minshull circular walk

The proposed Rights of Way Improvement Plan projects for 2014-15 had been approved by the Portfolio Holder and funding allocated from the Local Transport Plan. A number of schemes had been initiated and updates on these would be included in future reports.

8 NEW MATTERS ARISING

Councillor K Edwards reported on the Destination Bollington project,

which aimed to encourage more people to visit Bollington. The Walking Festival and the Walkers are Welcome accreditation were two successes of this project.

Linda Rose reported that gates had been removed off a restricted byway and had helped cleared up the vegetation so the route could now be used for carriage driving.

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Thursday 12 June 2014 in Macclesfield.