

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cheshire Local Access Forum**
held on Friday, 16th December, 2011 at Committee Room 1 - Wyvern House,
The Drummer, Winsford, CW7 1AH

PRESENT

Forum Members

John White (in the Chair)
Robert Anderson
Rhoda Bailey
Neil Collie
Helen Connolly
Andy Gildon
Dale Langham
Andrew Needham
Kay Loch
Keith Osborn
John Taylor
Kath Wurchbacher

Officers and Others

Mike Taylor, Cheshire East Council
Rachel Graves, Cheshire East Council
Denise Snelson, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Adele Mayer, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Susie Woodward-Moor, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Graham Dutton, Warrington Borough Council
Julie Sharman, British Waterways
Mr John Haines, Ramblers
Mr Peter Williams, CTC Chester and North Wales

Action

31 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Keith Pennyfather, Genni Butler, Ian Hesketh and Hazel Barber.

32 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

Nominations to the posts of Chairman and Vice-Chairman were requested. John White was nominated as Chairman and John Taylor as Vice Chairman. It was agreed that they would be appointed for a one year period.

RESOLVED:

That John White be appointed as the Chairman and John Taylor be appointed as the Vice-Chairman of the Cheshire Local Access Forum for the ensuing year.

33 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2011 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the following spelling amendments:

Item 25 – Update Reports from Working Groups

Finance

The sentence be amended to read “The Group had **nothing** to report at present”.

Under Represented Groups

On the fifth line ‘geocoaching events’ be amended to read ‘**geocaching** events’

34 BRITISH WATERWAYS: A NEW CHARITABLE TRUST

Julie Sharman, Head of Regeneration (North), British Waterways, briefed the Forum on the creation of The Canal and River Trust, which would come into being in April 2012.

The Canal and River Trust would be taking over British Waterways’ waterways in England and Wales. The Waterways Trust in England and Wales would also be merging with the Canal and River Trust.

Transition Trustees had been appointed to oversee the formation of the new Trust. The governance structures for the new Trust would include a Council whose role would be to appoint and hold accountable the Board of Trustees, monitor the Charity so that it meets its charitable purposes and appoint auditors and other company law shareholder powers. The Trustees would be the principal governing body and be responsible for the appointment of the management to run the Charity; determining policy and strategy, and approve business plans. Waterways Partnerships would be created to oversee the work of local waterways units. The Partnerships would be made up of local people who would hold local management to account and oversee the work of the Trust at local level. The Chairman of each Partnership would sit on the Trust’s Council.

It was highlighted that the North Wales and Borders Partnership was looking for members at present. Under the leadership of the Chair - Jim Forrester, the Partnership would be working closely with the Area’s Waterway Manager to develop an overarching vision for the waterways and develop strategies and plans to encourage more people to use and get involved with their local

waterway. More information was available on the British Waterways' website.

Members asked questions about the sale of residential property and impact on access to canals; access to towpaths for walkers, cyclist and equestrians; towpaths becoming public rights of way and ownership of bridges and locks.

35 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT

The draft Annual Report for 2010-11 had been circulated with the agenda.

Members suggested a number of amendments including the updating of the Forum's membership, changing the photograph on the front cover, amending the description on the A556 road scheme and including health and wellbeing in the priorities.

Any further amendments were to be sent to Denise Snelson or Genni Butler as soon as possible so that the Annual Report could be finalised and printed.

**ALL/
GB/DS**

36 CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER INTERACTIVE MAPPING PRESENTATION

Denise Snelson gave a presentation on the changes being made to the Cheshire West and Chester Council's Interactive Mapping system. She explained and demonstrated the information which would be available on the system. This included the information collected and photographs of path furniture taken during the CAMS survey. It was hoped that the service would be come live in February 2012.

To encourage use of the interactive mapping system a number of presentations were planned to Parish Councils. Members commented that they found the interactive mapping system very useful but that it was difficult to find on the Council's website and asked if a link could be included from the Home page.

37 UPDATES REPORT FROM WORKING GROUPS

Members of the Working Groups gave an update on their work since the last meeting:

Finance

Neil Collie reported that the Group hoped to update, with the help of Denise Snelson and Genni Butler, the Annual Funding Spreadsheet for the next Forum meeting.

**NC/
GB/DS**

Under Represented Groups

The Working Group had produced a discussion paper on their findings for the Forum to consider.

The Group had looked at ways to encourage under represented groups to access the countryside more readily and had concluded that no single initiative would have a breakthrough effect on getting people into the countryside. This was more likely to be achieved by a number of smaller initiatives such as:

- improving information to encourage access
- targeting work with children as a means of reaching adults
- finding 'challenge and reward' incentives to visit the countryside
- utilising new media to reach younger people
- emphasising the viability of existing public transport systems as a means of access

The Group was proposing that a test event be held to see if the initiatives mentioned above could actually increase the number of people access the countryside.

Health

Helen Connolly reported on the key findings of British Horse Society (BHS) research on Health Benefits of Horse Riding.

The BHS had commissioned the University of Brighton, in partnership with Plumpton College, to research the physical health, psychological and well-being benefits of recreational horse riding in the UK.

The research found that horse riding and associated activities expended sufficient energy to be classed as moderate intensity exercise. A survey of 1,248 horse riders had been carried out and the response indicated that the vast majority of horse riders were female (90%) and a third of these were above 45 years of age. Horse riding was especially well placed to play a valuable role in initiatives to encourage increased physical activity amongst women of all ages. It was also found that horse riding stimulated positive psychological feelings and that riders gained well being from interacting with horses. Being outdoors and in contact with nature was also an important motivation for the majority of horse riders.

Support was needed for better access to the countryside for equestrian users, with the provisions of safe routes to bridleways and better horsebox parking and the benefits of horse riding needed to be promoted more.

38 CHESHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM WEBSITE

The Cheshire Local Access Forum webpage was hosted on the Cheshire West and Chester Council's website. Adele Mayer

reported that the Council was updating their website and that guidance issued for this would have an effect on the content of the Forum's webpage.

The guidance stated that websites should no longer host archival material and that any documents on the website must be less than a year old. At present the Forum webpage held archival material in the form of old agendas and minutes.

Three options for alternative arrangements for the website were outlined. These being:

- **Option 1:** That the Forum ran and maintained its own website, which could then hold all the materials current and archival. A link from the website could then be maintained from the Cheshire West and Chester and East websites.
- **Option 2:** That the current website contain the latest documents, with these being available for a maximum of one year
- **Option 3:** That Cheshire East host the Forum for the time being and delay a decision.

Following discussion, Members agreed Option 2 as the way forward so that the website showed the latest agenda and minutes.

39 **RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATES**

Members were updated on the Rights of Way Improvement Plans for Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester. The report outlined details of the current projects on the general infrastructure, access for equestrian and off road cyclists, accessibility and events and promotions.

Progress on the following projects was reported:

Cheshire East

- Crewe to Nantwich Greenway
- Gritstone Trail – crossing on A54
- Long distance horse ride
- Stapeley Footpath No.1
- Pickmere Footpath No.13

Cheshire West and Chester

- Cuddington new footpath to link with Footpath No. 21
- Flintshire to Neston Cycleway
- North West Coastal Trail
- Delamere Loop
- Weaver Valley projects

Denise Snelson reported that Cheshire West and Chester Council

had completed an Open Space Audit and Assessment of Need Household survey, along with consultation with Town/Parish Councils, recreational organisations and the public, on their Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2011-2016. The results from these had been used to produce a 'Statement of Action' and 'Improvement Implementation Plan' for the next five years and it was hoped that the final version of the Improvement Plan would be available in January 2012.

40 FEEDBACK FROM NORTH-WEST REGIONAL LAF CHAIRS' MEETING

John Taylor and Andrew Needham had attended the meeting of the North West Regional LAF Chairs' on 6 October 2011. The main topics discussed were:

- Natural England's agreement to fund regional LAF
- Development of urban area LAFs in Manchester
- Changes to British Waterways
- What was happening to the 10 year review of CROW access maps
- Changes to the National Peak Park Boundaries
- Cattle Free Routes
- Huddle Forum

The Huddle forum had been created by Natural England and was a user friendly network site for Local Access Forums, which enabled discussion with other Forums, information sharing, advice, guidance and access to library of specialised information.

John White had been invited to join and there was the opportunity for two additional members to join the online community. Members were asked to let John know if they were interested in joining by the next Forum meeting.

41 REPORTS FROM MEMBERS

Mike Taylor reported on the restructuring of services taking place at Cheshire East Council. The Greenspaces Service had moved from Health and Wellbeing, with the Public Rights of Way Team and Countryside Ranger Service becoming part of Highways and Transportation and Parks/Openspaces moving to Streetscene. The staffing structure was not known as present and he did not have any indication if there would be changes.

Kath Wurcbacher reported that Richard Benyon MP, Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries, had urged all local authorities to allow horse riders to use cycle trails, routes and any other ways where it was in their powers to do so and encouraged that permission or dedication happened where it was not in their power.

Neil Collie reported that a new group – Peak District Green Lanes Alliance, had been established to campaign against the use of green lanes by motor vehicles and the damage caused by them.

He also reported that East Cheshire Ramblers had carried out a footpath inspection in their area and that the number of paths graded C and D had increased. The results would be shared with the Cheshire East Public Rights of Way Team.

John White reported that Defra had asked Natural England to develop and run a new grant scheme called 'Paths for Communities', which would be launched in April 2012. It would be a competitive scheme, supporting proposals which offered best value for money. Local communities would be able to bid into a central fund to create new public rights of way or upgrade existing ones for horse and bike use, to enable the path network to become easier to use, better publicised and better integrated with local transport, services and popular destinations.

He also reported that the Independent Panel on Forestry had published a progress report on 8 December 2011. The Panel had received 42,000 responses to their call for views and was working towards making recommendations which would increase the benefits to the public from access to forests in England. The recommendations would be made to the Government in spring 2012. The progress report could be viewed on the Defra website.

42 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Cheshire Local Access Forum would take place on Friday 23 March 2012.