



CHESHIRE **LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

Annual Report 2009 - 2010



Chairman's introduction

2010 was the first year of a Cheshire Local Access Forum without Warrington and with six new members. It was also the first operating year for the two new unitary authorities si has been quite a challenging time.

During the year we have attempted to increase the link with parish and town councils, monitored the management of access to the countryside by the new authorities and ensured we were consulted on the new Local Transport Plans and the consequent Right of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIP). We have also continued to monitor the Cheshire ROWIP for 2006-11 and contributed to relevant northwest regional and national issues of access.

I would like to thank the forum members and officers for their support and enthusiasm during a period of great change. The local government spending review will ensure that 2011-2 will be equally challenging.

JOHN WHITE

Training

- New members to the Forum received induction training before the December 2009 AGM.
- Keith Osborn, Andrew Needham, John White and Michael Scott attended a training day for new members on 5th March 2010 arranged by the north west region LAF co-ordinator.
- John Taylor and Bob Anderson attended a training day on the Lancashire County Council Trampler Scheme in the Forest of Bowland on 25th March 2010.
- Andrew Needham accepted an invitation to visit Cumbria's LAF on 25th March 2010.

.Items of interest

- Members reviewed the new Cheshire East policy on structures on public rights of way which uses the principle of least restrictive option to make paths more accessible for all, including those with disabilities
- The Forum responded to the Cheshire West and Chester Council following a presentation on the development of the Local Transport Plan 3
- Continued to monitor the delivery of Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) projects, the development of the ROWIPs for Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils, and annual reports for each
- Members contributed to the development of Walks for All leaflets, giving information to users on accessible routes across the county
- The Forum made changes to the environmental impact surveying of public rights of way and users within the A556 Mere Highways Agency scheme following a presentation by contractors Jacobs Engineering
- Members assessed the differing roles and interest in public rights of way across the town and parish councils of Cheshire. A best practice guidance note was prepared
- The Forum learned about the number of long distance routes that span Cheshire
- The Forum heard about the Open Spaces Survey being conducted in Cheshire West and Chester Council
- The Forum heard about the relaunch of the Discover Cheshire website: www.discovercheshire.co.uk



Members' articles

Some Thoughts from a New Boy

I was a bit surprised to be accepted as a member of the Forum: I spend quite a lot of time in the Cheshire countryside, birding and/or walking my dog, but this didn't seem much of a qualification. Inevitably, the first year has been a matter of learning rather than contributing: I still have problems identifying the abbreviations, acronyms and technical terms, though I think I am improving.

First impressions? The Forum members all, like myself, bring "on the ground" experience to bear – and a varied experience at that, including (for example) horse-riding, cycling, running and estate management, and drawn fairly widely from across the county. That's quite impressive and re-assuring – even if we are (inevitably?) a typical white middle-class gathering. Equally impressive is the excellent back-up from officers – not just in servicing meetings, but in availability at other times to provide information and deal with queries. All this makes for informed, and informative, discussion.

A pleasant surprise was the regional dimension, and the opportunity to learn about what is going on elsewhere. Having missed a couple of training events, I feel a bit guilty about referring to visits to Beacon Fell in Lancashire for a demonstration of the impressive Trampler vehicles for disabled people, and to Thurstaston Country Park to learn about coastal path issues and to sit in on part of a Merseyside LAF meeting: each was a really good day out! That said, I came away from each with

something to think about (the logistics of a Trampler hire scheme; the very different access problems in a major conurbation.). I do wonder, though, if we should have contact with LAFs in the West Midlands and North Wales – much closer than, say, Cumbria and maybe with similar experience to our own.

Another feature has been the scope for making connections between CLAF and other parts of my life. Plodding about doing bird surveys has at least given me some first-hand knowledge of footpath problems, and I've been able to introduce some access material, gleaned from contact with CLAF, into the county birding community. More important, perhaps, is the fact that the inclusion agenda has meshed in fairly well with my interests, once professional and now voluntary, in working with older and less able people: there's a lot more to this access business than just blocked footpaths.

So it is probably all coming together: it is more complex, and more varied, than I anticipated; it seems very worthwhile; I'm beginning to feel that maybe I can be a useful part of the Forum (and I'm glad that I eventually acquired broadband just before joining! I'm not sure I could have coped otherwise). As far as the future goes, I'm very worried about what impact public-sector cuts will have on access work generally (aren't we all?), but whatever happens I can see plenty of scope for pursuing issues which are important to our well-being – even if, as I suspect, the full scope of the Forum's activities is not very widely recognised by the public at large. After all, until I joined I didn't recognise it.....

Bob Anderson



New routes in the Peckforton Hills

I have now been a member of the Cheshire Local Access Forum for almost a year and during that time have seen a significant project spanning both the Cheshire East and Cheshire West areas come to fruition. With a particular interest in access for equestrians, the re-opening of the route over the Peckforton Hills is a real step forward in improving off-road riding possibilities. I have recently ridden this route with my own horse and found it took me a good 3 hours. There are pleasant surroundings and scenery from every aspect and the view of Beeston Castle from one part of the route is stunning. Where a horse can go, most other users also can and this route, either entirely or in fragments, because it is unencumbered by stiles and kissing gates, can be enjoyed by walkers (also those with the larger dog!), cyclists, those less able and parents with small children in pushchairs. The project is a true credit to the Hillforts and Habitats Landscape Partnership Team.

elen Connolly

Priorities for 2009 - 2010

- involvement in ROWIP2 and LTP3
- safety on rural roads
- urban rural access
- how does access better raise the health and wellbeing of the residents of the county

Priorities for 2010 - 2011

Development of working groups with the following themes:-

- Health
- Under represented groups
- Funding
- Spreading best practice



Walkers, riders, cyclists and canoeists across Cheshire will be able to discover the hidden places of this beautiful county, following the launch of new and improved versions of the popular Discovercheshire websites.

Developed by Cheshire West and Chester Council in partnership with Cheshire East Council and The Mersey Forest, the sites are aimed at local residents, as well as visitors planning their trip to the county. They use interactive Ordnance Survey mapping to provide multimedia information on all of the area's promoted routes, as well as country and urban parks. Users can even print out maps and directions to take with them into the countryside.

The websites also provide information on places of interest and events – as well as details of visitor attractions, pubs, restaurants and accommodation, within easy travelling distance of a chosen route or destination.

A new Discover site focussing on the Gritstone Trail launched in November 2010. This not only provides interactive mapping, directions and tourism information for the trail, but also details of the history of the route, as well as of the geology, flora and fauna that can be seen along the way. Similar websites are to be launched next year focussing on the Sandstone Trail and Weaver Way.

Among many other potential uses, the Discovercheshire websites have also been chosen as the primary means of promoting routes devised as part of the new Delamere

Project, which is supported by the Cheshire West and Chester Council, the Forestry Commission and Visit Chester and Cheshire.

The Discover sites can be found at: -

www.discovercheshire.co.uk (information for all of Cheshire)

www.discovercheshirepeakdistrict.co.uk (further information on Cheshire East and Cheshire's Peak District)

www.discoverthemerseyforest.co.uk (information on the Mersey Forest area).

www.discoverthegritstonetrail.co.uk (comprehansive details of this popular route)

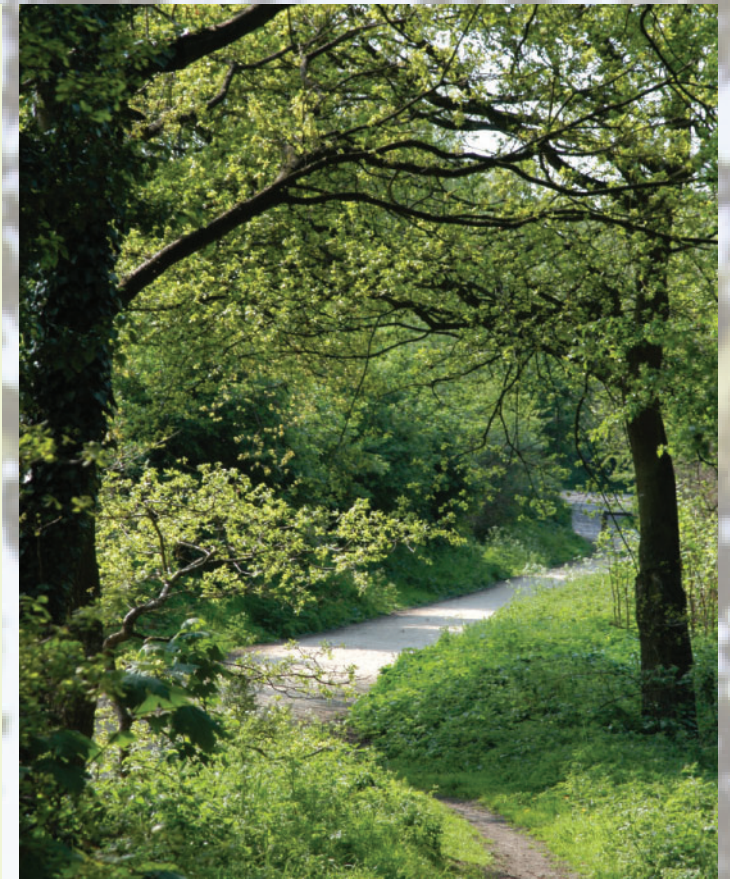
DiscoverCheshire





Andy Gildon

My name is Andy Gildon, I'm a trail and fell runner, covering around 2000 miles per year (my dog probably goes even further). I joined the CLAF in 2009 and did so because I wanted to help people make better use of the wonderful and precious asset that is our PROW network. I use it daily and have a long experience of organising events to enable people to enjoy the countryside via use of our footpaths. I've come to understand that many people believe erroneously that they are not allowed to use rights of way, that the countryside is dangerous, that one can become easily lost etc. and that these misconceptions prevent them from enjoying the glorious freedom of small adventures in nature. My purpose in the CLAF is to work to break down these artificial barriers and allow those who do not use the network for lack of knowledge or cultural, economic and physical reasons to do so.



Bollington Walking Festival

The Cheshire Local Access Forum is always looking to spread the word about new ways to entice people into the lovely countryside that graces our County. We also have a very well maintained network of well marked footpaths that can take walkers into every nook and cranny as well as the towpaths along the canals that make up the famous 'Cheshire ring'.

Walking Festivals are becoming ever more popular. This year saw Bollington's first. Bollington prides itself on being the only stone built town in the Cheshire Peak District. Bollington nestles in the Dean Valley just a few hundred metres from the Peak National Park. The town prides itself on its industrial history. The finest cotton ever spun was supposed to have been produced in this valley Town.

The Walking Festival, held in the last two weeks of October, was a great success. It came about through an encouraging example of a local community working together with local government to make things happen. Cheshire East Council provided the services of their Tourism Office and Town Centre Manager to host meetings and find the finance for an excellent colourful and informative leaflet and a website. Bollington provided its own tourism forum of energetic local groups, ranging from the Bridgend Centre, the Town Council, and the Civic Society to hotels, pubs and walking

groups. The thirty two walks which took place over the 16 days catered for many interests, from family walks to guided historical and heritage explorations, to the longer and more strenuous hill walks provided by East Cheshire Ramblers.

The walks were all given exotic titles, such as The Knights Walk or Rise to Shine, to attract more walkers! And it did seem to work. Even the 18 mile walk to Shuttlingsloe on a very wet day attracted 25 people. Nearly all our walks had numbers in the 20s or 30s and attracted a wide age range of experienced walkers who appreciated this opportunity to explore a less well known part of the Peak District.

The weather was mixed as you would expect around here. It rained very hard on Tuesdays. Other days were gloriously sunny and bright and walkers could enjoy the views over the countryside and the autumn colours at their best. The success of this Festival was possible because of the readiness of walk leaders to devise attractive walks months in advance and be ready to welcome newcomers in unknown numbers. Let's hope that the success of this Festival will lead to others in the future.

The Cheshire Local Access Forum welcomes these community initiatives and is working to put together advice on how such events might attract groups of people who as yet find barriers to enjoying the Cheshire countryside.



Membership

Member	Area of interest
Robert Anderson	Accessibility
Rhoda Bailey	Councillor, Cheshire East Council
Neil Collie	Walking
Helen Connolly	Horse riding
Ken Edwards	Walking, local government
Andy Gildon	Community involvement
Dale Langham	Cycling and walking as sustainable transport
Andrew Needham	Councillor, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Keith Osborn	Land management
Keith Pennyfather	Walking and sustainable transport
Michael Scott	Land management
John Taylor, Vice Chair	Land management, accessibility
John White, Chairman	Walking
Kath Wurbacher	Horse riding



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