

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM held on Friday 25 March 2011 at Phoenix House, Winsford.

PRESENT:

Forum Members

John White (in the Chair)
Robert Anderson
Rhoda Bailey
Ken Edwards
Andy Gildon
Andrew Needham
Keith Pennyfather
John Taylor
Kath Wurcbacher

Officers and others

George Broughton, Cheshire East Council
Genni Butler, Cheshire East Council
Rachel Graves, Cheshire East Council
Mike Taylor, Cheshire East Council
Hazel Barber, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Denise Snelson, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Angela Simpson, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Martin Thornhill, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Toni Proffitt, Denbighshire County Council
Graham Dutton, Warrington Borough Council
Andrea Peattie, Forestry Commission
Richard Mostyn, Forestry Commission

Action

The Forum was informed that Amy Rushton, Rights of Way Manager, Cheshire East Council, had recently left the Authority. Members paid tribute by saying she had been an excellent Officer who had made a valuable contribution to the work of the Local Access Forum.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Neil Collie, Helen Connolly, Dale Langham and Keith Osborn.

2 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2010 be agreed as a correct record.

3 FORESTRY COMMISSION: PROPOSED FUTURE CHANGES

Andrea Peattie, Project Manager, and Richard Mostyn, Recreation Manager, at Delamere Forest briefed the Forum on the proposed

changes to the Forestry Commission.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) had launched a consultation on 27 January 2011 on the future of the Public Forest Estate in England but following public outcry on the proposals for future management and ownership, had halted the consultation on 17 February 2011.

The Environment Secretary, Caroline Speiman, then announced that an Independent Forestry Panel would be established to advise her on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England and on the role of the Forestry Commission in implementing policy. The Panel would consist of 12 members, chaired by the Right Reverend James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool. A bibliography of the members and the terms of reference of the Panel could be viewed on the Defra website: <http://ww2.defra.gov.uk/rural/forestry/panel/>

Members queried how the Panel would consult with Access Forums and it was suggested that this be raised with the England Access Forum.

The Forum then went on to discuss the work of the Forestry Commission at Delamere Forest. Andrea Peattie explained that Delamere Forest was a mixed use forest with a third used for timber and two thirds for recreational use. The Forestry Commission was looking at ways to generate income and increase the number of visitors from 750,000 to 1 million whilst protecting the forest environment. The Forest was zoned in to areas for walkers, horse riders and cyclist in the forest, with a number of dedicated trails for each. Restoration work was being carried out on the meres and mosses at present and to help protect them, none of the trails went near them. The Forestry Commission had led the way in providing permissive access for horse riders and cyclist to their forests as the CROW Act 2000 only gave access to walkers.

Members suggested that a representative from the Woodlands Trust be invited to a future meeting to discuss access to woodlands in Cheshire

GB/DS

4 WORKING GROUPS

Members of the Working Groups gave an update on their progress to date:

Finance

The terms of reference for the Funding Sub Group had been circulated with the agenda and a breakdown of funding for public rights of way responsibilities for Cheshire West and Chester Council and Cheshire East Council was tabled, along with a list of sources of external funding. On discussing the breakdown of funding, it was suggested that details of old Best Value Performance Indicator 178 (% of total length of public right of way which are easy to use by members of the public) be included as well as the percentage of easy access paths.

GB/DS

The Forum approved the terms of reference for the Funding Sub Group.

Under Represented Groups

The Group had not met since the last meeting and were hoping to arrange a date today. The Group was looking at how transport, such as mini buses, could be provided to help access the countryside and it was suggested that they contact the Council's Transport Services and also the Local Transport Plan departments to seek their views.

Health

The Health Group had not met since the last meeting. John White reported that he had attended a training event on the Localism Bill. The Bill, which was going through Parliament at present, would allow local communities to access funding via community budgets to tackle local issues. This was an area which the Group could look at to see if it could support health initiatives.

5 LOCAL SERVICES DELIVERY – UPDATE FROM BOLLINGTON

Ken Edwards gave a presentation to the Forum, from the prospective of Bollington Town Council, on Cheshire East Council's proposals to devolve services to Town and Parish Councils.

Bollington Town Council had met with Cheshire East Council to discuss what services and assets could possibly be devolved to the Town Council. These included:

- Repairing street furniture
- Replacing street nameplates
- Hanging baskets
- Grass cutting
- Bus shelters
- Public toilets
- Community Halls
- Recreation Grounds

The Town Council had expressed an interest in taking over the running of the Civic Hall, Community Centre, Town Hall, Recreation Ground, Memorial Gardens and Allotments, and was awaiting detailed financial data from Cheshire East Council before carrying out a survey of the electorate before deciding on whether to go ahead.

6 CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER COUNCIL RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Denise Snelson reported on the consultation process for the Cheshire West and Chester Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Copies of the Plan had been circulated at the last meeting and Denise asked if Forum members had any comments to feedback as part of the consultation.

It was suggested that a forward from the Chairman of the Local Access Forum be included – as per the Cheshire East ROWIP, to show the Forum's commitment to the Plan. Also mention the Local Transport

Plan and explain what it is, and include safety on connecting roads between rights of way.

The consultation was open until 15 April for comments to be submitted.

7 CHESHIRE EAST RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2011-2026: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2011-2015

Genni Butler reported on the first four year implementation plan under the Cheshire East Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2011-2026.

The ROWIP had to set out a statement of action detailing how the Authority would implement improvements and this would be set out in four-yearly implementation plans.

Suggestions for improvement projects had been submitted during the development of the ROWIP by officers, members of the public, user groups and community groups. These suggestions had been prioritised by the methodology selected by Forum at its meeting in December 2010. This methodology took into account the benefits of the scheme in the context of local need.

The highest priority suggestions had been selected for each category of suggestion: walking, cycling, horse riding, transport related and cross-cutting projects. It was intended that these suggestions be investigated and developed first, with the acknowledgement that some may not be feasible and other opportunities may arise through partnerships and developments that result in alternative projects being taken forward.

Funding of £30,000 had been secured from the Local Transport Plan budget for the coming financial year.

8 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATES

Members were updated on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Cheshire. The report received outlined details of the current projects on the general infrastructure, access for equestrians and off road cyclists, accessibility and event and promotions.

Progress on the following projects was reported:

Cheshire East

- Bollington – upgrade of Footpath No.17 to Bridleway status
- Nantwich Riverside Loop
- Connect 2 project Crewe and Nantwich
- Promotion work for Rights of Way and access matters

Cheshire West and Chester

- Flintshire to Neston Cycleway
- Bishop Bennet Way
- Delamere Loop

- Weaver Valley
- Walks for All in Cheshire West
- Discover Cheshire Website
- Publications and events

9 FEEDBACK FROM NORTH WEST REGIONAL LAF CHAIRS' MEETING

The Chairman reported on the issues discussed at the latest meeting of the North West Regional LAF Chairs. The main topics were:

- Future of English Access Forum
- Localism Bill
- Coastal Access
- CROW access
- National Trails

Natural England would no longer be providing support to the England Access Forum, whilst support at regional level would continue to be provided.

10 REPORTS FROM MEMBERS

Ken Edwards reported that the Bollington Walking Festival would be taking place again this year in October.

He also asked about work cover at Cheshire East Council, following Amy Rushton's departure. In response Mike Taylor reported that the post of Rights of Way Manager was no longer in the structure and that he had taken over the responsibilities, with two officers being upgraded to help support him and deal with the more major activities. It was suggested the Chairman and another member meeting with the Head of Health and Wellbeing to discuss this.

MT/JW

John Taylor reported on the changes at Crewe Bus Station following its refurbishment.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Cheshire Local Access Forum would take place on Friday 24 June 2011.