

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM held on Friday 24 June 2011 at Cheshire West and Chester Council Offices, Civic Way, Ellesmere Port.

PRESENT:

Forum Members

John White (in the Chair)
Robert Anderson
Rhoda Bailey
Neil Collie
Dale Langham
Andrew Needham
Keith Osborn
Keith Pennyfather
John Taylor
Kath Wurchbacher

Officers and others

Rachel Graves, Cheshire East Council
Mike Taylor, Cheshire East Council
Hazel Barber, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Denise Snelson, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Graham Dutton, Warrington Borough Council
Councillor Kay Loch, Cheshire West and Chester Council
David Pott
Simon Hayton, Jacobs
Dan Johnston, Jacobs
Anna Pickering, Highways Agency
Roger Wright, Highways Agency

Action

12 APOLOGIES AND MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Helen Connolly, Andy Gildon, Genni Butler and Ian Hesketh.

There was a vacancy on the Forum following the resignation of Michael Scott and it was proposed that Andrew Needham be co-opted onto the Forum.

Cheshire West and Chester Council had not yet appointed their representative to the Forum.

Councillor Stuart Parker was the new Executive Member for Culture and Recreation at Cheshire West and Chester Council. Councillor Rod Menlove, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services at Cheshire East Council was now the responsible portfolio holder for Public Rights of Way. It was suggested that they both be invited to a future meeting of the Local Access Forum.

RESOLVED:

That Andrew Needham be co-opted onto the Cheshire Local Access Forum and Councillors Stuart Parker and Rod Menlove be invited to attend a future meeting of the Local Access Forum

DS/GB

13 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2011 be agreed as a correct record.

14 TWO SAINTS WAY LONG DISTANCE TRAIL

David Pott, whose idea it was to create the Two Saints Way, briefed the Forum on the development of the trail.

The Two Saints Way was a new pilgrimage route of approximately 86 miles between the two cathedral cities of Chester and Lichfield, linking St Werburgh's shrine with St Chad's shrine.

The trail was split into four sections:

1 - Chester to Nantwich section started at Chester Cathedral, with the route mostly along the Shropshire Union Canal, with a diversion to Beeston Castle and the village of Bunbury, before ending at Nantwich.

2 - Nantwich to Stoke on Trent section was predominately farmland and after the relative flatness of Cheshire there were some hills to walk over on the way into Stoke on Trent. The Staffordshire Hoard could be viewed at the Potteries Museum.

3 - Stoke on Trent to Stafford section of the route followed the Trent Valley, along sections of the Trent and Mersey Canal, through remnants of the Staffordshire New Forest at Trentham and Tittensor Chase. The trail passed through Stone to Salt where it turned south west over Hopton Heath and Beacon Hill to Stafford.

4 - Stafford to Lichfield section meandered out of Stafford along the River Sow, the route joining the Heart of England Way to cross Cannock Chase, before the last few miles of farmland and country lanes to Lichfield and St Chad's Well.

The intention was to open the trail in 2012. Work was in progress to sort out any access issues, design the waymarking and information boards and produce a guide for the route.

Meetings were being held with interested parties, which included Chester and Lichfield Cathedrals, Visit Chester, Staffordshire Tourism, Staffordshire University and British Waterways. The next meeting would be held on 18 July 2011 at 2 pm at the Beaconside Campus of

Staffordshire University in Stafford.

Further information could be obtained by email David - dlpott@twosaintsway.org.uk and a website was under development - www.twosaintsway.org.uk

15 A556 PROJECT UPDATE

Dan Johnston and Simon Hayton from Jacobs and Anna Pickering and Roger Wright from the Highways Agency briefed the Forum on the progress with the A556 improvement project since they had last attended the Forum in March 2010.

There was to be no access from the old Chester Road to Junction 19 of M6. Old Hall Lane was to be stopped up and an underpass created for user. Overbridges would be created at Bentlyhurst Lane and the A50 junction. New pedestrian and equestrian crossings would be created at the Mere Crossroads and the Millington Junction. Changes would also be made to the Bucklow Hill junction. Chapel Lane would be stopped up at the point where the new road crossed it. Changes would be made to the public footpaths around the M56 junction with some being diverted and one path being upgraded to a bridleway.

The survey of non-motorised traffic had been carried out at 20 locations along the affected route. Each survey had lasted 12 hours and had included a count of pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians with face to face interviews. Disabled users had been included and recorded separately. The surveys had been carried out once during midweek in school summer term and once at a weekend during school holidays.

The results showed that more cyclists used the affected routes than pedestrians and equestrian users, with increased usage at weekends. The busiest locations were the A50 junction and the Bucklow Hill junction.

Public consultation would be carried out on the proposals and subject to statutory processes it was hoped that construction would commence in 2013/14.

Forum members asked questions about the status of the underpass, the declassification of the present A556 and future provision of cycle lanes along this route; and plans for wildlife mitigation.

The Forum was asked to forward any further comments to Dan Johnston either by email - dan.johnston@jacobs.com or by post to

Dan Johnston
Jacobs
1 City Walk
Leeds
LS11 9DX

16 CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER COUNCIL PERSONNEL CHANGES

Denise Snelson reported on the staffing changes at Cheshire West and Chester Council.

Angela Simpson, Greenspace Manager, was on a secondment post at present but would be taking voluntary redundancy at the end of July. Ian Hesketh was now the Acting Greenspace Manager.

Martin Thornhill, Greenspace Senior Strategy Officer, and Claire Keane, Greenspace Development Officer, had both taken voluntary redundancy.

Denise now reported directly to Ian Hesketh and was the only one in the team working on access development projects.

17 CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER COUNCIL RESULTS OF CAMS SURVEY

Denise Snelson reported on the results of the Countryside Access Management (CAMS) survey.

The purpose of the survey had been to enable the Council to have the necessary information to develop and deliver an effective asset management plan for the public rights of way network and to identify those paths with high accessibility or with potential to provide high accessibility.

Using Global Positioning System (GPS) and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) surveyors checked paths against the electronic Definitive Map. All furniture items were assessed including bridges, drains, stiles, gates, bridges and fingerposts. Photographs were taken of every path surface, furniture item and faults. Any issues were logged with the appropriate Network Officer to be resolved.

The results of the survey were migrated directly into the electronic CAMS database which the Council uses to manage the network. This system allowed work sheets and issues to be raised and resolved. It also allowed legal work, such as Diversions, to be logged against paths. The system could be interrogated and analysis reports created as and when needed.

The IT and Web Team were currently working with new software to transfer furniture icons and images across to the interactive mapping system, which would enable rights of way users to look at routes and assess their accessibility and suitability.

18 WORKING GROUPS: FUNDING, UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS AND HEALTH

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

Finance

The breaking down of funding, tabled at the last meeting, had been updated to include details of the Ease of Use Random 5% survey as well as the percentage of easy access paths.

Under Represented Groups

Work was in progress with developing a survey. The Group had considered the definition of under presented groups and had found that there was a lack of baseline data which they could use. They had also found there was a reliance on cars rather than public transport as a means to access the countryside.

Health

The Group had not met and would be doing so shortly. It was noted that health was still a priority for both councils.

19 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 – bridge over canal at Clarence Mill
- Crewe to Nantwich Greenway
- Nantwich Riverside Loop
- discovercheshire.co.uk
- Publications

Cheshire West and Chester

- Cuddington – new footpath to link to Footpath No. 21
- Flintshire to Neston Cycleway
- North West Coastal Trail
- Bishop Bennet Way and Delamere Loop
- Launch of 'Walks for All' booklet
- Publications

20 FEEDBACK FROM NORTH WEST REGIONAL LAF CHAIRS' MEETING

The Chairman reported that the last meeting of the Regional LAF Chairs had been cancelled.

The Regional LAF Chairs had been discussing costal access; the decision to defer the decade review of CROW access map; reduced resources and removal of regional support from Natural England and the future of England Access Forum.

21 REPORTS FROM MEMBERS

Neil Collie asked if the dates of future meetings could be agreed at the next meeting rather than the Annual Meeting in December

GB/DS

John Taylor reported that he was concerned about the possible loss of subsidies for bus passes due to Councils having to save money, as these the passes were a way of accessing the countryside.

22 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Cheshire Local Access Forum would take place on Friday 23 September 2011.