

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cheshire Local Access Forum**
held on Friday, 23rd September, 2011 at Nether Alderley Parish Hall,
St Mary's Church, Nether Alderley, Cheshire, SK10 4TW

PRESENT

Forum Members

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

Officers and others

Genni Bulter, Cheshire East Council
Rachel Graves, Cheshire East Council
Mike Taylor, Cheshire East Council
Denise Snelson, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Graham Dutton, Warrington Borough Council
Mr Alan Catherall
'Soot'

Action

Prior to the meeting, members walked to view the footbridge on
Nether Alderley Footpath No.33 over the Alderely Edge Bypass.

The proposal to include a footbridge on the Bypass had been
discussed by the Cheshire and Warrington Local Access Forum in
December 2007 and the Forum had helped secure its construction.

23 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Keith Osborn and Ian Hesketh.

Cheshire West and Chester Council had appointed Councillor Kay
Loch to be their representative on the Forum.

24 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2011 be agreed
as a correct record.

25 UPDATE REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

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

Finance

The Group had nothing to report at present.

Under Represented Groups

The Group was in the process of putting together a position paper which would be brought to a future meeting. They had considered ways to encourage under represented group in accessing the countryside. Suggestions had included promotion of walks through leaflets, holding treasure hunts and geocoaching events, promoting walking festivals such as the Bollington Walking Festival and encouraging walking groups to hold events like the Ramblers initiative 'Get Walking Keep Walking'.

The Group had also consider issues which could put people off walking in the countryside and these included personal safety if walking on own, concerns about sheep, cows and bulls in fields, and not knowing where footpaths are going and the need for more information on signposts.

Health

The Health Group had not met since the last meeting but its members were aware of many countryside access events connected to health taking place such as "Change4Life", "Walk4Life Miles" and walks and events arranged by the Ranger Service and Health Teams in both Councils. It was suggested that feedback be requested from these events. **GB/DS**

A report on horse riding and its benefits to health was due to be published shortly. The Woodlands Trust had issued a report on the benefits of trees to physical and mental health.

26 EVALUATION OF THE NANTWICH RIVERSIDE LOOP PROJECT

Genni Butler reported on the findings of an evaluation of the Nantwich Riverside Loop project, which was completed in May 2011.

The Nantwich Riverside Loop was a three-mile circular walking route which had been designed to encourage people to walk a bit further than they normally walk. The route, signposted in both directions, ran along the River Weaver, then across fields to the Shropshire Union Canal where it followed the improved towpath up to the aqueduct over the Chester Road, before returning to the town via the historic Welsh Row

The Riverside Loop was a partnership project involving Cheshire East Council and British Waterways with support from voluntary organisations including Riverside Concern, Nantwich in Bloom, Nantwich Civic Society, Shropshire Union Canal Society, Nantwich Town Council, Acton, Edleston and Henhull Parish Council. The towpath improvement works were funded by a grant secured from Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd (WREN).

To guide walkers around the Loop a new leaflet had been published. The leaflet included a map, directions and information on the history of the riverside, canal and other features along the route. An evaluation card had been inserted in the first tranche of leaflets to gather evidence as to the value of the route and the usefulness of the leaflet.

Eighty responses had been received so far and of these responses:

- 95% said that the leaflet encouraged them to walk the route
- 90% said that having walked the route they are more likely to explore other walks in the area
- 94% said they preferred to find information on walks in a leaflet
- 29% stated the internet as a preferred source of information
- 94% said they feel healthier having been out for a walk
- 98% know that walking could improve their physical and mental health
- 68% of respondents reported that they were trying to exercise more or had been recommended by their doctor or health professional to exercise more

27 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATES

Members were updated on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester. 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 to link towpath with Clarence Road
- Crewe to Nantwich Greenway
- Poynton Footpath No.30
- Seven Sisters Lane, Ollerton
- Long Distance Horse Rides
- Stapeley Footpath No. 1
- Pickmere Footpath No. 13
- discovercheshire.co.uk

- publications

Cheshire West and Chester

- Flintshire to Neston Cycleway
- Weaver Valley – upgrade of section of path into a multi-user path and cycleway
- Accessibility
- Publication and events

It had been announced by the Richard Benyon, Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, that a new national trust for waterways would be set up to take over the functions of British Waterways and the Environment Agency's responsibility for navigable rivers and that access for walkers on England and Wales canal towpaths would be guaranteed under these proposals. It was suggested that British Waterways be invited to a future meeting to discuss these proposals and any possible closures of canals.

GB/DS

28 FEEDBACK FROM NORTH-WEST REGIONAL LAF CHAIRS' MEETING

The Chairman reported that the next meeting of the Regional LAF Chairs was on 6 October 2011 in Preston. He was unable to attend this meeting and asked if another member would like to attend with John Taylor. Andrew Needham agreed to attend in his place.

The Regional Chairs' meeting had previously discussed the Coastal Access project. Genni Butler reported that she had spoken to Danny Moores at Natural England, on the progress of this project. She reported that Danny had stated that he was working with 2 others in a team on the Allonby to Whitehaven stretch in West Cumbria, which was one of 5 lead stretches across the country: Somerset, Kent, Norfolk, Durham and West Cumbria. An advanced stretch was being developed at Weymouth to be completed prior to July 2012. Hearings on this stretch were being held presently to hear objections from landowners and other parties. The relatively low number of issues arising was pleasing to Natural England as this shows the consultation work done up front has paid off. Natural England was currently awaiting ministerial approval to develop the project beyond the initial 5 stretches. This approval was expected any time in the next month or so.

29 REPORTS FROM MEMBERS

John White reminded members that the next meeting would be the Annual General Meeting, at which the Chairman and Vice-Chairman would need to be elected.

He also highlighted a number of consultations being carried out to which members may like to respond:

- Cheshire West and Chester was consulting on two large planning applications in Northwich for housing on land near the River Weaver which could affect access to the river path.
- Cheshire East Council was undertaking a Place Shaping Consultation, which ends on 30 September. The consultation was the first stage of consultation in drawing up new plans for Towns and Villages in Cheshire East and was looking at how many new homes and jobs were need and where they should go; protecting and improving important open areas; providing new cycle routes and footpaths; improving town centres and community facilities; and how the environment of towns and villages could be improved.

Andy Gildon reported that a quarry local to where he lived was near the end of its working life and there had been a request to include permissive paths in the restoration plan of the site.

Kay Loch reported that the next meeting of the Cheshire West and Chester Council's Rights of Way Committee was on 20 October 2011.

30 PROPOSED DATES OF MEETINGS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

The dates of future meetings of the Local Access Forum were noted as follows:

Friday 16 December 2011
Friday 23 March 2012
Friday 22 June 2012
Friday 21 September 2012
Friday 14 December 2012

All meetings to commence at 10.00 am