

Cheshire East Local Access Forum Annual Report 2014 - 2015





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Background to the Forum

The Cheshire East Local Access Forum (CELAF) is a statutory body established under section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, to provide advice on access to the countryside.

The primary purpose of the Forum is to provide advice to Cheshire East Borough Council, and other bodies, such as Government departments, Natural England, the Forestry Commission, English Heritage, Sport England and Town and Parish Councils, on how to make the countryside more accessible and enjoyable for open air recreation, in ways which address social, economic and environmental interests.

The Forum consists of volunteer members.

Front cover photos

The photographs on the front cover are reproduced with permission, and with thanks to the photographers and those in the photos:

- hand-cyclist near Church Lawton;
- walker near Haslington;
- horse and carriage driver in Great Warford; and,
- cyclists on the Biddulph Valley Way, near Congleton.



Chair's introduction

The Forum has enjoyed a successful and active second year, building on the foundation laid in 2013/14.

We have commented upon a number of road schemes and planning applications, detailed later in the report, where these impact upon access and Public Rights of Way. Working groups have been active in pursuing our stated priorities of improving safety on rural lanes, and promoting access for all, while our energetic publicity officer has continued to work to raise the Forum's profile locally.

It is pleasing that members have worked so hard and consistently, and once again we owe an immense debt to the Cheshire East staff who have so ably and willingly supported us. Two members of the Forum resigned in the current year, to pursue other interests, and we are embarking upon a recruitment process to replace them and increase our numbers – to better represent the interests of users of the countryside, and to share the common workload.

In December 2014 we conducted a short internal review, to assess our work at the half-way point of our first term. We concluded that, after a hesitant start, we had made progress in those areas on which we have chosen to work, but need to do more to engage with other relevant organisations and interests. This has given us some form of direction for our work in the coming year; I am confident we will continue to develop.

Bob Anderson

Chair, Cheshire East Local Access Forum

Priorities of the Forum

The Cheshire East Local Access Forum held its first meeting in April 2013. During the initial meetings of the Forum, members discussed the various topics of countryside access involved within the Forum's remit. The main priorities for the work of the Forum continue to be:

1. **Publicity** – to strengthen the Forum's identity and public awareness of the Forum and its work.

Against this aim, the Forum has again secured publicity on a number of topics through local newspapers including the Knutsford Guardian, Nantwich Chronicle, Macclesfield Express and Crewe Chronicle. Articles have also appeared in publications of Cheshire East Partnerships, Natural England, and the NFU.

In addition to the written word, Forum members spread news of the work of the Forum through wider opportunities, including:-

- talks to Macclesfield Accessibility Group, South Cheshire Ramblers and East Cheshire Ramblers;
- attendance at a Definitive Map Modification Order public inquiry; and,
- attendance on behalf of the Forum at a training day for Natural England Access officers.



Articles featured in Knutsford Guardian 23rd March 2014, Nantwich Chronicle 26th March 2014, Knutsford Guardian 21st January 2015 and Cheshire East Partnerships Newsletter, January 2015

2. **Safety on rural lanes** – the development of a campaign focussing on the improvement of safety for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers on rural lanes.

The Forum has won the support of several parish councils for its campaign to improve safety for vulnerable users on rural roads. The Forum organised a meeting in Mobberley for parish councillors from the areas through which Laureen's Ride and the Cheshire Cycleway pass.

It was the first event of its kind organised by the Forum. Three Forum members - Linda Rose, John Handley and Carole Bentley - gave presentations on the dangers faced by horse riders, cyclists and walkers, respectively, in areas where they are forced to use country roads which generally have a 60mph speed limit. The meeting also heard from Kevin Skillings of Cheshire East Highways about the road safety challenges faced by the authority.



Rural road safety meeting discussion

The impetus for the meeting came from Linda Rose, who is a horse rider and carriage driver. She said: "The number of accidents on rural roads is alarming so, with the help of parish and town councillors, the Forum wants to identify 'danger hotspots' and to come up with practical and attainable ideas for improvements. The response of so many of the parish councillors at the meeting was heartening and I do hope we can make some headway with this very difficult topic. We will be following up the meeting later in the year and looking into the possibility of organising similar events in other parts of Cheshire East."

Among the various issues raised by councillors in the general discussion were driver attitudes and training, speed limit consistency, reduced road maintenance and verge obstruction enforcement.

The meeting was attended by representatives from the parish councils of Chorley; Rainow; Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths; High Legh; Great Warford; Twemlow; Cranage; Over Alderley and Birtles; Nether Alderley and by Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC).

3. **Lost ways** – focussing attention on and assisting progress with research into possible Public Rights of Way that are not currently recorded on the legal record, the Definitive Map and Statement. It was decided to put this priority on hold due to forthcoming legislative changes.

4. **Access for All** – improving access to the countryside for people from hard to reach groups.

The Forum has assisted in the production of a new edition of the Cheshire East Walks for All leaflet which gives full details on a number of accessible walks in the countryside. Members submitted numerous suggestions for suitable new walk locations and assisted in the collation the accessibility information required. The Forum was kindly assisted in this task by Kath Cuthbert and Pete Cuthbert who run the www.cyclingotherwise.co.uk website.

The information has been collated into a standard format and checked by the volunteers of the Forum. The new leaflet, *More Walks for All*, is in design and is proposed to be published in spring 2015.



Extracts from the Walks for All leaflet and people on accessible routes in the new leaflet

The work of the Forum

During the year, the agendas of the meetings were packed with items, some generated by members themselves and some as a result of external requests for the collective expertise of the Forum to provide comment on a particular initiative. The following gives a flavour of the items on which the Forum has worked:

- The Forum succeeded in improving facilities for non-motorised users within the **A556 Knutsford to Bowdon Improvement Scheme** through negotiation with the Highways Agency. In particular, the Forum secured headroom in an underpass sufficient for equestrians so that the route can be used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders to navigate under the new road.



Highways Agency A556 Knutsford to Bowdon public consultation document:
Aerial View with Route

- The preferred option for the proposed **Congleton Relief Road** was presented to the Forum by the engineering team. The Forum took the opportunity to re-stress the importance of the rural lane network for non-motorised users, including the key link in the National Cycle Network. The engineers from the scheme's design team took comments from the Forum on how the Public Rights of Way in the area would be affected by the proposed road. Concern was expressed in particular about one Public Footpath that was proposed to be stopped up, with the Forum explaining the case for a footbridge or underpass.
- In another road scheme, the Forum was consulted on proposals for the management of Public Rights of Way during the widening of the **A500/M6 Pinch Point Road Scheme**.
- A representative from Cheshire East Highways explained the **highway maintenance regimes** employed on the roads of the borough, including inspections and repairs. Forum Members were particularly interested in the maintenance and protection of verges as a haven for non-motorised users of the road network.

- The Chair and Vice Chair attended meetings of the **North West region's LAF Chairs**, reporting on the activities of the Cheshire East Forum and sharing evidence, news and best practice around the region. The Forum **urged Natural England** to reverse the decision to withdraw funding the regional LAF co-ordinator roles.
- A representative from **Natural England** attended the Forum to explain the role of Natural England in relation to LAFs.
- A Forum member attended a training day led by the **Black Environmental Network** on access to the countryside by hard to reach communities.
- The Forum monitored closely the **restructuring of the Council** involving the Public Rights of Way team and the Countryside Ranger Service, and the resourcing of those teams.
- The Forum undertook a '**half-term**' **evaluation** of progress against its own aims at the half way point in the Members' 3 year appointment.
- The Forum received updates on **long term closures** of Public Rights of Way in the borough and progress in the resolution of the issues necessitating the closures.
- The progress of the **Deregulation Bill** through Parliament was described to the Forum as this legislation contains changes to Public Rights of Way legal processes.
- **The Forum submitted consultation responses on:**
 - the draft **Sharing Towpaths** policy being developed by the Canal and River Trust;
 - the draft **Dog Walking Advice** being developed by Natural England and Natural Resources Wales;
 - the draft **Cycling Delivery Plan** being developed by the Department for Transport;
 - the draft **Parks Strategy** being developed by Cheshire East Council;
 - a number of **planning applications** which were likely to detrimentally affect or had potential to add to access to the countryside for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers;
 - the draft **Alderley Park Development Framework** being developed by Cheshire East Council; and,
 - the Cheshire East Highways consultation on **Local Community Road Safety**.
- The Forum continued to **monitor the delivery of Rights of Way Improvement Plan** (ROWIP) projects and the annual reports of the Public Rights of Way team at Cheshire East Council.

Forum membership

Membership of the Forum runs for a period of 3 years. The members currently appointed to the Forum, and their areas of interest, are shown below:

| Name | Areas of interest | Geographic area |
|--------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Bob Anderson Chair | Accessibility for all, wildlife, walking | Nantwich |
| Councillor Rhoda Bailey | Ward Member, Public Rights of Way Committee Member | Scholar Green |
| Carole Bentley | Walking, information and publicity | Willaston |
| Chris Driver | Wildlife, conservation, planning | Acton |
| Pat Featherstone Vice-chair | Walking, volunteering, health improvement | Disley |
| Andy Gildon* | Involving local communities, running and walking | Chelford |
| John Handley | Land management, landscape interpretation | Wilmslow |
| Gillian Herdman* | Walking, leisure cycling, working members of the public | Hassall Green |
| Dale Langham | Walking and cycling as sustainable transport | Wilmslow |
| Linda Rose | Carriage driving, horse riding | Great Warford |
| Ivor Williams | Visitor and rural economy, land management | Rainow |

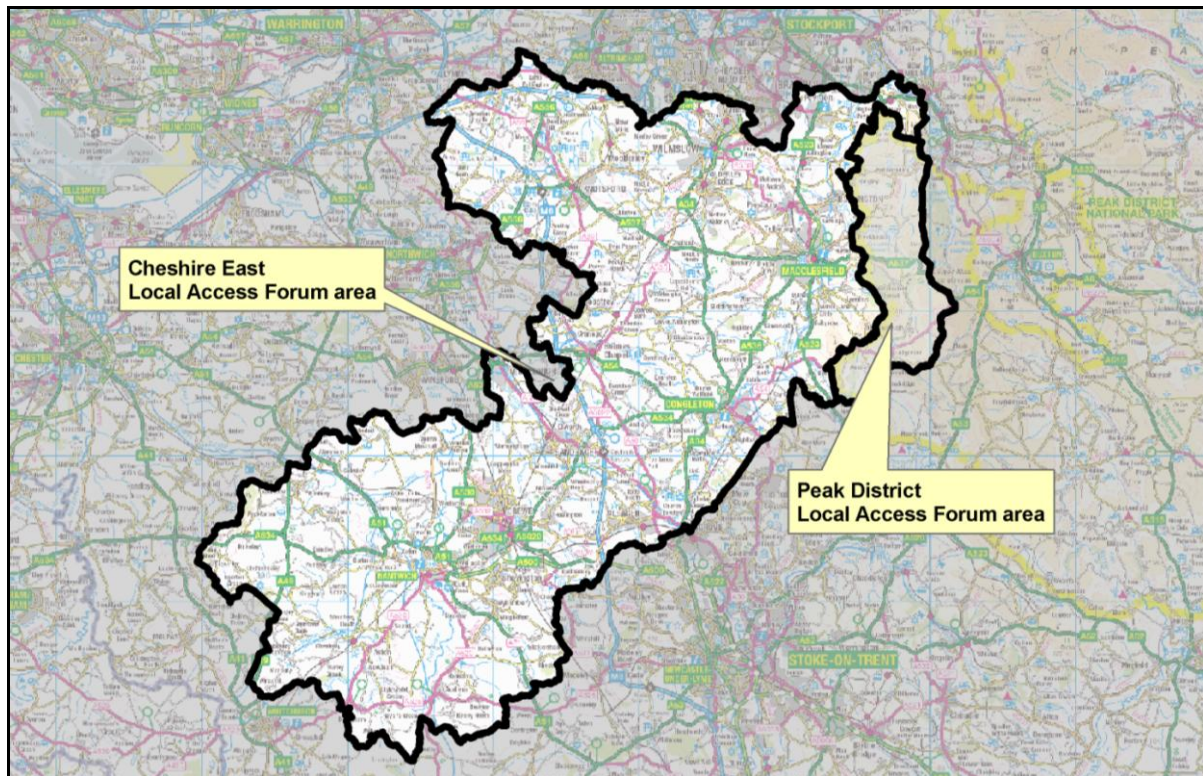
*stepped down during year

We will be recruiting new members to the Forum during 2015. So, if you are interested in joining the Forum and contributing to its work, please get in touch – see the contact details on the following page.



The Cheshire East Local Access Forum area

The Forum covers all of Cheshire East except for that part of the borough inside the Peak District National Park, as the National Park has its own Local Access Forum.



Contact Cheshire East Local Access Forum

| | | | |
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| Post: | c/o Public Rights of Way, Cheshire East Council, 2 nd Floor, Old Building, Municipal Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 2BJ | Web: | www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/laf |
| | | Email: | laf@cheshireeast.gov.uk |
| | | Tel: | 01270 686029 |

Web: On the website you can view meeting agendas and minutes, along with previous annual reports.

Meetings: The Forum meets quarterly, alternating between Crewe and Macclesfield. The meetings of the Forum are open to the public.