

Access to the countryside without the car

One issue to which the Forum has not given much attention hitherto is ensuring that the Cheshire countryside is accessible to all residents and visitors irrespective of their means of travel. With increasing attention rightly being given to climate change and the need to cut greenhouse gas emissions, the need for people to be able to reach the countryside easily in a more sustainable way than by car perhaps merits being placed higher up the Forum's agenda. The Forum has a duty to improve public access, and this should extend equally to those who are socially excluded, or who suffer disability, or who for various reasons either cannot or do not drive a car, as well as car owners who might decide not to drive if they are made aware of the other options available.

The two new unitary authorities are responsible for co-ordinating public transport, thus relevant aspects the Forum might press for the Councils to consider could include the existence and viability of local bus services which provide access to key countryside sites (or could perhaps easily be tweaked to do so), the adequacy of information, marketing and promotion about such services, and in some cases the need for shuttle services from nearby railway stations or special recreational journeys such as those which have operated in recent years to Tatton park, Jodrell Bank, National Trust properties and the Sandstone and Gritstone Trails.



The Forum might equally lobby for the introduction of new multi-modal tickets, along the lines of the one-time Sunday Adventurer Ticket which was valid on buses throughout Cheshire, or for the extension of the area of validity of some existing leisure tickets such as the Wayfarer Ticket, which for almost 30 years has provided a cheap and flexible means of access by bus and rail to the northern part of the Forum's area. The Forum might also emphasise the importance of Council-sponsored guided walks and events being planned to start from bus stops or stations and being deliberately timed to accommodate those arriving by 'greener' means of transport than by car. All these are issues relevant to the Forum's agenda.

Keith Pennyfather

Safety Improvements on Rural Roads

The Forum is concerned about the safety of vulnerable road users who have to use sections of rural roads to complete journeys on foot, by bicycle or on horseback. Traffic using rural roads has grown steadily and many roads carry significant traffic volumes. Many rural roads are narrow, have no footway and may not even have a verge. In these locations there is a potential conflict between pedestrians forced to walk along the carriageway and fast moving traffic. In many cases the visibility is poor and accidents, or near-misses, may occur.

The Forum considers that minor improvements could bring significant safety benefits and improve the accessibility of people living in rural areas.

These improvements may be as simple as cutting the verges so that they can be brought into use, constructing narrow footways, or providing a footway behind the boundary fence or hedge. The rural roads to be considered first should include short lengths where a narrow road has been used to connect parts of the public rights of way network or where there are rural businesses or other developments along the road.

The Forum is campaigning to ensure that potential schemes are identified and that the concept is included in the next Local Transport Plan due to start in 2011. Please contact the Local Access Forum if you know of sections of rural road where these low cost safety improvements would make a difference.

Membership

Member	Area of interest		
John White, Chairman	Walking	John Mitchell	Land management
Barbara Smith, Vice-chair	Land management	Keith Pennyfather	Sustainable transport
Peter Chapman	Walking	David Robinson	Cycling, local government
Neil Collie	Walking	John Taylor	Land manager, accessibility
Evelyn Cragg-Hine	Walking, education	Eleanor Johnson	Councillor, Cheshire County Council;
Ken Edwards	Walking, local government	Alan Litton	Councillor, Warrington Borough Council
Dale Langham	Cycling and walking as sustainable transport	Andrew Knowles	Councillor Cheshire East Council
		Richard Short	Councillor, Cheshire West and Chester Council
John Lilley	Walking, planning strategy		

CHESHIRE & WARRINGTON LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Public Footpath

Annual Report
July 2008- September 2009



Chairman's Introduction

2008/2009 has been a year of change and consolidation as the Cheshire County authority became two unitary authorities; Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester. Also Warrington Borough Council decided it would be better served by joining the Merseyside Local Access Forum.

Consequently the supporting officers have all changed roles and in some case retired. However the officers have throughout continued to work to further the aims of the Forum despite the uncertainty. I am pleased to say that the two new Cheshire councils have agreed to support the new Cheshire Local Access forum.

Our agendas have covered presentations, consultations and specific issues that have arisen during the year within our remit.

We have continued to monitor and support the Rights of Way Improvement plans and discussed any gating orders affecting access. The formation of a regional and an English national access forum will provide us with support from Defra and Natural England. It will also enable us to share issues with neighbouring forums and influence national proposals.

This year we will be recruiting new members to serve for the next three years of the forum. I would like to thank those who have retired for their contribution and companionship and look forward to working with the new and continuing members on the priorities for 2010.

John White

What I like about the Cheshire Countryside

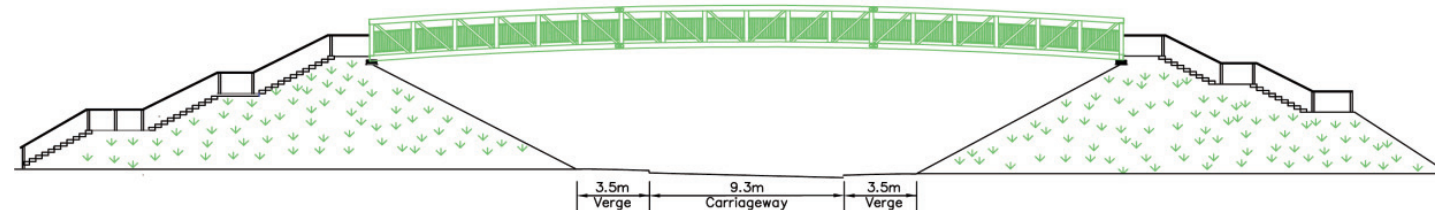
I walk about 600 miles of the rights of way in Cheshire each year as a member and leader of walking groups. The main benefit I get from this is getting out into open spaces with rolling hills, valleys, waterways, trees wildflowers and attractive buildings. How else can you get fresh air, become an expert on cattle, stiles, footpath lore and improve physical and mental fitness.

I am responsible for monitoring a section of Cheshire's footpaths and this adds an understanding of the legal aspects, liaison with officers and undertaking some minor physical improvements myself. Getting an overgrown, badly signed path improved (yes there are some!) is quite satisfying!

One of the main concerns this year has been walking through cattle. Groups of young heifers or bullocks in the spring can be quite intimidating and bulls have a bad reputation. The only difficulties we have had is with penned-in animals on a right of way or cows with young calves. Usually a small diversion will avoid the hazard.

Landowners vary from the welcoming who want a chat to the obstructive and rude - a copy of the Rights of Way protocol with diplomacy can help!

The replacement of stiles with gates is very welcome particularly as one ages but nettles and brambles in the autumn, mud in winter and horse tape all the time are a nuisance. Those responsible for maintenance budgets please note! However the benefits of walking through this varied countryside make these inconveniences bearable.



Alderley Edge and Nether Alderley Bypass

The Local Access Forum has taken a keen interest in the development of this major road scheme. In particular, it has commented on the provision of facilities for walkers and cyclists.

The new bypass of Alderley Edge & Nether Alderley will be a fast single carriageway road and will not have any junctions with side roads. Overbridges will be provided where the existing roads cross the line of the bypass. The Forum has welcomed the inclusion of separate cycle tracks and footways which are being provided on both sides of the new road and which will link to the existing road network by sloping ramps.

In addition, a number of footpaths that cross the line of the bypass could conveniently be diverted to use the bridges being built for the side roads. However, there was no convenient diversion for two footpaths one in Chorley Parish and the other in Nether Alderley Parish. The designers insisted that walkers could safely cross the new carriageway 'at-grade' that is, by walking across the road between traffic travelling at sixty miles per hour in both directions.

In January 2005, the Local Access Forum opposed the County Council at the Public Inquiry into the proposed Alderley Edge & Nether Alderley Bypass. In evidence to the Inquiry the chairman of the Forum stated:

'Bridges provide a safe crossing for walkers of all ages as well as for people with disabilities. Also, a bridge is visible from a distance, making it obvious to people using the footpath that there is a safe crossing facility. It can also be seen as a feature of aesthetic merit in the landscape setting.'

On publication of the independent Inspector's report, he concluded that 'in the interests of good practice' a pedestrian footbridge should be provided to take the footpath over the bypass, but left the final decision to the County Council.

Having received this encouragement from the Inspector's report the Forum continued to press for a footbridge. In April 2008 the County Council finally agreed that a footbridge would be provided as part of the scheme. Construction of the bypass commenced in October 2008 and the footbridge has received planning permission from Cheshire East Council. It will be an elegant single span steel structure painted green and seated on the landscaping mounds on each side of the new road. In this case, the persistence of the Forum has paid off and walkers of all abilities will be able to use the local footpaths in safety.

The priorities 08-09

- Influencing Town and Parish Councils. To this end, the Forum invited a representative from the Cheshire Association of Local Councils to give a presentation at a recent meeting to clarify how the Forum might engage with and influence these groups.
- Carried over - To seek clarification nationally on the definition of the term 'cycleway' and the possible implications where work is conducted to 'upgrade' public footpaths without proper legal work to change their status.
- The ongoing situation with regard to budgets and funding for the PROW Teams of the new Unitary Authorities in Cheshire and Warrington Borough Council.
- Influencing the new Unitary Authorities in Cheshire to ensure that the Local Access Forum remains vibrant and meaningful and that it has a seat on the Area Boards once they are created.
- Safety on rural roads with particular regard to the needs of vulnerable road users who wish to use rural roads as part of a journey by walking, cycling or horse riding.

Priorities for 09-10

- 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