

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM held on Friday 17 September 2010 at Holmes Chapel Library.

PRESENT:

Forum Members

John White (in the Chair)
Robert Anderson
Neil Collie
Helen Connolly
Ken Edwards
Andy Gildon
Dale Langham
Andrew Needham
Keith Osborn
Keith Pennyfather
Kath Wurbacher

Officers and others

Genni Butler, Cheshire East Council
Rachel Graves, Cheshire East Council
Mike Taylor, Cheshire East Council
Hazel Barber, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Dee McCarthy, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Adele Mayer, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Denise Snelson, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Graham Dutton, Warrington Borough Council

Action

25 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Rhoda Bailey, Michael Scott and John Taylor.

26 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Matters Arising

Minute 20 – Public Rights of Way Regulatory Decision Making

Andrew Needham and Adele Mayer reported on the new procedures in Cheshire West and Chester for dealing with applications made under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Highways Act 1980 and the Town and Country Planning Act. Details of the application, consultation and investigation would be posted on the Council's website for 28 days before a decision was made. The decision for approval was delegated to the Head of Service except when a report was called in by a Councillor to be heard by the Public Rights of Way Committee.

As the Forum had a role on advising on policy matter it was suggested that Councillor Richard Short, Culture and Recreation Portfolio Holder be invited to attend a future meeting to report on the impact of the decision making changes in Cheshire West and

Chester.

As the next meeting was too late in the Budget Consultation process for the Forum to be consulted, it was suggested that the first meeting of the Greenspaces Forum be held in time for consultation to take place on the Greenspaces/Rights of Way Budget.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2010 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

Minute 17 – Working Groups

Under Represented Groups – ‘Bob Andrews’ be amended to read ‘Bob Anderson’.

27 FEEDBACK FROM WORKING GROUPS AND BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS TO PARISH COUNCILS

Andy Gildon reported on the progress with the Best Practice Recommendations to Parish and Town Councils since the last meeting and asked for the Forum’s advice on the best way to get the Recommendations as an item on Parish Council agendas. It was suggested that a copy be sent to all Town and Parish Councils and that Forum Members follow this up by making contact with the Town and Parish Council. A method of contacting the Parish Clerks would be agreed with Andy.

AG/GB/DS

Members reported on the progress with the Working Groups established at the last meeting. The Groups were in the process of setting up their first meetings and agreeing the remit of their Group. Progress would be reported at the next meeting in December.

28 PROPOSED CHANGES TO NATURAL ENGLAND

The Chairman reported on the proposed changes by the Government to Natural England.

The Government had announced, in the light of the budget deficit, proposed changes to government departments and organisations including Natural England. Local Access Forum Chairs had met with representatives from Natural England to discuss the possible future scenarios and consequences for Forums.

The role of Natural England was likely to focus on evaluation, setting standards, evidence, research, monitoring and delivery with ‘policy’ development’ being owned or moved back to government departments. Natural England was to provide support and technical advice to policy makers. Between now and April 2011 it would be reorganised and redefined to become a smaller, more focussed organisation.

There was uncertainty about the future level of funding and resources for Local Access Forums. England Access Forum future could lie with Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) as opposed to Natural England as DEFRA would be the body setting policy in the future. The Natural Environment White Paper would be a key document for England Access Forum and Local Access Forums to consider.

It was suggested that a representative from Natural England be invited to the Forum once the changes have taken place.

GB/DS

29 LOCAL SERVICE DELIVERY – DEVOLUTION OF POWERS FROM BOROUGH COUNCILS TO PARISH COUNCILS

Helen Connolly reported on the proposals for the devolution of powers from Borough Councils to Parish Councils.

Cheshire East Council's Cabinet had received a report on 19 July which outlined the Council's approach to the implementation of the transfer and devolution of functions and services to Town and Parish Councils. The report could be viewed on the Council's website – www.cheshireeast.gov.uk. The Council's ambition was to empower others to provide more relevant, responsive and value for money local public services, where appropriate, through local service delivery by working with Town and Parish Councils to promote and enhance their opportunities to deliver services for which they had powers and duties.

In October, the Council would be holding a number of meetings with Parish Councils to outline these proposals.

Denise Snelson agreed to find out what Cheshire West and Chester Council was doing in relation to the devolution of powers.

DS

30 CHESHIRE EAST DRAFT RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2011-2026

Genni Butler reported on the Cheshire East Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2011-2026

It was a statutory duty under section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 for every local authority to prepare and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP).

The draft Cheshire East ROWIP had been developed in line with the Local Transport Plan 3 into which it was required to be integrated.

The ROWIP consisted of five sections:

- Introduction
- Evaluation of current ROWIP
- Network Assessment
- Demand Assessment

- What needed to be done

The Forum was asked to comment on the draft ROWIP and Members discussed each of the sections. Issues discussed included access to public rights of way and that even though use of public transport was encouraged, walkers, riders and cyclists tended to use their own vehicles and lack of parking provision was a problem and could deter people using the rights of way.

Neil Collie suggested the following addition to the Initiatives - Walking, which was supported by the Forum:

“Safety Improvements: support the development, on safety grounds, of low cost measures, such as verge improvements and provision of footways on rural roads so as to encourage travel by foot, cycle and on horseback.”

The draft ROWIP would be presented to the Rights of Way Committee on 21 September 2010 to seek recommendation for the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing to approve the document to go out to public consultation during October and November.

Forum Members were asked to encourage their wider networks to comment on the draft ROWIP during the public consultation period.

ALL

31 CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER DRAFT RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2011-2016

Denise Snelson reported on the Cheshire West and Chester Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2011-2016.

A consultation exercise had been carried out to collect information on how people felt about their countryside and Greenspace Access Network. Also an Open Space Audit and Assessment of Need Household survey had been carried out. The results of these had been use to produce a Statement of Action and Improvement Implementation Plan

The Statement of Action consisted of six sections:

- Assets and Maintenance
- Economic Growth
- Better safety, security and health
- Quality of Life
- Climate Change
- Greater Equality of Opportunity

Each section outlined the actions which would be taken to improve access to the Greenspaces Network.

The draft ROWIP would go out for formal consultation in October and copies would be sent to Forum Members.

DS

32 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATES

Members were updated on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) for Cheshire. The report received outlined details of the current projects on the general infrastructure, access for equestrians and off road cyclists, accessibility and events and promotions. Progress on the following projects was reported:

Cheshire East:

- Bollington – bridge over canal at Clarence Mill
- Bollington – upgrade of footpath to bridleway
- Connect 2 Nantwich to Crewe Greenway
- Nantwich Riverside Loop
- Discovercheshire.co.uk
- Publicity for PROW and access matters

Cheshire West and Chester

- Flintshire to Neston Cycleway
- North West Coastal Trail
- Weaver Way and associated projects
- Bishop Barnet Way Road
- Dutton Horse Crossing, Weaver Way
- Walks for All, Cheshire West and Chester

33 FEEDBACK FROM NORTH WEST REGIONAL LAF CHAIRS' MEETING

The Chairman report on the topics discussed at the North West Regional Chair's meeting and briefed the Forum on :

- Smaller local authorities combining to carry out improvements
- Merger of Cumbria and Lancashire Local Access Forums
- Review of Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
- Training Topics

34 REPORTS FROM MEMBERS

Ken Edwards reminded Members about the Bollington Walking Festival which was taking place 15 - 31 October 2010 and handed out leaflets detailing the walks taking place.

Helen Connolly was concerned about cars parking in the designated horse box parking areas on Whitegate Way. Denise Snelson agreed to speak to the Ranger responsible for the Whitegate Way on this.

DS

Neil Collie asked if the agenda for the Forum meeting could be posted on the Forum's website before meeting took place.

RG/DS

35 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Annual Report

A draft of the Annual Report would be brought to the December meeting and Members were asked to forward their individual

contributions by end of November to Genni Butler.

ALL

36 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on Friday 10 December 2010.