

MINUTES of the meeting of the Herefordshire Local Access Forum held at Council Chamber, Brockington Hereford, on Wednesday 18th April, 2007 at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Neil Barnes, Hugh Black, David Boddington, Dennis Downey, Richard Gething (Chairman), David Judson, Arthur Lee, Dick Makin, Ben Nash, Peter Newman, Colin Palmer, Norman Pomfret, Derek Wareham

Observers: Tony Featherstone (Parks, Countryside and Leisure Development Manager HC), Cllr Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community Services), Rhys Griffiths (Senior Archivist, Records Office), Mike Everitt (Malvern Hills District Footpath Society), Peter Mckay (Byways and Bridleways Trust), John Evans, (Eastern Area BBNPA LAF chairman), Mike Hudson, Roger Sankey

190. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Simon Dereham, Charlotte Morgan, Cllr Sally Robertson, Joy Williams

The Chair welcomed Cllr Stockton, who thanked the forum for their work, Rhys Griffith and John Evans to the meeting.

191. MINUTES

The minutes from the previous forum meeting in October were signed subject to the words “not likely” being taken out of paragraph 1 of item 189.

AGREED THAT:

Minutes from the meeting 17.01.07 be signed as a true record of the meeting

192. MATTERS ARISING / ACTION POINTS

One forum member queried whether there had been any progress on item 177 from the previous minutes on the List of streets letter to be re-sent. It was informed that the letter would need further agreement and that the List of Streets issue would stay on the agenda.

The forum was also reminded of what the List of Streets is.

A member raised a query regarding point 186 of the previous minutes, about the Inspection and Maintenance leaflet being produced by the council, as to whether it would be available to comment on.

ACTION:

PROW Inspection and Maintenance leaflet circulated for LAF comment.

193. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Forum members were directed to a copy of the distributed draft ROWIP and informed of consultation start dates and deadline for response.

The secretariat guided the forum through the plan according to each relevant section of Introduction, Background, Demand Assessment, Network Assessment and the Statement of Action, and how they had been researched and put together.

It was noted that the plan aimed to be an aspirational document alongside a bidding document and that its approach focussed on being ground level led by working closely with Parish Councils.

Discussion arose on some sections of the document including charts and figures, which would be developed further.

It was discussed about how best the LAF could respond to the ROWIP. It was decided that the working group should provide a response to avoid duplication with user group representatives providing their extra views. The working group could therefore focus a response on the principles of the plan.

The secretariat will provide a summary of responses.

One member corrected the list of consultees that had been previously circulated adding "wildlife" into the description of Conservation areas. The final List of consultees would be circulated to the forum once known.

It was informed that local members would be notified of the consultation through the members library. It was also noted by the secretariat that this document would go to full cabinet for approval like the ROW strategy had done previously. This was further confirmed by Cllr Stockton as the document will have an affect on all local communities and wards in the whole county and is therefore a key decision.

ACTION

ROWIP working group to meet with date to be confirmed

Secretariat to provide a summary of ROWIP responses

Secretariat to circulate final list of ROWIP consultees to forum members

194. FORUM BUSINESS

The Chairman stressed that the forum business was increasing and that its status as an independent body was improving. The updated LAF guidance had been circulated to the forum and any views were invited on this.

One forum member queried what the government attitude was towards central funding of LAF's. In response to this it was informed that funding is through central funds but not ring-fenced.

The forum further discussed spending and agreed that it was a good idea to look at what the LAF already costs at the next meeting.

The chairman asked the forum if the forum should now have their own headed note paper, due to the LAF being a separate body from the council, as they are still using HC headed notepaper.

Although a separate advisory body and not accountable to the council, the LAF were reminded of the responsibilities of HC in appointing members and acting as the secretariat. Members discussed where the LAF currently sat in relation to the rights of way department as most discussion centred around rights of way issues within meetings.

An info sheet had been circulated regarding Parish Councils and LAFs working together, which would shortly be appearing in the National Association of Local Councils national review. It was stated that the raising of awareness of LAFs to councils was encouraging.

ACTION

Suggestions of design for headed note-paper logo was welcomed.

195. RIGHTS OF WAY MANAGERS REPORT

The forum were informed of a letter, sent to LAF secretaries in England, with regard to ROWIP's and the funding of their implementation from the Parliamentary Secretary for Biodiversity, Landscape and Rural Affairs, Barry Gardiner.

The letter outlined that although production of a ROWIP was a statutory requirement, there was no legal requirement to implement it. Therefore that money was allocated through the local authority rather than DEFRA.

The forum were notified of the new Public Rights of Way Office at Queenswood Country Park having moved there earlier in April.

The Rights of Way Manager outlined a number of ongoing items and their progress:

Enforcement Policy

This was complete and now being put into place

PPO policy

A new part time post had been identified to deal with orders and good progress was being made at order making stage.

The forum were reminded of the 'right to apply' regarding applications for diversions of rights of way around agricultural land. It was reported that this would be looked at in more detail including costs and any further information and progress on this would be noted and relayed back to the forum.

Modifications

It was informed that a spreadsheet to track modifications progress would be available to the forum and public soon.

Inspection and maintenance plan

This is currently being put into place

Access Land

There was nothing to report on access land issues.

BVPI 178

There had been a lot of discussion regarding this, and its methodology before the May survey period.

A letter had been received from Mike Everitt of the Malvern Hills District Footpath Society concerning the BVPI statistics. This outlined that other statistics such as issues relating to enforcement, modification order backlogs should be looked at, other than or alongside the estimate of BVPI 178, in improving the condition of the network.

This would be looked at and would be reported in the next manager's report at the forum.

It was reported that there have been a significant number of path closures in the county due to works being carried out including the pipeline, Rotherwas Access Road, Hereford and Ross flood alleviation schemes and a welsh water pipeline.

The forum felt the construction phase of the gas pipeline had reached the county following little and poor consultation. Although the closure notices were up a week in hand to keep the footpaths open as long as possible, the forum felt this was not enough time due to the scale of the operation.

One forum member stressed they felt that it had worked out well although it was further noted by the forum that it would have been beneficial to have received more information from the contractors. It was agreed that a letter could be written to the regulators and contractors regarding this. It was further discussed that advice could be sought about the framing of this letter from those who have already made representations.

ACTION:

Barry Gardiner LAF letter would be forwarded onto the forum

Letter to be written by the forum to regulators and contractors regarding the pipeline and level of information provided.

196. WORK GROUP REPORTSLost Ways working group

The chairman of the working group outlined what the group had been working on since January when the forum received a presentation from Natural England on the project.

That:

- The working group had met monthly
- A decision was made to push ahead with a Discovering Lost Ways project
- Natural England had attended each monthly working group meeting
- The Info sheet had been mailed out to interested parties
- Invites to chosen local parishes would be discussed further to take project forward
- Natural England would like to see a report on the work and findings in September

The Chair then extended an invite to a member of the forum with landowner interest as this was missing from the group. This was accepted by two members willing to represent landowners. Myra Chilman and Dick Makin agreed to attend as representatives.

The county records office were also invited to the next DLW working group meeting in May and this too was accepted by Rhys Griffiths on their behalf.

ROWIP

The Chair briefly informed the forum that a response had been written on behalf of the forum on the Draft Wye and Lugg consultation. Copies of this response were available from the secretariat.

The forum discussed the ROWIP further and felt that it would be a good idea to look at other ROWIPs from neighbouring authorities. If there was a list of websites this could be made easier to access so members were aware of completed ROWIPs.

John Evans, Chairman of the Brecon Beacons Eastern Area LAF, stated that their ROWIP was being re-written and would perhaps be ready nearer August.

ACTION

Secretariat to circulate a list of websites with draft or completed ROWIPs on

197. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A question had been received from Arthur Lee regarding next year's rights of way budget. In response the forum were informed that the budget remained the same as last year, with £50,000 on top from LTP grant.

198. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The next forum meeting would be held at Brockhampton Village Hall.

A forum member queried how the ploughing and cropping issue was being dealt with. The secretariat stated that with the new policy sets out a timetable to tackling ploughing and cropping through letters and enforcement. An improvement has been seen due to cross compliance.

In response to whether those areas cropped last year are being inspected this year, it was stated that the wardens will be looking at problem areas as resources permit.

The Chairman further stated that the forum felt the response received from the RPA relating to the letter the forum wrote last year on cross compliance issues was not satisfactory. The forum were in agreement that the chairman bring the issue up via the National Forum meeting he would be attending.

Meeting ended at 8:45pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____