

**Notes of a meeting of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum held at
County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday 25 February 2010.**

Present

Mr. R. Denney, Mr. B. Sutton, Mr. H. Eppel, Mr. S.J. Warren, Mr. M. Parr, Mr. J. Law, Mrs. L. Forman, Mr. T. Kirby, Mrs. H. Brown, Mrs. V. Allen and Dr. G. Mason.

Officers in attendance

Mr. P. Hitchings, Mr. E. McWilliam, Mr. S. Weston and Mr. P. Williams.

Action by

374. Election of Chairman

It was proposed by Mrs. Brown and seconded by Mr. Kirby that Mr. Denney be elected Chairman of the Forum.

AGREED:

That Mr. R. Denney be elected Chairman of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum for 2010.

375. Election of Vice-chairman

It was proposed by Mr. Denney and seconded by Mrs. Forman that Mr. Sutton be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Forum.

AGREED:

That Mr. B. Sutton be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum for 2010.

376. Chairman's welcome

The Chairman welcomed members to the first meeting of 2010; in particular he welcomed Mr. Hitchings to his first meeting of the Local Access Forum. In the future Mr. Hitchings would be replacing Mr. Weston as clerk for the Forum meetings.

377. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from the following members:

Mr. C. Gordon
Mr. P. Tame

Mr. A. Pyper
Mrs. R. Camamile

378. Minutes of the previous meeting

Minute 370(d).

It was noted that the 'River Eye near Wardley' should read 'Eye Brooke'. Subject to that amendment the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2009 were confirmed as a correct record.

379. Matters arising from the minutes not otherwise on the agenda

Minute 359: Feedback from Watermead Country Park site visit

Mr Williams provided the Forum with a further update on developments at Watermead Country Park as part of the Connect2 bid. He told the Forum that Birstall lock bridge had now opened, but the bridge at King Lear's Lake had not yet opened because discussions were taking place about what surface material was most suitable for the bridge. It was due to be completed by the middle of March.

Minute 364: Update on Walking Week '09 Workshop

The dates for Walking Week 2010 were confirmed as being 4-12 September 2010. Mr. McWilliam informed the Forum that the event had been moved to a later date in the year (to the previously discussed late June period) due to the summer World Cup event. This was also consistent with last year.

Minute 365: Working with Parishes

Mr. McWilliam updated the Forum on the progress of working with Parish Councils on access issues. Andrew Poole (Access officer – Marketing and Promotions) had been working alongside other members of the Policy & Promotion team to draft a proposal on how best the Local Access Forum and Parish Councils could approach community paths together. It was suggested that a workshop be arranged to discuss the proposals.

AGREED:

To hold the workshop on 18 May from 3.30pm, before the Local Access Forum meeting later that day.

EM/PH/SW

Minute 366: Encouraging more people to walk

Mr. Williams reported that there was an issue with regard to insurance and the number of walks that village representatives could lead each year; currently limited to two.

AGREED:

That Mr. Williams seek to clarify the insurance requirements for village representative walking group leaders. **PW**

Minute 370(a): Open Forum: Quarry at Shepshed

Mr. Williams reported that the reinstatement of the footpath at the quarry in Shepshed was now being considered as part of a larger planning application that had been submitted to develop an incinerator on the site of the former quarry.

Minute 370(b): Open Forum: Community Services Department

Mr. Williams provided a further update to the Forum on the restructuring process within the County Council. He stressed that the County Council was undergoing a period of significant change and therefore the officers that currently worked alongside the Forum would likely be subject to change. He told the Forum that he would endeavour to keep clear lines of communication between the Forum and its members, and relevant officers and departments at the County Council.

In light of this information the Chairman and members thanked Mr. Williams and Mr. McWilliam for their work on behalf of the Forum, and for the support and advice they had offered to the Forum and members over the years.

380. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

390. Urgent Items

It was AGREED that the following items be taken as urgent:

- Gating Orders in Wigston;
- Footpath issue at Mr. Sutton's Farm.

391. Change to the Order of Business

With the consent of the Forum, the Chairman agreed to vary the order of business from that set out in the agenda.

392. Urgent Item: Gating Orders in Wigston

Mr. Warren wished to revisit the proposed policy for the making of Gating Orders. It had come to his attention that since the Forum was consulted on 2 October 2008, the request made by Oadby & Wigston Borough Council for a temporary Gating Order in Little Hill, Wigston which, since its installation had become a 24/7 Gating Order; an effective closure. This would essentially mean the closure of those rights of way affected by any such Gating Order.

The Bridleway Association and the Ramblers Association had been consulted on the Order but the matter had not been brought to the attention of the Forum in its role as statutory consultee. Mr. McWilliam reported that he was unaware of any alterations to the proposal and would therefore seek further clarification on the issue to bring to the attention of the Forum at the next meeting. The forums view on the gating orders had been sought the previous year. At that point the forum had objected to the proposals.

392. Urgent Item: Footpath Issue at Mr. Sutton's Farm

Mr. Sutton reported his concerns about a path on his farm (S87) which was used by walkers, but lead to a dead end. He had suggested that the path be redirected to join it with surrounding paths and the parish council had agreed with this approach, however the redirection appeared to be taking a long time to resolve.

Mr. McWilliam reported that the legal process for such issues was complex and the County Council was legally bound to comply with the necessary regulations in such situations.

393. English Access Forum Update (Regional Meeting)

The Chairman referred to letters of correspondence concerning the English Access Forum (EAF), a copy of which are filed with the minutes, marked 'B'. He reported that the regional meeting for the EAF was taking place at the same time as the Forum meeting.

It was the general consensus of the Forum that the set up of the EAF had been dysfunctional. It was explained that the purpose of the EAF was to bring combined pressure from all LAFs to bear on the government as a 'common voice'. Despite this aim however, the EAF had delivered disappointing results.

AGREED:

That the LAF would wait for a response from the regional meeting of the English Access Forum.

394. Local Access Forum, East Midlands Regional Conference: Workshops

Mr. McWilliam reported that there were seven places available for members to attend the East Midlands Regional Conference Workshops to be held on Tuesday 23 March. He suggested it may be of benefit to members in terms of broadening their knowledge of the LAF network and provided an opportunity to meet fellow members across the region to share best practice. More information about the conference could be found in the letter sent by Natural England, a copy of which, marked 'C', is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman told the Forum that having attended in previous years he would not be attending the session this year.

AGREED:

That members wishing to attend the Local Access Forum East Midlands should contact the organiser directly. **ALL**

395. ROWIP2 and LTP3 – Timetabling

Mr McWilliam presented an overview of the Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3). The LTP set out how the County Council planned to deliver an effective transport network over the next five years. In addition to motor vehicles, the LTP included development of more sustainable forms of transport such as walking and cycling. The LTP was a strategy that also allowed for the seeking of funding opportunities. The LTP3 would be influenced by national guidance that suggested the following key principles:

- Supporting national economic competitiveness and growth, by delivering reliable and efficient transport networks;
- Reducing carbon emissions and other greenhouse gases, with the desired outcome of tackling climate change;
- Contributing to better safety, security and health and longer life expectancy by reducing the risk of death, injury or illness arising from transport, and by promoting travel modes that are beneficial to health;
- Promoting greater equality of opportunity for all citizens, with the desired outcome of achieving a fairer society; and
- Improving quality of life for transport users and non-transport users, and to promote a healthy natural environment.

The document would be consulted on later in the year. The proposals would be finalised in February 2011. The LTP would also have supporting documents. One would be a revision to the current Rights of Way Improvement plan. This had a five year action plan that would be completed at the end of 2010. The revised ROWIP would include a new 5 year Action Plan. The forums views would be sought at an early stage.

Arising from discussion, members made the following suggestions in relation to the Plan:

- Increased use of rights of way could be encouraged through the improvement of signage. Though it was acknowledged that signage in the County was of the best in the country, it could be more informative. It was also commented that it might be better practice to develop existing path networks by joining up linear routes to make circuits of path, rather than create new paths,

- which seemed to be the norm at present;
- Signage should include clear messages about the accessibility of rights of way routes. This is because stiles can be barriers to people with certain disabilities and as a result they may have to turn back along a route where they have met a stile that they had not been made aware of;
- Members questioned the affordability of the plan, given the Council's current financial situation. Mr. McWilliam reported that any proposals would be balanced with budgetary constraints.
- Members stated that the process of making applications to the County Council for changes to paths was too difficult to negotiate even with Parish Council support at a local level, some applications taking as long as 5 years to confirm. It was reported that there were several officers working in this field. They often faced difficulties when dealing with path adjustments. The number of legal obligations the Authority must meet had increased and therefore the time authorities must spend on each application had increased. The speed with which other authorities dealt with the same applications was similar because of the legal framework.

Mr. McWilliam informed the group that a timetable for the plan and preliminary discussions with the forum would begin this summer.

AGREED:

That Mr. McWilliam would update the group on the progress of the lost ways group and consider responding to government, suggesting efficiency savings related to legislation (This was already a proposal in the current ROWIP).

EM

396. Funding Bids and Implementation Progress

Mr. Williams reported on the progress with the following funding applications:

Watermead Country Park

- Works within the park as part of the Connect2 bid had now been mostly completed. A lighting proposal was subject to a planning application between the Birstall and Thurmaston ends of the Park. This was currently being reviewed due to concerns regarding the effects on bats;
- Playbuilder funding had been secured for children's play equipment around King Lear's Lake. A number of dinosaur-themed equipment would be installed over the coming months;
- An 'Access to Nature' bid for £670,000 had been submitted jointly with the City Council to improve access at the east side of the Park, provide a toilet block and fund an Access Officer;

Green Infrastructure Bid

- A funding application to the 6Cs GI Board for £692,000 had been successful. This funding would be spent with the City to improve links to the County's sections of the Canal and would also result in coherent signage in both the City and County.

Mr. Williams further reported that a bid had been submitted on behalf of the Stepping Stones Project for a 'green gym' in Braunstone.

AGREED:

That the information provided be noted.

397. Gates As Obstructions

Mrs. Allen reported her concerns about the authorisation of stiles and gates on ROW. It was reported that those that were not authorised were considered by Defra to be unlawful.

Mr. McWilliam reported that the County Council's Environment and Transport department was responsible for granting authorisation to build stiles and gates on public rights of way. The County Council kept an asset management database on all structures installed during scheme programmes. In terms of availability to the public, officers had received no enquiries to make the information public. If a complaint was made to the County Council it would check if authorisation had been sought.

398. National Forest Trail Update

Mr. McWilliam reported that an early draft of the proposed trail was now available.

AGREED:

That those members wishing to have sight of the early draft contact Mr. McWilliam. **ALL**

399. Reorganisation Update

Mr. Williams reported that as of 1 February the Community Services department of Leicestershire County Council had ceased to exist. Officers had been transferred to other departments across the County Council including the newly titled 'Environment & Transport' Department, of which the Director was Matthew Lugg. Waste Management would continue to be headed by Holly Field. Under the current action plan, some officers within Mr. Williams' team were likely to be transferred to other departments.

AGREED:

That it be noted that a more definitive report on changes at the County Council would be presented at the next LAF meeting. **PW**

400. Parliamentary Inquiry into the National Forest Company

Mr. McWilliam presented a report of the Director of Environment & Transport on the Environment concerning a parliamentary enquiry into the National Forest Company. A copy of this report, marked 'D', is filed with these minutes. It was reported that the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA) were presently considering the future of the National Forest Company.

AGREED:

- (a) That the LAF was supportive of the Company and would inform EFRA that it is pleased with the work and progress on the new National Forest in the region. **EM**
- (b) That the Forum would wish to be actively involved in future consultations on access proposals within the forest.

401. Correspondence

Mr. F. Bedford:

The Forum had received a letter from a Mr. F. Bedford seeking advice from the LAF about how to oppose the development of land in Lubesthorpe in the interests of preserving access routes and wildlife environments.

AGREED:

That Mr. McWilliam respond to Mr. Bedford updating him on the role of the forum and its current response to the Blaby LDF. **EM**

David Taylor MP Memorial Events:

Mr. McWilliam reported that a series of memorial events were to be held in celebration of the life and work of MP David Taylor (Labour, North West Leicestershire) who passed away on Boxing Day 2009.

The British Heart Foundation was dedicating its annual fund-raising walk to David Taylor's memory. The walk would be taking place on 7 March 2010 at Calke Abbey. There would be three alternative routes of varying distance to walk; 7; 10 and 14 miles.

The Chairman announced that the Ramblers' Association would be conducting a similar memorial walk in David Taylor's memory on 13 March 2010. The walk would be taking place from St Helen's Church in the Market Harborough area.

402. Sub Groups:

Mr. McWilliam reported the following update in regard to subgroups:

Planning

In the light of a number of planning matters at the meeting the group would need to meet if time allowed before the submissions were made.

LTP

There were three areas for this year. Ashby in North West Leicestershire, Bosworth in both NW and Hinckley boroughs and Lutterworth in the south of the county. The officers co-ordinating the schemes would be contacting members directly to arrange the first sub group meeting and to distribute maps.

Publicity

The Annual Report was due. Last year's report had included submissions from members of the Forum and it was felt that this year's Report should keep a similar theme. It had also been issued in a successful leaflet format.

AGREED:

That interested members should submit articles for use in the Forum's Annual Report.

ALL

403. Planning Matters:
Bardon Hill/Newhurst Quarry/Lubesthorpe/Glenfield

Mr. McWilliam updated the Forum on the progress of planning applications for Bardon Hill; Newhurst Quarry; Lubesthorpe and Glenfield on which the Forum could submit its comments as consultee.

Bardon Hill

It was suggested that the Forum should consider having a meeting to discuss each item individually, in particular the development at Bardon Hill because the planning application received by the County Council was considerably large and complex.

It was commented that the Bardon Hill proposal had not taken into account many of the 'wish list' items the Forum had provided since previously being consulted. The proposal had provided only the bare minimum in terms of its obligation for access requirement.

AGREED:

That the Forum recommend that the proposals should provide more access routes.

EM

Newhurst Quarry

It was commented that the most advantageous way to progress the Newhurst Quarry would be to improve amenities at the location. There was an underpass track linking the two quarries which could be turned into a footpath or bridleway giving a traffic free method of crossing the M1. There was already an existing track which ran from the underpass up to a public footpath running through Longcliffe Lodge Farm. There was also space for a footpath to run through the Newhurst Quarry site to link the A512 Ashby Road to the underpass. If this footpath link could be restored it would give a footpath link from Shepshed to the top of the Beacon, via the concession footpath across Nanpanton Hall estate.

A new car park in the bottom of Longcliffe Quarry would create a circuit from the Longcliffe Quarry rim back across to beside the motorway and back down to the new car park. Such a car park would also be a useful starting place for long distance walks in Charnwood Forest and may gain support from the National Forest.

A new restoration plan could be encouraged to adopt these suggested new footpaths and access routes.

AGREED:

Dr Mason had already formulated some comments that could be supported by the forum.

Lubesthorpe

Mr. McWilliam reported that the Lubesthorpe area was being put forward as a sustainable urban extension. This would be subject to a range of planning processes.

It was commented that the Glenfield planning application contained an environmental impact assessment that was very detailed and covered the entire range of effects of the development on the local natural environment. This should be used as a guide for other environmental impact assessments.

Glenfield

Mr. McWilliam reported on a significant development in Glenfield for housing and industrial units. The proposals included some positive aspects for ROW, such as a long green corridor that linked to the M1 and a number of cycleways.

AGREED:

That the Forum was generally supportive of the proposals but that a more detailed response should be given.

404. Future Recreational use of Rock Quarries (Presentation)

Dr. Mason gave a presentation on his proposal for the use of disused hard rock quarries in Leicestershire as recreational spaces. A copy of the presentation slides and a further information sheet explaining the proposals are filed with these minutes.

AGREED:

- (a) That Dr. Mason's be thanked for his informative presentation;
- (b) That Dr. Mason's proposals for the use of disused hard rock quarries in Leicestershire as recreational space be supported by the Forum.

405. Date of the next meeting

NOTED:

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 18 May 2010 at 6pm in the Guthlaxton Committee Room at County Hall, Glenfield. This was to be preceded by a workshop on 'involving local communities with their rights of way'. It was suggested that this could begin at 3:30.

6.00pm – 8.40pm
25 February 2010

CHAIRMAN