

**Notes of a meeting of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum held at  
County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday 26 November 2009.**

**Present**

Mrs. V. Allen, Mrs. H. Brown, Mrs. R. Camamile CC, Mrs. L. Forman, Mr. J. Kitching, Mr. J. Law, Dr. G. Mason, Mr. M. Parr, Mrs. A. Pyper, Mr. B. Sutton (in the Chair), Mr. S. J. Warren.

**Officers in attendance**

Mr. C. Gordon (Natural England), Mr. E. McWilliam, Mr. P. Williams and Mr. R. Steffens.

**Action by**

**356. Chairman's welcome**

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting.

**357. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from the following members:

Mr. Denney  
Mr. Eppel  
Mr Henderson  
Mr. Kirby  
Mr. Tame

**358. Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

**359. Matters arising from the minutes**

**Minute 346: Feedback from Watermead Country Park site visit**

Mr. Williams updated members on developments at Watermead Country Park following the site visit which had taken place on 29 September 2009. He reported that good progress continued to be made:

- Birstall lock bridge had been completed and was due to open the following day.
- The bridge at King Lear's Lake would be opening shortly.
- A planning application would be submitted shortly for the lighting scheme between Birstall and Thurmaston.

- Consideration was being given to the surface material to be used at the bridge near White Horse Lane.

### **360. Declarations of Interest**

Mr. Chris Gordon (Natural England) reported that he was a member of the 6Cs Growth Points Board. He would therefore leave the meeting during discussion on item 9 – Green Infrastructure bid to Growth Points. (The matter was discussed under Minute 363 below).

### **361. The Charnwood Forest**

Forum members were advised of progress on the development of a Vision Statement for Charnwood Forest Regional Park. The Vision Statement, a copy of which is attached to those notes, had now been agreed by the partners. The objectives of the Park were:

- To manage and promote landscape and settlement character, including biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and industrial heritage features.
- To promote sustainable leisure and tourism.
- To support agricultural diversification and woodland and rural economy uses which respect local character.

The special nature of the area would be recognised in the Local Development Frameworks of Charnwood Borough Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and North West Leicestershire District Council.

It was also reported that agreement had been reached with colleagues in Nottinghamshire to exchange information and pool knowledge with regard to Charnwood and Sherwood Forests. Furthermore, a touring exhibition would be demonstrating the geodiversity of Charnwood Forest in the New Year.

### **362. The Soar Valley and Grand Union Canal – Strategy – Update**

It was reported that the Soar Valley and Grand Union Canal Strategy had been launched on 24 November by its partner organisations. The aim of the Strategy is to improve and promote a 23 mile long corridor of the River Soar and Grand Union Canal in Leicestershire. The Strategy set out the wider rationale, context, strategic priorities and actions for maximising the positive economic, social and environmental contribution of the River Soar and Grand Union Canal Corridor.

The section of the waterway covered by the Strategy runs from Kilby Bridge in the south, through the centre of Leicester, and north to Loughborough Meadows. The width of the corridor varies along the route to take into account the numerous features along the Soar Valley. It was thought that the waterway was not currently fulfilling its potential for a number of reasons, including its low public profile and poor accessibility in places. The Strategy recommended a series of actions to improve the

physical landscape of the waterway and, more crucially, how the waterway was utilised. The emphasis was on outlining a route-map of short to medium term interventions that were realistic and affordable, and could help to put in place the conditions to secure long term change.

It was considered that insufficient funding was being directed to the waterway by British Waterways and the Connect2 Partnership was undertaking some work to make up the shortfall.

*(At this point Mr. Gordon left the meeting).*

### **363. Green Infrastructure bid to Growth Points**

Mr. Williams reported that Green Infrastructure funding was dealt with at the 6Cs level. Unfortunately, the Government had reduced funding for 2010/11 by 40% but there was £700,000 available for which to bid. Accordingly, bids were being prepared for:

- Burbage Common – to improve access from Burbage and Hinckley
- Charnwood Forest – to improve access to a number of sites, including Charnwood Lodge
- Soar Valley – signage and site access from Leicester to Birstall

Expressions of interest needed to be made to the 6Cs immediately and details of agreed projects would be submitted by the end of January 2010. A final decision would be made by the end of March.

*(Mr. Gordon returned to the meeting).*

### **364. Update on Walking Week '09 Workshop**

Mr. McWilliam reported that an event had been held on 23 November to celebrate the success of the Walking Week '09. Invited partners discussed how the event went, what should be done in future and whether an event should be held in 2010.

This year's event had been well received, with 1,100 people participating in 80 walks. 80% of the participants had indicated that they would take part again. It was hoped that a bigger pool of walking leaders could be established, although insurance was an issue which needed to be addressed and clarified for the benefit of the leaders.

It had been agreed to organise a Walking Week in 2010, probably towards the end of June.

### **365. Working with Parishes**

Mr Law read out a suggested note to parish councils encouraging them to become more involved in access issues.

Andrew Poole (Access officer – Marketing and Promotions) was currently

considering how to work better with parishes, and it was thought that it would be helpful to discuss the issue at the next Annual Meeting between the County Council and Parish Councils.

Suggested ways of improving dialogue with the parishes were:

- That the LAF website was promoted with them
- Ensure that the 28 Community Forums had access issues on their agenda

It was noted that support for increased dialogue with parishes could be problematic since no additional resources would be available. It would be important therefore to consider from the outset exactly what support could be offered. Any additional involvement by parishes would be very much on a self-help basis.

AGREED:

That an officer be asked to prepare a report on the implications of increasing contact with parish councils to enable the Forum to consider the matter in detail.

### **366. Encouraging More People to Walk**

Mr. Law read out a proposed note suggesting that villages could provide an individual who would meet organised groups of walkers and provide them with some historical context of the locality during walks. It was thought that villages would be interested in this idea because they would be able to promote the local area and that walkers would be interested because they would learn more about the area.

There was however, an issue regarding third party insurance – village contacts would only normally be insured to lead two walks annually.

### **367. Natural England Update**

#### **(a) Walking for Health**

Mr Gordon reported that Natural England had recently appointed a 'Walking for Health' officer with funding from the NHS. The purpose of the post was to encourage the establishment of local walking routes and to encourage more regular walking. The post was funded for 2 years and it was intended to link publicity with the Healthy Walking Week.

#### **(b) Access Officer**

Mr Gordon reported that Jan Tilsey had left her post but that a new Access Officer would be appointed shortly.

(c) LAF Regional Co-Ordination

Mr Gordon reported that Claire Herring, the Regional LAF Co-ordinator, would be talking to LAF chairmen with a view to establishing a 'chair network' and thus improve co-ordination within the region and nationally.

(d) Agri-Environment

Mr Gordon reported that Natural England supported farmers who undertook environmental projects which improved access to farmland. Funding would be targeted where it was most needed.

Mrs Allen referred to the gaps in the bridleway network and hoped that these could be reduced.

**368. National Forest Trail**

Mr. McWilliam gave an update on the proposal to establish a National Forest Trail. He reported that the National Forest (NF) Company had appointed someone to look at the business case for a new trail and would report by the end of the year. If a business case was proven to the NF would bid for funds. Although the route was not yet determined, it would link to existing footpaths. The highway authority would need 100% financial support for any works carried out.

**369. Correspondence**

(a) East Midlands Chairs Meeting

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> November is attached to these notes for information.

(b) Access Newsletter

A copy of the latest issue of the Access Newsletter (Issue 42) was circulated at the meeting. A copy of the Newsletter is filed with these notes.

(c) Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Structures (Gates, Gaps and Stiles) on Rights of Way

Consideration was given to the draft good practice guidance for local authorities in respect of Gates, Gaps and Stiles on Rights of Way. A copy of the good practice guidance is filed with these notes.

The main recommendations of the guidance are set out on page 6. With regard to the fourth recommendation, Mr. McWilliam suggested that it would be possible for the County Council to identify routes which were free from stiles or other lawful

structures.

It was suggested that photographs should be taken of obstacles and kept for reference of user groups who would be able to access the photographs and make their own assessment as to suitability. User groups would also assess whether new or reinstated obstacles performed their function correctly. Mr. McWilliam commented that the County Council would not regard the collection of photographs as a good use of resources.

Mr. McWilliam also confirmed that new/replacement structures would comply with the good practice guidance.

### **370. Open Forum**

#### **(a) Quarry at Shepshed**

Discussion took place on the possible reinstatement of the footpath at the quarry in Shepshed. If it was reinstated it would be possible to walk along a right of way from Shepshed to Beacon Hill and beyond. It was suggested that a planning application would need to be submitted by the company to develop an incinerator on the site of the former quarry and that would enable the County Council to provide a new footpath. Care would however need to be taken to ensure delineation between pedestrians and traffic within the site.

Mr. McWilliam agreed to discuss the matter with the County Council's minerals section.

#### **(b) Community Services Department**

Mr. Williams reported on a restructuring process within the County Council required to meet savings targets over the coming three years. The Community Services Department would be disbanded and it was likely that the functions of the Environmental Management Team would be dispersed.

Mr. Williams indicated that he would be in a position to report more fully on the changes at the Forum's next meeting.

It was suggested that if the County Council needed to sell part of its estate it should first consider access issues and ensure that arrangements were in place to improve public access before the land was sold.

#### **(c) Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)**

It was reported that some LAFs were consulted when TROs were being proposed. Mr. McWilliam confirmed that he would speak to Highways officers about their TRO consultation arrangements.

Mrs Allen mentioned a temporary TRO which had been in existence on The Drift which formed part of the boundary between Leicestershire and Lincolnshire. She suggested that the Forum and the Lincolnshire Local Access Forum should both discuss the matter.

Mr McWilliam stated that this was a matter for Lincolnshire.

(d) Bridge over the River Eye near Wardley

Mrs Pyper referred to the possible reinstatement of a bridleway bridge over the River Eye near Wardley. Rutland County Council had indicated that the Council was prepared to construct the bridge if Leicestershire County Council agreed to maintain it. Rutland was allegedly waiting to hear from the County Council.

AGREED:

That the reinstatement of the bridge over the River Eye near Wardley be discussed at the next meeting of the Forum.

(e) M1 Junction 19 Improvements – Consultation

Mr. Parr referred to the consultation by the Highways Agency on proposals to improve the M1 at Junction 19. In his opinion the proposed arrangements for Rights of Way would be better than the existing arrangements.

**371. Orders Items**

No items were raised under this item.

**372. Sub-Groups**

No items were raised under this item.

**373. Agenda Items for the Next Meeting**

The following item was agreed for the next meeting of the Forum (on Thursday 25 February 2010 at 6.00pm):

- Bridge over the River Eye near Wardley.