

TELFORD AND WREKIN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

**Minutes of a meeting held on Wednesday 24th April 2013 at 1.30pm
at The Studio, Graham Building, Wrekin College, Sutherland Road, Wellington, Telford**

PRESENT: Anthony Francis Jones (Telford Bridleways Association), Marion Law (Rambler), Janet Mees-Robinson (British Carriage Drivers Association), Reg Potter (Telford & Wrekin Bicycle Users Group), Cllr Arnold England (Telford & Wrekin Council), Cllr Tracy Hope (Telford & Wrekin Council), Peter Holt (Land Owner), Bob Coalbran (Wellington Walkers are Welcome), Marilyn Pietroni (Disability), Bruce Udale (Landowner), Fiona Smith (Disability) and Paula Doherty.

ALSO PRESENT: Andrew Careless (Senior Rights of Way Officer), Michael Barker (Assistant Director Planning Specialist) and Jayne Clarke (Democratic Services Support Officer)

LAF-33 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 9th January 2013 be agreed subject to one amendment in Minute No LAF 25 “Cllr Tracy Hope had been in a difficult position representing the project whilst holding a seat on the Parish Council” needed to be amended to read “Cllr Tracy Hope had been in a difficult position representing the project whilst holding a seat on the Huntington Lane Surface Mine Site Community Fund Sub-Committee”

LAF-34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Bob Alton (Rambler), Jim Roberts (Landowner), Malcolm Morris (STROWP) and Sarah Faulkner (National Farmers Union)

LAF-35 CHAIRMAN’S MATTERS

The Chairman gave a brief overview on the work that he had undertaken on the LAF which included:

- Liaising with Andrew Careless directly on Rights of Way Access concerns and actioning them to a positive outcome
- Looking through all Planning Applications and attending at Plans Board to support or object to applications
- Undertaking work to ensure that the Telford Millennium Community had the correct multi-user access following the new build by Taylor Wimpey
- Looking at access to areas such as the new Grazing Cow Public House at Gresham Drive
- Telford and Wrekin’s Cycling Map
- Donkey Field
- Wrekin Trundle
- Traffic Regulation Orders and access concerns
- Diversion and Extinguishment Orders

LAF-36 MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

The Chairman welcomed Paula Doherty as a potential new member of the LAF. Paula Doherty then gave a brief overview of the work that she had undertaken over the last few years.

The Chairman announced that Bob Alton would like to stand down as Vice-Chair at the AGM and the position would then be available. Members were asked to put their names forward. As the Chairman already represented the horse riders/bridleways it was suggested that the Vice-Chair be from the other areas represented ie landowners.

Cllr Arnold England announced that this may be his last LAF meeting due to possible changes within the Cabinet which would be announced at the Council AGM. These changes would take place before the next LAF Meeting. He thanked the LAF for their quality of expertise and contributions to access issues. The Chairman thanked Cllr England for his work bringing all of the agencies together to act as one unit and for taking Rights of Way matters seriously.

LAF-37 WREKIN TRUNDLE UPDATE

Andrew Careless informed the LAF that a meeting had taken place between Michael Barker and Ian Ross from the Council and Peter Whittle from the Huntington Lane Community Liaison Committee regarding the concerns that had been raised. The LAF, as the Applicant for Wrekin Trundle, were asked to address these issues and to determine the next course of action.

Michael Barker gave a report on the meeting that took place. Michael Barker and Peter Whittle had walked over the route from Limekiln Lane to St John's Church on the Dawley Road but focussed on the area of Limekiln Lane to the edge of the surface mining works. There were a number of concerns that needed to be addressed.

At the Wellington end of Limekiln Lane there were pot holes and the suitability was questioned for walking, wheelchairs and horses towards Steeraway Farm. The footpath diversion order had been made by the Council and there were a number of drawbacks compared with the original route:

- Longer/less direct route
- Gradient over the new section at the head of the field

The section of the path near to Shortwood School up to the Dawley Road had primarily urban population use. The diverted route would be more of a diversion for this use. It could be looked at in two different ways:

- A route between 2 points
- Users of the route ie recreational use

Concerns had been raised on the previous un-diverted route through Steeraway Farm due to unrestricted access through the farm during the day and night, security of the farm and premises, health and safety issues. These issues had been resolved following the diversion making the route safer and more secure.

The diverted route crossed a field with a gradient and there was a concern regarding the steepness of the gradient for riders on horseback or wheelchair users, as the route was aimed to maximise potential use.

The Local Highway Authority had not yet put up any signage or formalised the diversion and this needed to be addressed from the point of diversion to the surface mining area. There was also concerns regarding the woodland area and the height of the canopy and branches/bushes at the sides of the route for users on horseback. The Highway Authority also needed to ensure that the appropriate width of the path and the canopy height were acceptable. The surface needed to be suitable for multi-use ie disabled horse riders and wheelchairs. Where the gradient increased Fieldfare had broadly endorsed the principles of the path and it was thought beneficial to have Fieldfare confirm this.

Where the route continued on the steeper gradient near to the previous coal working around the industrial archaeological areas and ancient monument, the mounts were a more difficult surface with uneven stones coming up through the ground surface. The LAF were asked to re-confirm if this still served a function for riders, walkers, disabled riders, and wheelchair users as a multi-use route and what benefits the path could create.

The coal working restoration would restore the area around St John's Church and would more clearly define the route.

The funding allocated from the Huntington Lane Community Fund was to create enhancement to the route and Peter Whittle needed to have assurance that the appropriate standard could be achieved, the distances checked and the cost would come in on budget.

It was asked that the LAF give assurances on:

- Viability
- Accuracy
- The funding could achieve the outcomes of the project

Andrew Careless confirmed that the Highway Authority had responsibility for Limekiln Lane as it was a public right of way and maintainable at the public expense. The pot holes would be repaired on this section of the route, at the access to the Trundle.

The diversion had been undertaken in the same manner as any other footpath diversion. There had been issues regarding Steeraway Farm ie dogs, children, parked cars and health and safety was of concern. The Council had not been able to resolve the problems and it was thought best to divert the route away from Steeraway Farm.

The new diversion was intended to be a leisure route for walkers to use and enjoy and it was not considered to be substantially different type of use of the un-diverted route and was expected to be used by the disabled and horse riders. The new route was more suitable as users would not have to negotiate farm machinery and gates. The access points at the watercourse were acceptable and had been upgraded beyond the required standard. The bridleway canopy and surface was acceptable.

Rights of Way had put aside a budget £20,000 to cover any shortfall within the project and to put in order the work that had not previously been carried out. There would be a further £1,000 set aside for contingency. Up-to-date rates had been sought from the contractors.

The Right of Way was not in a bad state but required tidying up and a reasonable surface. The route had been designed to be 1½ metres in width with a rolled stone track. There would be shuttering lining the route with rest bays and seating at approximately 50-75m intervals depending on the gradient. For use by horses where the track was less than 3

metres the vegetation would be cleared out to a 3 metre width. Stock fencing would be placed on the fields and there would be car parking areas.

Fieldfare had expressed continued interest in the future management and PR. This would contribute to the Millennium Miles and access in the open countryside for all users.

It may not be fully accessible from A-B for wheelchair users, but it was envisaged that as much of the route as possible would be available to the widest range of users. What might be suitable for one may not be suitable for another.

A discussion took place including:

- Route being ridden for many years
- Encroachment of Steeraway Pond on the un-diverted path
- Diverted route was considered to be a safer route than the un-diverted route through Steeraway Farm
- Diversion being longer but less steep
- Coal Board paths would be set at 3 metres and mounds flattened
- Project had been fully funded
- Important route for disabled/wheelchair users – do not necessarily need to access whole route
- Bringing together of the community to help each other out whilst using route
- The introduction of tapping rail/shuttering for partially sighted/blind users

Following the discussion it was suggested that the report was updated to include the different levels of disability and the sensory aspect that could be gained from the route. Everyone could get something from the route and this needed to be clear in the report.

Thanks was passed to Cllr Tracy Hope for all of her hard work during the last 15-18 months on the project.

A vote was taken by the members, which was fully supported, on the continuation of the project which was wholly achievable and fully funded.

AGREED – that a report be given to the Huntington Lane Community Fund Committee that the LAF fully support the project which would be wholly achievable and fully funded.

LAF-38 REVIEW OF DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDER APPLICATIONS – AREAS TO TACKLE

This item was deferred to the next meeting of the LAF.

LAF-39 RIGHTS OF WAY CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME DISCUSSION – BUDGET / EXTRA OFFICER

Andrew Careless gave a verbal update.

Jaswant Sidhu no longer worked for the Council as he had taken voluntary redundancy. The post of Rights of Way Officer had now gone. A new lower grade post would be introduced and it was hoped to appoint a member of staff who could deal with the general day-to-day issues ie pot holes/clearing etc. It was hoped that a new officer would be in place by the next LAF meeting but if this was not possible an update on the progress would be given.

Funding streams had been sourced for a Legal Officer to undertake the backlog of modification orders and other rights of way matters. The post would be dedicated to Highways and Rights of Way. The officer would be legally trained and employed on a 2 year fixed term contract.

LAF-40 VOLUNTEER GROUPS UPDATE

Marion Law gave a brief report on the Volunteer Group on behalf of Bob Alton.

The maintenance work party had now started work. There were 13 volunteers registered with the Council. Not all volunteers were able to get out at any one time so it was not possible to organise a regular work day. It was decided that the volunteers would operate on different days of the week to give as many of the volunteers as possible the opportunity to participate and respond to the problems as when they occurred or were reported. The volunteers would also endeavour to keep a watching brief on rights of way that had previously been worked on. The Council had met all of the requirements ie insurance, tools, equipment, advice.

To date the volunteers had cleared two sections of overgrowth on two rights of way. An overhanging hedge and brambles had been trimmed back on a section of footpath bordering Wrekin golf course and similar work undertaken on a footpath at Lawley Furnaces.

Bad weather had impeded progress but it was hoped to continue the good work. It was currently proving difficult to maintain the momentum. Once an area had been identified on a right of way where work could be undertaken there needed to be a speedy response from the Council to contact the landowner and get a reply in order that work could proceed. The current line of communication could be improved.

A discussion took place regarding access to land that did not belong to the Council. The Council did not hold records of Land Owners these would not always be registered at the Land Registry. The Council only had powers to enter onto land in an emergency or after 28 days notice had been served on a landowner.

It was suggested that the LAF set up a database of landowners and could then pass the details on to the Right of Way Officer if an area needed any work. It was further suggested that a Map be produced outlining the ownership of the land. The LAF may be able to work with Parish Council in order to pool their knowledge. A task force would be set up to work on this project.

AGREED: that a task force be set up in order to create the database and map of landowners.

LAF-41 LAF ANNUAL CONFERENCE – REPORT FROM JAN MEES-ROBINSON

Jan Mees-Robinson gave a report on the LAF Annual Conference which she had attended on behalf of Anthony Francis-Jones.

The report could be found at Appendix 1 to these Minutes.

Full reports from Natural England could be downloaded from the website and the Democratic Services Support Officer would circulate the link to the website to all members of the LAF.

LAF-42 DONKEY FIELD UPDATE

The Chairman reported that he had submitted an application for funding for the Donkey Field Project to the Huntington Lane Community Fund. The application had been unsuccessful in

securing funding as there had been more applications received by the Committee than the money available. There had been some inaccuracies in the Community Fund Committee's perception of the project as it believed it to be a commercial project.

The project had now been fully drawn up and had landowner permissions. Full Planning Consent had also been given. Further funding would be sought in order for the project to continue.

A discussion took place regarding the recent promotion of the Wrekin and surrounding area in the Shropshire Star and the issues around parking, toilet facilities and catering.

LAF-43 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Route 55

The Lease terminated on the 1st January 2013 and the land from the A41 to the bridge had been pegged out ready for the contractors. This was part of a bigger project which should be complete by 2015. The area was only a small section of the route and it was envisaged that this would take approximately 6 weeks to complete once the contractors had a start date. The Rights of Way Officer would need to negotiate with the landowner to allow infrequent access to the area for repairs or remedial maintenance. It was hoped that this area of work would be completed by the end of the summer.

Coalmining Site

An open meeting regarding the Coalmining Site was due to be held on Tuesday 30th April at Little Wenlock Village Hall at 7.00pm

Wellington Walking Festival

Bob Coalbran had a display board at the LAF Meeting showing the promotional postcards and leaflets on the Wellington Walking Festival.

Members of the LAF were asked to take some of the leaflets/postcards away with them and give them out to promote the event.

Fly-tipping in Lawley

It was reported to the meeting that the Fly-tipping in Lawley had still not been cleared away. The Rights of Way Officer apologised to the LAF that this had not been undertaken, despite his best efforts, and that he would again chase this up as it was the Council's responsibility.

LAF-44 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the LAF was to be held on 3 July 2013. The meeting would be held at Wrekin College, but in a different Conference Room. Details would follow once they were available.

The Meeting ended at 3.26pm