

TELFORD AND WREKIN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 8th October 2014 at 1.30pm
at The Memorial Hall, Wrekin College, Sutherland Road, Wellington, Telford**

PRESENT:

Bob Alton (Rambler), Bob Coalbran (Wellington Walkers are Welcome), Anthony Francis Jones (Telford Bridleways Association), Marion Law (Ramblers Association), Malcolm Morris (STROWP), Janet Mees-Robinson (British Carriage Drivers Association), Jim Roberts (Landowner) and Fiona Smith (Disability)

ALSO PRESENT: Andrew Careless (Senior Rights of Way Officer), Jayne Clarke (Democratic Services Support Officer), Ann Sharkey (Legal Assistant, Telford & Wrekin Council) and Marc Petty (Wellington LA21 Group)

LAF-13 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Local Access Forum held on 9 July 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

LAF-14 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Page 4 of the Minutes dated 9th July 2014, LAF-9, referred to Parish Paths Partnership (P3) – As no agenda item had been raised for discussion, this would be dealt with under Any Other Urgent Business.

LAF-15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Liz Clare (Telford & Wrekin Council), Paula Doherty (Rights of Way Projects), Sarah Faulkner (NFU), Cllr T Hope, Peter Holt (Landowner) and Cadi Price (Severn Gorge Countryside Trust).

LAF-16 CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS

The Chair reported on a number of issues:-

Liaison - The Chair continued to meet regularly with the Senior Rights of Way Officer who kept him fully briefed on matters.

Planning Applications - The Chair continued to make comments on Planning Applications via the e-Planning system. He had now looked at 800+ planning applications. The following applications were highlighted:

- Apley Farm
- Muxton Grange
- Waters Upton – lots of discussion had taken place on this application
- Newdale – J6 to all of the work on the other side of the Railway line to Pink Skips and the sports field
- Maxell Site – Green Space with Right of Way around the periphery. Public access needed through the site, with a minimum of bridleway, which would also allow for use by cyclists.

- Grazing Cow – this was still not complete. The horse enabled road crossing at West Centre Way needed reinstating

UK Coal Restoration site – The Chair reported that from an aerial view that the area now looked pretty green from the pictures that had been taken.

Information had been received from Dave Coxill, Telford & Wrekin Council, following a meeting he had held with Craig Ball from UK Coal, regarding the state of restoration of the Huntington Lane site.

The restoration of the site was substantially complete with topographical profiles in place, together with seeding and grazing although this had not yet been signed off. The rights of way had mainly been laid down with hardcore (except for the section going through the SAM within New Works Wood). The entrance to the rights of way at Huntington Lane and New Works Lane had been fenced off. The new car park at New Works Lane had been blocked off by boulders. A hard core surface had now been laid but there was black plastic cloth within the hardcore which had not been completely removed. Mr Coxill was in discussion with UK Coal regarding the soiling of the site as well as the right of way through the SAM. The discussion regarding the SAM would also include English Heritage. The public were able to gain access to the site but the rights of way were not currently open to the public. The restoration needed to be completed before the rights of way were opened completely. Once the rights of way were opened up the 5 Year Aftercare Period would then begin.

The Senior Rights of Way officer agreed with Mr Coxill that the rights of way were not yet open and this would not take place until the site restoration had been completed properly and signed off. No limitations had been installed.

J Roberts informed the LAF that people were using the site and were having to climb over the fences. He was not happy with the restoration and several meetings had taken place. From the farming side it was awful due to the rocks not being moved, together with metal work and barbed wire sticking up. A temporary fence had been installed along New Works Form for approximately 300m. This fence had been cut half way along between each post. A digger had been found with barbed wire around it. Mr Roberts said that he would contact the Shropshire Star to highlight these issues to see if they could find out who was carrying out these acts. There were still a lot of issues to be put right. Soil had been put down last year but this could not be sown due to the wet weather. Due to the very wet winter the soil had washed away. This needed to be replaced but it was an ongoing battle to ensure this happened and he did not know how soon. The placement of fencing and gates was also an issue. Electric fences had now been installed, set back off the footpaths. Sheep were currently grazing the fields but there had been incidents with dogs and Mr Roberts had been notified prior to the meeting that one of the sheep had injuries.

The Chair agreed that the work needed to be finished to satisfaction and the Rights of Way reinstated. Peter Whittle had been in touch with the Chair regarding the cuts in the fence and he had been informed that deer had got their antlers caught in the wire. It was hoped that the 5 year plan would begin sooner rather than later as the public would see this field as a brown field site.

Janet Mees-Robinson enquired if there was a completion date for the remedial works. This was a legal footpath on which notice had been served to allow 4 wheeled carriages to drive along Hatch Lane. Liaison had taken place with the Council for the footpath to be suitable for horses but not the intention for the posts to be removed for quad bikes and other vehicles

to gain access. The footpath had been moved away from the farmyard but the map that had been received from the Council was wrong. The work had still not begun.

Members of the LAF asked for an update on why the Steeraway Farm Diversion had not yet started and if a new Diversion Order would be required and the process to start again from scratch. A further question was raised regarding the differences between the two orders.

J Roberts commented that on the map the footpath had been shown going across the top of the field and not through the wood. If the path was to go through the wood then fencing would not be required. The path should follow a straight line from Steeraway Farm to the Wood and then diagonally through the Wood to join the old track. Mr Roberts further commented that it had now been some 2½ years and no work on the path had taken place.

B Coalbran asked if following such a long delay if the LAF could write in strong terms asking for this matter to be resolved as soon as possible.

The Senior Rights of Way Officer informed the LAF that the Diversion Order could run concurrently. Agreement was still required from Terry Beanland in order to take up the work on the land and the price needed to be agreed. Details with regards to the gates also needed to be agreed. There would be potential for objections if a new Diversion Order was to be made, but this was a risk that the Senior Rights of Way Officer would be prepared to take in order to move the matter forward.

J Mees-Robinson commented on the rocks that were in Hatch Lane. This right of way needed to be fully open as this was a point of law. There needed to be a Kent Carriage Gap which would allow for a cart but not a quad bike to access the land. She further commented that people should not be stopped going up the lane.

Trundle – There was nothing further to report on the Trundle.

Donkey Field – The Chair informed the LAF that the Planning Application was still valid. This was still considered to be the best solution for the road and parking problems. Repairs to the carriageway and double yellow lines were now in place. A bid for funding had been submitted. Peter Holt was still fully supportive of the project.

Edgmond Diversion Orders – The Senior Rights of Way Officer had met with the three land owners and had agreed the route descriptions and proposed alterations to Paula's plans. The aim was to publish the outstanding orders all in one go. It was hoped to set up a meeting in Edgmond Parish Hall and that this would be well advertised locally for people to come and speak to the officers in order that they could allay any fears locally. There would be 10-15 orders being published concurrently.

Ironbridge – Concerns were raised over the access to the Ironbridge directly outside the front door of the Toll House. The gate was permanently closed which left a small gap of less than the width of two people and there was no ramp which made it very difficult for people, especially the disabled to access the Ironbridge. It was suggested that these concerns were raised with the Ironbridge Gorge Strategy Group.

Huddle – Consultation had taken place and it was raised that advice for dog walkers needed to be re-iterated. A document had been written which put down in black and white the advice for dog walkers using the Huddle.

Raby Estates – The Chair was keeping a close eye on the effect that the logging will have on the rights of way. As this was a working forest the LAF were unable to comment on agricultural land issues.

Town Park – The Chair had undertaken a photo session on horseback following a complaint regarding a horse step-out which took riders straight out onto a public road. Following discussions with the Town Park Management it had been agreed that this would be taken back off the public road.

The Chair reported that Geoff Shinner, Sustrans Ranger, would unfortunately not be able to attend at LAF meetings due to work commitments.

Thanks was given to the Council's Cabinet Members, Cllr E Clare and Cllr C Smith, for presenting their report on the dedication of the bridleways and the footpaths at the recent Cabinet Meeting. These orders would now be signed off and completed. A question was raised regarding the status of the Cockshutt and the Town Park. A Sharkey informed the LAF that there were 60 individual paths involved on the maps, particularly in the Cockshutt and work was currently being undertaken to draft the maps. M Morris raised a question as to whether the Council would delegate authority to Ian Ross in Legal Services, together with the Senior Rights of Way Officer, to make the Orders as necessary. A Sharkey informed the LAF that the Council's Constitution would be amended at the earliest opportunity for Highways to make the Orders. The Chair commented that this process would massively increase the network and would chip away at the remaining DMMOs.

A letter of thanks had been sent to the Managing Director of the Council, Richard Partington, for all of the hard work that had gone into the dedication of the rights of way. The Managing Director had passed on this letter of thanks to all of the staff concerned, who had, in turn, replied to the Chair.

Dothill Local Nature Reserve - Tee Lake, near to Dothill Primary School in Wellington, part of the Silkin Way to Bratton, was a proposed Local Nature Reserve (LNR). If this was to be approved it would stop any future development of the land which was a large green space that ran through to the Charlton School and to the Railway Line. J Mees-Robinson suggested that the LAF vote to send a letter of support to the applicants for the LNR. The Chair believed that the application had already been submitted and would be going through. M Petty explained that he believed that this application had been ongoing for some years and that the paperwork took a long time. There were conflicting views as to whether the LNR had been agreed or not. M Morris informed the LAF that there were further LNR applications in Stirchley and Madeley and they were currently mapping the boundaries on these areas. There were also proposals for LNRs for Rough Park and The Beeches at Ironbridge and a push on protecting green space within South Telford. M Morris reported that there was also a plan to broaden the rights of way at the Pit Mound. It was agreed that the Chair would write a letter of support for the Dothill LNR.

Little Wenlock Parish Council (LWPC) – Quiet Lanes – The Chair had written a letter of support to LWPC in support of their Quiet Lanes application.

De-Regulation Bill – The Chair informed the LAF that the Bill was still in draft form and as it stood gates could be erected on restricted byways. There was still a long way to go at present. The Senior Rights of Way Officer commented that the LAF needed to be careful with de-regulation, that although it was sold as more efficient and a fight against bureaucracy and stopped political pressure interfering with due process it was not necessarily a good

thing. New restrictions could be put up or authorised on new restricted byways but not on historical restricted byways.

Natural England – LAF Engagement Plan – The Chair had enquired what role the LAF could play and how they could engage with Natural England. Invitations to attend at the LAF meetings had been extended to Natural England.

LAF-17 MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

The Chair was making enquiries for a cyclist to attend the LAF following the resignation from Reg Potter (BUGS). The Chair would continue to support cyclists through bridleways which gave legal rights to cyclists.

LAF-18 LA21 PRESENTATION

The Chair introduced Marc Petty from LA21.

M Petty informed the LAF that he was a Project Officer for Wellington Local Agenda Group which supported Wellington and the work around the Wrekin for cyclists/walkers. The Group's main goals had been producing booklets containing information on Wellington and its historic and natural areas. A pot of money had been secured from the Lottery Fund and information regarding on road cycling only and OS Map walking had been produced. This had been in partnership with Shropshire AONB.

Other work WLA21 had been involved with was sustainable transport. 9.5 out of 10 journeys to the Wrekin were made by car. This put great pressure on access particularly in the Forest Glen Area.

“Explore the Wrekin” was a new project and LA21 were working with funding bodies in order to secure further funding.

Three booklets had been produced:

The Five Towns Wrekin Trail – this was produced to promote the green network. This would now be replaced by the “Green Infrastructure”. This linked up 5 Towns with the Wrekin and gave details of the Towns themselves together with habitats and a map of the route.

The Wild Wrekin Trail – this booklet explored the farms, quarries and woodland by bicycle.

Walk Around the Wrekin – this was a designated guide around the Wrekin Forest from Dothill in the North to The River Severn and Ironbridge in the South. It gave details of the habitat and the fully designated footpaths.

All three of these booklets were available on the LA21 website.

It was hoped in the future to create a designated Wrekin Portal – a virtual tour which would give details of the more iconic flora and fauna and become a one-stop-shop for the Wrekin.

M Petty hoped that his visit had raised awareness of the Strategic Group as they were currently trying to grow the public side of the image.

The group worked with Wellington Walkers are Welcome on some of the projects.

The three booklets were made available for members of the LAF to take away.

The Chair thanked Mr Petty for his presentation and commented that he had been “blown away” with his enthusiasm and the booklets were a fantastic read.

LAF-19 RIGHTS OF WAY – TELFORD AND WREKIN COUNCIL UPDATE – PROJECTS

The Senior Rights of Way Officer informed the LAF that the two LSTF Projects would be finished in 2015 and had kept them busy. A lot of work had been undertaken on the route which now stretched between Staffordshire and Priorslee.

LAF-20 REVIEW OF DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDER APPLICATIONS

A Sharkey informed the LAF that there were currently 69 DMMOs on the list although there were some duplicated applications.

With regard to the short length of path at Sylvan Close A Sharkey was reviewing the huge file of evidence.

J Mees-Robinson asked if any rights of way were being looked at in the Wellington area ie white roads. A discussion took place around white roads and the Senior Rights of Way Officer informed the LAF that if the land/white road was not classed as highway then there was no due legal process that highways could use to dedicate the land. If a track led to 3 or 4 houses it was an issue for the owners to get the rights to maintain the track.

The Chair asked if there were any plans to dedicate the land within Apley Woods. A Sharkey confirmed that the list would be looked at in order and there were no plans to deviate away from the list. The Senior Rights of Way Officer indicated to the LAF that there was currently no delegated authority for the highway officers to look at this. This would be a public easement on land owned by Estates and Investments and that highways would have to ask the Council to dedicate the rights of way over their land. A Sharkey commented that this would be an easier process now as the process had been seen by Members and it was now understood.

LAF-21 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair thanked Bob Alton and Bob Coalbran for the clearance work that had been undertaken by their volunteer groups.

As the Chair had previously mentioned, the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) had been raised at the last meeting for discussion.

B Coalbran thought that there was a strong case to have this system within the Borough which was more in line with P3 groups in other areas. Support for the network was needed. J Mees-Robinson reported that the Parishes paid money into Rights of Ways. M Morris confirmed that STROWP had been involved with this since 1998 maintaining rights of way in South Telford. STROWP had a Project Officer who organised groups from community payback, skills groups and the green gym to cut back growth, re-build steps on an ad hoc basis.

The Senior Rights of Way Officer explained that Parish Councils have a right to maintain the routes and had specific powers. M Morris commented that they had formalised their group for insurance purposes and it had been running for a number of years. The P3 seemed to be more structured, it used volunteers in order to make a difference to the character of the area. There had originally been 5 Parish Councils in South Telford that took part in STROWP, but this had now diminished to just Stirchley and Madeley. The Senior Rights of Way Officer explained that the levels of rights of way work varied from parish to parish, some parishes had very few rights of way and others had a lot more. It was probable that 70% of issues were clearance issues and the vast majority urban clearance. Three quarters of the rights of way in Edgmond needed regular clearance which caused difficulties with a limited pot of money. With regard to priorities and re-occurring issues the vast majority of these could be undertaken by Public Realm. It had been decided that from April 2015 the vast majority of clearance work would be undertaken by the Public Realm Team all other rights of way issues would continue to come to the Senior Rights of Way Officer. Public Realm had dedicated officers on the ground who could deal with issues much quicker.

B Coalbran highlighted a growing strategic issue which needed urgent clearance. The Wrekin Link and Shropshire Way to Silkin Way were very overgrown and needed urgent work. They were totally blocked and this connection needed to be accessible as this was a route that would bring people into the Borough. The Senior Rights of Way Officer commented that he was looking to see if there were any pots of money that may come forward before April. There was a lot of pressure on resources and not all of the work would get done. Council budgets were likely to continue to shrink over the next 5 years. B Alton asked if the Borough would be able to clear the Wrekin Link, as it was currently too big a job for the volunteers. Once it was cleared then the volunteers would be able to keep an eye on it and keep the route clear. He also asked if there would be a direct line of communication with the Public Realm Team. A good line of communication was required for the volunteers in order to help them identify areas of clearance that could be undertaken.

The Chair suggested that a report be brought back to the April 2015 meeting which processes and communication information could be confirmed.

Bob Alton informed the LAF that Walking for Health had now had all volunteers back in place and all walks were now reinstated.

LAF-10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and reminded the LAF that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 7th January 2015 at The Studio, Wrekin College at 1.00pm for 1.30pm start.

The meeting ended at 3.32pm

Chair:

Dated: