

TELFORD AND WREKIN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 8th July 2015 at 1.30pm
at The Studio, Graham Building, Wrekin College, Sutherland Road, Wellington, Telford**

PRESENT:

Cllr Liz Clare (Telford & Wrekin Council), Bob Coalbran (Wellington Walkers are Welcome), Paula Doherty (Rights of Way Projects), Anthony Francis-Jones (Telford Bridleways Association), Peter Holt (Landowner), Marion Law (Ramblers Association), Janet Mees-Robinson (British Carriage Drivers Association), Malcolm Morris (STROWP), Cadi Price (Severn Gorge Countryside Trust) and Fiona Smith (Disability)

ALSO PRESENT: Jane Bonner (Wellington Cycle Club), Gill Steed (Ramblers Association), Andrew Careless (Senior Rights of Way Officer, TWC), Phil Smith (Democratic Services Team Leader, TWC).

LAF-1 ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED – that Anthony Francis-Jones be elected Chair of the Local Access Forum for 2015/16.

LAF-2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED – that Fiona Smith be elected Vice-Chair of the Local Access Forum for 2015/16.

LAF-3 MINUTES

The LAF considered the minutes of the meeting held on 15th April 2015. The following amendments were suggested:

- **LAF 38** – Ironbridge Toll House Access – delete words “step over” and replace with words “gate width”;
- **LAF 38** – UK Coal Site, New Works – delete the words “deeply embedded” in the second paragraph; and correct the name “Dave Ball” to “Craig Ball” in the fifth paragraph;
- **LAF 38** – Leighton Lane – delete the words “to motorised vehicles” in the first paragraph;
- **LAF 40** – Buckatree – delete the words “Severn Gorge Countryside Trust” and replace with “Shropshire Wildlife Trust”;
- **LAF 42** – Volunteer Path Clearance Groups – delete the words “routes were” in the first paragraph and replace with “Wrekin Link was”; the third paragraph to be reworded to say “Bob Coalbran explained that once the issue of the stile was resolved, there would be a good walking connection from the Silkin Way to the new route of the Shropshire Way at Sunnylands”; the first sentence of the sixth paragraph to be reworded to say “Bob Coalbran suggested that the next project would be to clear the footpath alongside Granville Road linking the ASDA roundabout to the Country Park”;

- **LAF 43** – Local Nature Reserve Applications – delete the words “Stirchley Park and Stirchley Pit Mound” and replace with “Madbrook Pools, Stirchley Dingle and Madeley Pit Mounds”

RESOLVED – that once the amendments detailed above have been made, the Chair be authorised to confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 15th April 2015.

LAF-4 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Bob Alton (Ramblers Association), Jim Roberts (Landowner) and Ann Sharkey (Legal Assistant, TWC).

LAF-5 CHAIRMAN’S MATTERS

The Chair continued to liaise with the Senior Rights of Way Officer and act as a general ‘clearing house’ for issues raised by LAF Members and the public.

The Chair reported on a number of issues/projects:-

Planning Applications

The Chair advised that the main issue recently had been proposed developments that would be built over footpaths. Janet Mees-Robinson asked a number of questions about which planning applications were looked at, and whether enough was being done to retain footpaths under threat of development. The Senior Rights of Way Officer explained that he was notified by Development Control wherever rights of way would be affected by a planning application. Any action to protect rights of way depended on the type and size of development, but a key principle was to ensure that the rights of way network was not compromised and that connectivity was retained – even if this was achieved by a diversion.

Janet Mees-Robinson also asked about the renewal of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, and whether the LAF would be consulted. The Senior Rights of Way Officer stated that the initial Plan was aspirational, and that any new Plan would need to reflect the current resource situation and what was achievable. The work involved was considerable, and one option was to ask colleagues in Highways to link it to the Borough’s Transport Plan. There would be consultation on any review of the Plan, and the views of the LAF would be sought. Malcolm Morris expressed the view that there needed to be monitoring of the Plan to see that it was meeting its objectives.

ACTION – AC to check that the Improvement Plan was available to view online, and to circulate the link to LAF members.

Ironbridge Toll House Access

The Chair raised concerns about the narrow access point onto the Iron Bridge from the south side of the river by the Toll House. Although a wheelchair could get through, at busy times there was often congestion due to the numbers of people using the access point. He had asked why the main gate onto the bridge could not be opened, and the response was that it needed to be kept closed to prevent vehicles driving onto the bridge. A discussion ensued, and it was suggested that if bollards were placed across the roadway nearer to the car park to prevent vehicle access, the gate could be opened to improve pedestrian/wheelchair access onto the bridge.

ACTION – MM to raise this matter at the next meeting of the World Heritage Site Strategy Group.

Fly Tipping Contact

The Chair advised that the 'Everyday Telford' app (via a smart phone) was a very useful way of reporting to the Council any incidences of fly-tipping on rights of way. So far, the response from the Council in reacting to the reports and taking action to clear the rights of way had been very good.

Greenways, Ketley

The Chair reported on an ongoing issue about access to a bridleway being blocked by parked trucks adjacent to the Greenways recycling site. He had written to a number of agencies about the problem, but had not yet been able to get any positive solution. The Senior Rights of Way Officer advised that the vehicles were on the adopted highway and so the Council would be unable to serve a Notice for blocking a right of way. However, he would raise the issue with the Highways department.

ACTION – AC to raise this issue with the Council Highways team to see if there is any action they can take to resolve the problem.

It was suggested that the Parish Council be contacted to find out if they are taking any action on this. Depending on the response, it might then be necessary to contact the owners of the recycling site.

ACTION – AF-J to write to Ketley Parish Council

UK Coal Site

Further to the discussion on this at the last meeting, the Chair reported that he had been told the £12,000 received from UK Coal was for expenditure on rights of way adjoining the site. The Senior Rights of Way Officer added that he had earmarked this money towards work in the Steeraway area, but that nothing could be done until the site had been formally signed off and handed over by UK Coal. The Chair added that UK Coal representatives were due to be visiting the site on 27 July to look at any outstanding issues before handover, and Jim Roberts would be keeping an eye on this.

Concerns were expressed at the continued closure of the Hutchison Way with no clear indication of when it might re-open to the public. The Chair and Cllr Clare reported that they had been raising this matter.

Path Clearance Groups Update

Marion Law reported that in Bob Alton's absence, there had not been any Ramblers Association path clearance work recently. Bob Coalbran stated that there were some RA members who were part of the Wellington Walkers group, and had taken part in their projects. Any others were more than welcome.

Bob Coalbran reported on the work that had been carried out in clearing the footpath alongside Granville Road, and with other specific clearance work – eg at the entrance to Ercall Wood. Currently, there were two sessions per month, and there was plenty to do.

Cllr Liz Clare reported that Donnington Youth Group had recently done some path clearance in their area.

Malcolm Morris referred to the 'Community Payback' scheme operated by the Probation Service in conjunction with the Council's Environmental Maintenance service, and whether that could be used for any path clearance projects.

ACTION – MM to find a contact for the Community Payback scheme

RAF Shawbury

The Chair reported that RAF Shawbury was kindly funding hi-vis jackets and other equipment for horseriders. He had been given about 60 sets of jackets etc. and was looking to distribute them to riders and walkers locally. Thanks were expressed to RAF Shawbury for this donation.

LAF-6 MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Further to the discussion at the last meeting regarding representation of cyclists on the LAF, the Chair welcomed Jane Bonner from Wellington Cycling Club to the meeting. Jane was attending this meeting as an observer, but it was hoped that she would formally join the Forum at the next meeting.

Jane Bonner gave a brief account of her role in the Cycling Club and on the Shropshire CTC Group.

LAF-7 CURRENT PROJECTS - REVIEW

The Senior Rights of Way Officer reported that he had mainly been progressing the LSDF projects. The funding for these closed on 31 March 2015. There were no other significant improvement projects in the pipeline, but he was working with other Council budget holders on general maintenance of the rights of way network and in responding to complaints about the network.

The Senior Rights of Way Officer added that looking forward the most important task was to produce a new Definitive Map of Rights of Way. He outlined the work that would need to be undertaken to achieve this, and that the aim would be to create a digital map which would be relatively easy to keep updated. He was proposing to make a business case for the resources that would be required to do the work, and it was hoped to get additional support from Legal Services.

LAF members were strongly supportive of the proposal for an updated Definitive Map, and that it was vital that this new baseline was established. It was also pointed out that a more up-to-date document would help to protect the Council legally and reduce the risk of any challenges.

AGREED – that the application for a business case for the production of an updated Definitive Map be strongly supported, and that Cllr Clare be involved in promoting this within the Council.

LAF-8 REVIEW OF DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDER APPLICATIONS

Unfortunately, Ann Sharkey was on sick leave and unable to provide an update. The Chair stated that he believed things were moving forward, and that he might get in touch with Ann when she was back in work to check on progress.

LAF-9 BIG PATHWATCH PROJECT

Marion Law provided further details of this Ramblers Association (RA) initiative. The idea was to walk a representative selection of 1km squares over the whole country during the second half of 2015 in order to map the status and condition of rights of way. The squares had been chosen randomly, and there were 157 covering (or part covering) the Telford & Wrekin area. Participants could register on line to undertake a survey of one or more squares. There would be an i-phone “app” available to record the results, or they could be inputted via a conventional computer. The results would be fed back to the Local Authority, and a picture of the whole country would be put together by Ramblers at the end of the project. It was hoped that some members of the LAF would take part, and would also encourage other members of the public to get involved.

Cadi Price asked what assistance would be provided to those volunteers taking part? Marion Law advised that all the information would be available on the RA website following the official launch on 13 July 2015.

ACTION – ML to send further information/links to the Forum Administrator to circulate to LAF members.

The Senior Rights of Way Officer was in agreement with the suggestion that his e-mail address be used for people to send their results to, although some concern was expressed at the amount of additional information/work this might generate on top of his normal workload.

LAF-10 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Publications

Bob Coalbran reported on three leaflets that had recently been published:

- Wellington Walking Festival – to promote the programme for this year’s Festival running from 14 to 20 September;
- Shropshire Way Route 16 guide – Ironbridge to The Wrekin
- Shropshire Way Route 17 guide – The Wrekin to Haughmond Hill

Council Website

Further to the comments at the last meeting, Paula Doherty reported that she had discussed with the Senior Rights of Way Officer about the need for getting the information on rights of way more up-to-date and joined up with other information. She had looked at the website again earlier that day, and while there had been some changes, there were still issues with some of the links and with the search facility. Generally it seemed very difficult to find anything on the Council’s website. There was now a link to the LAF page, but this did not have up-to-date information on meetings etc. In terms of the use of the website for reporting issues about rights of way, it was felt that the Council’s customer contact centre was not always accurately recording the information received, and this often made it difficult for the Rights of Way team to identify exactly where problems were occurring. It was suggested that one solution might be to add Rights of Way to the ‘Everyday Telford’ smartphone app so that people could report things directly.

ACTION – PD to prepare a letter to the Council’s Assistant Director: Neighbourhood & Customer Services raising the concerns of the LAF about the Council website and the recording of information submitted. (NB: the Chair to sign and send the letter on behalf of the LAF).

Benthall Lime Trail

Cadi Price reported that a surfaced path and boardwalk had now been completed.

LAF-11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and reminded the LAF that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 14th October 2015 at The Studio, Graham Building, Wrekin College at 1.00pm for 1.30pm start.

The meeting ended at 4.00pm

Chair:

Date: