

**SOUTH LINCOLNSHIRE AND RUTLAND
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM
7 JULY 2010****PRESENT:**Members

Councillor D Brailsford, Mr I Cox, Mr W Cross, Councillor P Golden, Miss R Harris, Mr G Law, Mr B Montgomery, Mrs A Morley, Mr C Smith, Mr J Williams and Mrs V Woolmer.

Officers

Stuart Crook (Public Rights of Way Officer, Rutland County Council), Andrew Savage (Senior Countryside Access Officer, Lincolnshire County Council) and Graham Watts (Democratic Services Officer, Lincolnshire County Council).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

AGREED

That Mr B Montgomery be elected as Chairman of the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum for 2010/2011.

MR B MONTGOMERY IN THE CHAIR2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

AGREED

That Mr J Williams be elected as Chairman of the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum for 2010/2011.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Chris Miller (Principal Countryside and Access Officer, Lincolnshire County Council).

It was reported that Mrs J Lucas had recently resigned from the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum, due to work commitments. Members wished Mrs Lucas well in her future endeavours and thanked her for the valuable contribution she had made towards the work of the Forum.

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4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 14 APRIL 2010

AGREED

That the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 April 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

5. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

No announcements were made by the Chairman.

6. EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL LOCAL ACCESS FORUM CHAIRMAN'S MEETING

The Chairman reported that he attended the last meeting of the East Midlands Regional Local Access Forum Chairman's meeting, held on 8 June 2010. The main issues discussed at the meeting were noted, as follows: -

- Definitive Map Modification Orders;
- a new long distance trail proposed for the National Forest;
- budget reduction of 15% to the People and Access section;
- the remaining availability of a budget of £7,000 to support Local Access Forums in the region;
- Ministerial commitment to the Marine and Coastal Access Act.

AGREED

That the update be noted and the Minutes of the meeting on 8 June 2010 be circulated to all Members of this Forum.

7. SEWSTERN LANE – UPDATE

Lincolnshire County Council's Senior Countryside Access Officer provided the Forum with an update on Sewstern Lane, following discussion on this issue at the last meeting of the Forum.

It was reported that the works undertaken were already creating benefits and the site was being rejuvenated as a result.

In closing, it was suggested that a site visit to Sewstern Lane could be held in the autumn to give Members the opportunity to see the difference that had been made.

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AGREED

That the update be noted.

8. JOINT LOCAL ACCESS FORUM ANNUAL REPORT

The Senior Countryside Access Officer from Lincolnshire County Council provided Members with a report on the joint Local Access Forum annual report for 2009/2010. A copy of the annual report was circulated for consideration.

It was reported that, as with previous years, the Mid-Lincolnshire Local Access Forum and the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum had agreed to write a joint report on its activities over the 2009/2010 period. The report included information on the following: -

- changes in membership and appointments;
- review of Forum meetings and actions taken;
- publicity;
- training;
- establishment of Sub-Groups;
- expenditure of each Local Access Forum.

AGREED

That the joint Local Access Forum annual report for 2009/2010 be endorsed by this Forum.

9. DEPARTMENT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS – HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP ACCESS

Mr C Smith introduced this item following a presentation the Forum received approximately a year ago on the organisation of Higher Level Stewardship schemes by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

In terms of permissive paths that had been made available through being part of the Higher Level Stewardship scheme, it was reported that these paths had to be maintained to a similar standard to that of the County Council's paths so that they could be used by the public. An example was given whereby a Member had used a path that was not up to a suitable standard and having reported the issue the necessary maintenance work was undertaken, resulting in the permissive path being usable.

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Members agreed that this was encouraging to hear and that more permissive paths should be used in the county on the basis that they should be accessible, and if not something could be done to ensure that they were accessible. It was reported that there were 183 permissive paths across Lincolnshire and these had been included on the online Rights of Way maps by the County Council. It was suggested that the Forum could assist in promoting the use of these permissive paths.

In closing, Members suggested incorporating the site visit to Sewstern Lane, as outlined in minute number seven above, with a visit to a permissive path so that Members could see the comparison between permissive paths and usual Rights of Way.

10. COASTAL COUNTRY PARK

Lincolnshire County Council's Senior Countryside Access Officer provided the Local Access Forum with an update on the creation of a dynamic and extensive Coastal County Park located between Sandilands and Chapel St Leonards on the Lincolnshire Coast, which it was anticipated would provide high quality facilities for people in terms of access to the coast and better protection for wildlife.

Although the Coastal Country Park was being developed in the boundary of the Mid-Lincolnshire Local Access Forum, the Park was still of interest to this Forum as it aimed to increase the Rights of Way network in Lincolnshire. To achieve this, and following the previous agenda item, it was noted that the Council would be looking to use more permissive paths through the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Higher Level Stewardship scheme.

AGREED

That the update be noted.

11. LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RUTLAND COUNTY COUNCIL - RIGHTS OF WAY BUDGETS

The following updates were provided by officers on their respective Council's budgets in relation to Rights of Way, following the recently announced national cuts in public sector budgets: -

i) Rutland County Council

The revenue budget for Rights of Way was set at £103,200. In terms of capital, two budgets had been set for use on Rights of Way capital works and projects as follows: -

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- Rights of Way capital - £25,000;
- 'Local Access Forum' budget - £24,700 (despite being called the Local Access Forum budget it was emphasised that this was not solely for the Local Access Forum and supported the expenses incurred by the Rights of Way section that could not be considered as maintenance).

It was highlighted, however, that these figures were likely to change as a result of consideration by the Council on its budget in view of recent national announcements by the government on reductions in public sector budgets.

The Forum agreed that every effort should be given to using the funding available for Rights of Way projects before it was re-allocated to other service areas.

ii) Lincolnshire County Council

The capital bridges budget originally totalling £150,000 per annum had been completely cut as part of the County Council's efficiency saving programme, which complicated maintenance of the existing large bridge stock in the county.

Revenue funding to maintain the network remained unchanged at present, however, the Forum was informed that a comprehensive spending review would be undertaken in the autumn which could result in significant changes to this budget. The Rights of Way Public Services Agreement budget had also been withdrawn. It was intended to use the remaining £133,000 for public access improvement works during years four and five of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan implementation.

A full service review would be taking place to ascertain what changes in policies or practices would be needed following the significant funding reductions, particularly in relation to capital at this time.

AGREED

That the updates be noted.

12. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATES

The following updates were reported by officers from their respective Councils in relation to the implementation of Rights of Way Improvement Plans: -

i) Lincolnshire County Council

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Highway Divisions had continued to make general improvements through improved maintenance and enforcement works in Lincolnshire. In the period April 2007 to May 2010 this included the following: -

- 569 stiles provided or repaired;
- 992 new road side signs;
- 1345 routes waymarked;
- 312 gates provided or repaired;
- 262 new bridges;
- 214 stiles replaced with kissing gates;
- 189 stiles removed.

A road and rail crossing audit had also been undertaken, with a total of 311 locations being surveyed where Rights of Way intersected with major roads and railway lines. The Access Development Team was considering the survey shortlist in conjunction with the Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership, the Highways Agency, Network Rail and the Lincolnshire County Council Highway Divisions.

In terms of the Unclassified County Roads Management Plan, 100 kilometres of green lanes had been surveyed to date with the remaining 200 kilometres scheduled to be surveyed by the end of August 2010.

A programme of infrastructure and surface improvement works were being implemented in conjunction with the Walks Co-ordinator and divisional Public Rights of Way Officers, as part of the health and wellbeing agenda. Lincolnshire County Council had also completed its Countryside Accessibility Guidance, which outlined the legal framework in relation to disabled countryside access and provided a desired standard for the provision and maintenance of path furniture and surface improvement works.

The 'Countryside for All' pack had recently been published, copies of which were circulated to Members at the meeting. The pack contained five accessibility walks at Bourne Woods, Chamber Farm Woods, Deeping Lakes, South Thoresby Warren and Whisby Nature Park. The selected routes used safe and easily accessible paths which had been chosen to exclude sites or other obstructions which would cause difficulty to users with limited mobility.

A new 'Countryside for All' section on the Council's Countryside Website was currently being developed. The new page would provide details of the 'Countryside for All' routes, as well as the new Countryside Accessibility Guidance.

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New 'Lincolnshire Walks' leaflets had also been produced for Pointon, Sempringham and Birthorpe.

The Council's Definitive Map Team was currently making a dedication agreement to upgrade Gayton le Wold Public Bridleway number 148 and it was also reported that infrastructure improvement works had commenced. Road safety signage and route signage would be undertaken during the coming summer.

A comprehensive overview of the implementation progress of all core tasks within the Rights of Way Improvement Plan was appended to the report.

During discussion, a suggestion was made to introduce a long distance trail between Lincolnshire and Peterborough. The Senior Countryside and Access officer agreed to investigate this proposal and provide a report back to the next meeting of the Forum.

ii) Rutland County Council

The works on the Sounding Bridge bridleway at Rutland Water had been completed. A temporary mesh screen would shortly be erected, however, it was highlighted that this would allow the bridleway to remain open to the public all year round.

The Council was currently looking into creating a footpath link between Thorpe on Water and Gretton. Conditions had been agreed by the Council and the landowner, meaning that the creation agreement for this route was ready to be drafted. Depending on the time it took for the necessary legal considerations, it was anticipated that the path would be created within the next eight weeks.

Upgrade works had also been completed at Wardley and this route was scheduled to become a bridleway as soon as the creation agreements had been produced.

Reference was made to discussions that had taken place with Anglian Water and Natural England regarding Rutland Water and the proposal of Anglian Water entering into a Higher Level Stewardship scheme. It was hoped that equestrian access to the existing track between Egleton and Manton could be included as part of any agreement. However, it was reported that Anglian Water would not permit horse riders on its existing Rights of Way for health and safety reasons. The Forum gave the Council's Countryside Access Officer its full backing to seek a way forward with Anglian Water in respect of this ongoing issue.

In closing, it was noted that Rutland Walking Week was recently held and Members were informed that there had been a vast increase in the number of people attending the event compared to previous years.

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AGREED

That the updates be noted.

13. DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDERS – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Local Access Forum considered two update reports, which set out the progress that had been made in relation to processing Definitive Map Modification Order applications by Lincolnshire County Council and Rutland County Council.

AGREED

That the reports be noted.

14. PUBLIC PATH ORDERS – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

Members considered two update reports, which set out the progress that had been made in relation to processing Public Path Order applications by Lincolnshire County Council and Rutland County Council.

AGREED

That the reports be noted.

15. FUTURE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM ITEMS

Mr C Smith introduced this item as he felt that the Local Access Forum should review the items that were included on agendas for Forum meetings or the way in which it received some of its information. An example of which was that of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and he suggested that a Sub-Group should be established to go through the Plan in detail and bring specific items forward for consideration as the Forum's priorities.

It was agreed that Mr C Smith would act as champion for this piece of work and liaise with Forum Members outside of the meeting in relation to Lincolnshire's Rights of Way Improvement Plan and provide feedback to the next meeting. Those Members from Rutland agreed to undertake the same exercise in respect of Rutland's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

AGREED

That the Rights of Way Improvement Plans for Lincolnshire and Rutland be considered in detail by Members of the Forum outside of the formal meeting, as detailed above, and be fed into the Forum's next meeting.

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16. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

AGREED

That the next meeting of the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum be held on Wednesday 13 October 2010 at 2.00 p.m. in Boston.

Meeting closed at 8.05 p.m.