

Agenda Item 4



A statutory advisory body to Lincolnshire County Council, North East Lincolnshire Council and other providers of outdoor recreational access

LINCOLNSHIRE JOINT LOCAL ACCESS FORUM 3 OCTOBER 2023

PRESENT: CHRIS PADLEY (CHAIRMAN)

Representing Independent Members: Jon Thornes MBE, Victor Clark and John Law

Officers: Andrew Fletcher (Public Rights of Way and Access Manager), Chris Marsh (Senior Highways Officer) and Emily Wilcox (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance:

1 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR 2023/24

There were no nominations for Vice-Chairman for 2023/24. The Forum would operate without a nominated Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the year.

2 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no questions from members of the public.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor I Carrington, Angie Tomlin, Sharon Hayes, Sheila Brookes and Sandra Harrison.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 7 JUNE 2023

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6 INTRODUCTION FROM ANDREW FLETCHER, PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AND ACCESS MANAGER

The Forum welcomed Andrew Fletcher, the newly appointed Public Rights of Way and Access Manager to the Forum. Andrew provided insight into to his previous career experience, which included working in Public Right of Way since 2002.

7 FRIENDS OF GROUP

Consideration was given to a report by John Law, which invited the Forum to discuss establishing a Friends of Group. Due to a lack of Forum members present, it was decided that this item be reconsidered when the proposal could be discussed thoroughly, and the remit of the group and roles needed be agreed.

In response to a question, it was clarified that as many groups could be set up as needed. Friends of Group was made up of volunteers who would assist with raising funds by appointing a treasurer and secretary for the Forum and its subgroups and participate in other activities to improve right of way issues. At the current time, there was a lack of resource to carry out all tasks currently, particularly given that Lincolnshire was a large County. It was felt that a Friends of Group would assist with capacity and fundraising issues.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the report be reconsidered at a future meeting.

8 CONSTRUCTION SITES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Consideration was given to a report by John Law, which invited the Forum to consider the impact of construction sites in the countryside asked the Forum to agree whether John Law should continue to work on the project referenced in the report and agree the next steps of the project.

Due to a lack of Forum members present, it was agreed that this item be reconsidered at a future meeting.

Further information on the project would be sent for circulation by the Democratic Services Officer to the Forum which would allow members to respond with their views.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and that the item be reconsidered at a future meeting of the Forum.

9 PERMISSIVE ACCESS

Consideration was given to a verbal report by John Law, which invited the Forum to discuss Permissive Access issues. The report referred to a proposal on 30 June 2022, where the Forum had given approval for a letter to be sent to the relevant DEFRA minister and Members of Parliament on behalf of the LAF. The Forum was advised that this had not yet been actioned and volunteers were sought to write the letter on behalf of the Forum.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal update be noted.

10 COUNTRYSIDE FOR ALL

Consideration was given to a report from John Law, which invited the Forum to consider an update on Countryside For All.

Further to the report, the Forum was advised that the National Lottery Funding bid would no longer be going ahead as it could not be applied for by organisations which have an income of over 250,000 as it was unlikely that income of over 250,000 were likely to get money for it and alternative sources of funding would be sought.

In relation to the Grantham Canal (land leading to the towpath at Casthorpe Road), the Forum were shown a number of images of the unsafe gate and path and were asked to consider whether the path could be placed on the Definitive Map prior to February 2024, so that Lincolnshire County Council could allocate funding to replace the damaged and unsafe gate. Further to this, the report requested that Lincolnshire County Council investigate what improvements could be made to the track from the road to the towpath, and inform the Forum once completed.

The Public Rights of Way and Access Manager explained that the request for a deed of dedication had previously been recorded, however following staff changes the request had not progressed further.

The dedication of rights on the definitive map wouldn't necessarily record a transfer of the issue as the highway's authority. A new rights of way order would need to be created for it to be added to the definitive map and statement of public rights of way, but this would not necessarily transfer the maintenance responsibility to the Council.

The importance of ensuring that the relevant staff had instructions on how to maintain and inspect land to make sure it was safe for public use through permissive access was highlighted. It was agreed that the Forum issue advice to Lincolnshire County Council's property team to suggest that it develops its policies regarding permissive access on Council owned land, whilst

highlighting the issue of safety on the Grantham Canal land leading to the towpath at Casthorpe Road) for consideration.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted;
2. That advice be issued from the Forum to Lincolnshire County Council's Property Services Team to suggest it develop its policies regarding permissive access on Council owned land, whilst highlighting the issue on Grantham Canal (land leading to the towpath at Casthorpe Road) for consideration.

11 THE DISABILITY SUB GROUP

Consideration was given to a report by John Law, which invited the Forum to consider a report on the Disability Sub-Group.

The sub-group had expressed their disappointment in the lack of funding applications for Changing Places Toilets. It was thought that the funding just contributed to the costs of building the sites, but a breakdown could be found on the UK government's website on changing places toilets.

The Democratic Services Officer agreed to follow up on the query regarding for funding for Changing Places Toilets in Lincolnshire.

The Disability sub group were aware of proposed changes by Natural England to some nature reserves across on some areas of the East Coast and Mablethorpe. Further details would be provided by John Law to those interested.

The area of land around Sandilands Beach was owned by the National Trust. The disability sub-group were aware of the impassibility of the path on the railway and were looking at a route to access. Victor Clarke agreed to assist John Law with this outside of the meeting to assist with progressing this matter further.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

12 FUTURE WORK OF THE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

The Forum discussed the current effectiveness of the Local Access Forum and the perceived lack of power and influence that the Forum had.

Attendance at meetings had declined significantly over recent years and a lack of resource from active members such as for fundraising and volunteering to subgroups was impacting capacity.

The Public Rights of Way and Access Manager explained that the Forum was a statutory requirement and that members giving up their time to attend should feel they are supportive and productive.

Members were in agreement that there needed to be a 'refresh' of how the Forum was ran to ensure that, this would include assessing the membership of the forum, its duties and its responsibilities and how it could best influence decisions and advice the Council.

The Forum sought to raise its profile, membership and influence and officers and members highlighted the potential to make the Forum more a more useful network and bring greater benefits.

The Public Rights of Way and improvement manager would work with the Democratic Services Officer and other members to establish a way forward to refresh the Forum and its terms of reference to have maximum impact. The Forum would be consulted and input into ideas throughout the process.

It was suggested that attendance might improve is membership could be related to a group rather than an individual.

RESOLVED:

That Officers work with the Forum on a 'refresh' of the work of the Forum to improve its profile and impact.

13 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Members were invited to input into a future work programme.

The Public Rights of Way and Improvement Manager suggested that the Forum are consulted on a number of Nationally Strategic Projects that have been proposed, such as solar farms and reservoirs. A review of the public rights of way policies and procedures, and a review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan is also planned for the coming year.

The Democratic Services Officer also agreed to look into the possibility of creating a shared group between Lincolnshire Joint Local Access Forum members in which applications and consultations could be shared in between meetings.

The meeting closed at 3.16 pm

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