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**SOUTH LINCOLNSHIRE AND RUTLAND
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM
9 FEBRUARY 2011**

Report Reference:- **2.1**

(Held at the County Council Offices, Sleaford)

PRESENT: JOHN WILLIAMS (VICE-CHAIRMAN)

Representing Lincolnshire County Council:- Councillor Ray Wootten

Representing Rutland County Council:- Councillor Peter Golden

Representing Independent Members:- Bryan Bowles, Ian Cox, Rosemary Harris, Graham Law, George Keeping and Colin Smith

Officers:- Lincolnshire County Council - Chris Miller (Principal Rights of Way & Access Officer), Andrew Savage (Senior Countryside Access Officer) and Steve Blagg (Democratic Services Officer); Rutland County Council - Stuart Crook (Public Rights of Way Officer)

Apologies for absence:- William Cross, Brian Montgomery and Mrs Audrey Morley,

39 EFFECTS OF CUTS IN THE BUDGET ON ACCESS AND RIGHTS OF WAY AND FUTURE DELIVERY

The Forum received a report from Chris Miller on proposals for workforce change within the Rights of Way and Countryside Access Service in Lincolnshire which were currently out for consultation. Details were given of the effects of the proposed budget which was due to be considered at the meeting of the Council on 11 February 2011. With regard to staffing levels it was proposed to disestablish 9.5 full time equivalent posts (fte) out of 25.5 (fte) posts and it was proposed to reduce the operational budget by 45% which included a 60% reduction in the budget for procuring materials and the money available for the cyclical programme of mowing (two cuts rather than three). The operational budget also included the money allocated to the Parish Paths Partnership which had been retained at 2010/11 levels, subject to a 2.4% increase to allow for inflation.

Chris Miller responded to comments made by the Forum as follows:-

1. Although posts would be disestablished the functions of the Rights of Way and Countryside Access Service would be retained. However, there was a need to examine how people were managed after the reductions in staff.
2. The power to enforce would not be lost. There was only one enforcement officer in post at the current time and in the future consideration would be given to using the services of a Highways Officer based in East Lindsey to have a more strategic role in the county for enforcement.

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3. While the provision of furniture and sign posting was good the main problem area was cropping and ploughing.
4. It was the responsibility of the landowner to carry out maintenance of furniture and it might be that the Council was no longer able to continue carrying out work on their behalf. The Council would ensure that landowners were reminded to carry out this task.
5. There was a need to examine at a strategic level the timetable for cutting grass.
6. There was the need to examine the use of the voluntary sector and community groups to maintain access in the future. The role of Parish Clusters was noted and the importance of Parish Councils especially with the localism agenda was recognised.
7. Maps would still be maintained on the internet.
8. With regard to assessing the impact of the cuts, in the past systems had been in place to measure ease of use. While the former BVPI 178 indicator no longer existed Lincolnshire County Council had continued to undertake surveys but they were costly in terms of officer time. The results still acted as a good indicator of the state of the network. The role of volunteers to report on access would have to be investigated in the future.

RESOLVED

That the Chairman and Vice-Chairman prepare a response on the effects of the budget on access and rights of way based on the comments made at today's meeting and that the response be circulated to the Forum for their comments before submission to the Council.

40. FUTURE OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PUBLIC FOREST ESTATE IN ENGLAND (minute 37, South Lincs Access Forum, 19 January 2011)

George Keeping and Ian Cox reported verbally on the consultation of the Future Ownership and Management of the Public Forest Estate in England. They stated that they had had an opportunity to read the consultation received from the government and there was much information in the document on leasing instead of sale of land and the protection of access over a period of 150 years which, in their opinion, was ludicrous.

Comments by other members of the Forum included:-

1. Current access arrangements and particularly permissive access should be maintained.
2. The use of Heritage Lottery funding to fund access.
3. Some Forestry Commission managed forest was moribund and some forests in private ownership was better managed with more variety of habitat.
4. A lot of Forestry Commission land had already been sold or was in the process of being sold.

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George Keeping stated that he would investigate whether the Woodland Trust was able to undertake an assessment of affected woodland in Lincolnshire.

The Forum was informed that it was the wish of the Mid Lincs Forum for Chris Padley and Dr Chris Allison to be involved in the sub group set up by this Forum, comprising George Keeping and Ian Cox, and for the sub group to prepare a joint response to the consultation for submission to both Forums at their next meetings for approval before being sent to the government.

The Forum noted that Defra was organising a series of workshops in connection with the consultation at which individuals could register to attend

RESOLVED

That a sub group, comprising George Keeping, Ian Cox, Chris Padley and Dr Chris Allison, prepare a joint response to the consultation on Future Ownership and Management of the Public Forest Estate in England and that the response be submitted to both Forums for approval at their next meetings before being sent to the government

The meeting closed at 3.05pm