

(Meeting held at the Guildhall Arts Centre, Grantham)

**PRESENT:**

Representing Lincolnshire County Council: - Councillor Ray Wootten.

Representing Rutland County Council: - Councillor Brian Montgomery.

Representing Independent Members: - Bryan Bowles, Ian Cox, Alan Gibbon, Rosemary Harris, Alec Hill, Graham Law, George Keeping, Audrey Morley and John Williams.

Officers: - Sarah Attrill (Witham Valley Country Park Project Officer), 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

RESOLVED

That Councillor Brian Montgomery be elected as Chairman of the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum for the 2011/2012 municipal year.

**COUNCILLOR BRIAN MONTGOMERY IN THE CHAIR**

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That John Williams be elected as Vice-Chairman of the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum for the 2011/2012 municipal year.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Brailsford.

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4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 13 APRIL 2011

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 April 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Stuart Crook (Rights of Way Officer, Rutland County Council) in the list of those present.

5. ACCESS DEVELOPMENT TEAM FUTURE PRIORITIES

A report by Lincolnshire County Council's Senior Countryside Access Officer was considered, which outlined the future priorities of the Council's Access Development Team.

Following the announcement of the Comprehensive Spending Review, it was clear that there would be a reduction of more than a quarter in the amount of Government grant funding allocated to local authorities in England over the next four years. On 13 December 2010 the Government announced that the main general revenue grant funding for Lincolnshire County Council next year would be reduced by £26.7 million. A further reduction of £16.1 million would be implemented in the following year, the reduction of which equated to 18% over the two years.

Workforce change proposals for the Rights of Way and Countryside Access service had been finalised and it was necessary for the service to evaluate its workload. Consequently the Council was implementing changes to the Public Rights of Way structure, specifically in relation to the Access Development Team where a number of amendments had been made. The Countryside Access Officer post had been disestablished and the Assistant Definitive Map Officer and Assistant Countryside Access Officer roles had been merged to create a new post title of Assistant Rights of Way Officer. This would ensure that there was adequate support to all areas of the section rather than just in Definitive Map work. The Access Development Team would also now include the Definitive Map Officer responsible for Public Path Orders.

Efforts would be made in the coming months to increase the level of public participation in the management of Lincolnshire's Public Rights of Way network. A number of options were currently under consideration, including the provision of an adopt-a-path scheme. This would develop the existing Parish Paths Partnership scheme and utilise community groups to undertake practical improvement and maintenance tasks.

It was no longer a statutory responsibility for local authorities to use the Government's 'Ease of Use' survey in respect of their Public Rights of Way networks. Despite this, however, Lincolnshire County Council would continue to project manage the survey via its Access Development Team, although consideration was being given to future

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surveys being partially conducted by volunteers. User groups had already been approached to assist in this fieldwork, which provided the authority with up to date information on the state of the network and highlighted maintenance and enforcement issues.

Members were informed that the implementation of the first Lincolnshire and Rights of Way Improvement Plan was in its final year. Preparation had commenced on the second Rights of Way Improvement Plan, with a view to the final document being published in Spring 2012. It was considered unrealistic, given the current financial constraints, to implement a programme of improvement works across the entire Rights of Way Network in the county. The new Rights of Way Improvement Plan would therefore focus on the aims and objectives of other projects and green infrastructure strategies, such as the Lincolnshire Coastal Country Park and the Witham Country Park. Aligning the Plan to other plans and strategies would increase the opportunities of obtaining external funding, enable the concentration of greater resources on a defined area and take advantage of more efficient partnership working.

Rutland County Council decided not to continue with the Government's 'Ease of Use' survey, in view of the fact that it was no longer a statutory requirement, and would not be collating records regarding the condition of its Rights of Way network.

In terms of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Rutland, it was agreed that a meeting between lead Members and the Head of Highways from Rutland County Council should be held in order to discuss the format of the revised Plan, together with general issues surrounding the Rights of Way network. The Rights of Way Officer from Rutland County Council agreed to liaise with all parties concerned and set up a meeting.

#### RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the Rights of Way Officer from Rutland County Council be requested to schedule a meeting between the Head of Highways and lead Members in relation to the Council's Rights of Way network and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

#### 6. FORWARD WORK PROPOSALS 2011 ONWARD

Further to the issues reported in the previous item, consideration was given to a report by Lincolnshire County Council's Senior Countryside Access Officer which put forward proposed changes to the way in which maintenance and enforcement works could be carried out in the future as a result of significant workforce change.

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It was reported that a number of the proposals included in the report would have an effect on existing policies established in either the 1980's or, more recently, in the 'Milestones' policy documents of 1996 and 2000.

The Forum was asked to consider proposals in relation to the below aspects of the Council's Public Rights of Way service, details of which relating to each were outlined within the report: -

- the Rights of Way priority system;
- service standard timescales;
- inspection regimes;
- annual condition surveys;
- Rights of Way Enforcement Policy.

In order to coincide with the Council's decision-making structure, a response from this Local Access Forum on the proposals in the report was required by no later than 31 August 2011. It was reported that the Mid-Lincolnshire Local Access Forum had recently appointed two of its Members to meet outside of the formal meeting to consider and submit a response prior to the Council's deadline. The two Members had indicated that they would be prepared to form a joint working group with this Forum in order that a joint response from both Local Access Forums in Lincolnshire could be submitted. The South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum agreed with this approach and it was agreed that George Keeping and Councillor Brian Montgomery would be appointed to the working group.

**RESOLVED**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That a joint working group be established with the Mid-Lincolnshire Local Access Forum to consider and submit a response to Lincolnshire County Council on the proposals outlined within the report in relation to maintenance and enforcement works.
- (3) That George Keeping and Councillor Brian Montgomery be appointed to represent the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum on the joint working group.

**7. JOINT LOCAL ACCESS FORUM ANNUAL REPORT**

Members were provided with a copy of the draft Joint Local Access Forum Annual Report, which captured the work undertaken by this Forum together with the Mid-Lincolnshire Local Access Forum for 2010/2011.

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An example was shown at the meeting of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum Annual Report, which had been designed in a leaflet style. These would be displayed in areas of specific interest so that people could take them away with them and it was agreed that this was a good way of publicising the work of the Forum.

RESOLVED

That the draft Joint Local Access Forum Annual Report for 2010/2011 be noted.

8. WITHAM VALLEY COUNTRY PARK

The Local Access Forum received a presentation by the Project Officer from Witham Valley Country Park, which provided Members with an overview of the Park's vision and aims.

The vision of the Country Park was noted as being the creation of a sustainable, accessible network of managed outdoor places which provided a diverse range of high quality experiences for the enjoyment of residents and visitors.

The Park had three principal aims, as follows: -

- to conserve, protect and enhance the natural, historic and built environment;
- to provide recreational space and leisure facilities for residents;
- to provide a range of high quality experiences for visitors and tourists to the area.

A plan showing the proposed location of the Country Park was shown to Members, which highlighted the areas to the west and south of Lincoln that the Park would cover.

Members were informed that the Park was being created for the following reasons: -

- there was greater demand on all facilities and accessible outdoor space due to Lincoln's expanding population;
- there would be a positive impact of green space on health outcomes;
- the Park would have a key role to play in attracting tourists to Lincolnshire.

The Country Park would make the most of what was already available in the area by improving accessibility, raising awareness and developing a corridor of disparate habitats.

The organisations behind the development of the Country Park had formed a Green Infrastructure Sub-Group, consisting of the City of Lincoln Council, Environment Agency, Lincolnshire County Council, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, North Kesteven District Council and West Lindsey District Council.

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The Local Access Forum was provided within an update on the work that was currently taking place in relation to the Park. The following aspects were noted as part of the presentation: -

- a new website was being developed, which would include strong visuals and great search engine efficiency designed to attract visitors from outside of the county. This would be launched on 16 September 2011;
- key site signage was being developed with partners, commencing with the rollout of parish boundary signs;
- promotional material was being developed, including generic leaflets for circulation at key sites in West Lindsey, North Kesteven and Lincoln Tourist Information Centres;
- partners' priorities would be included in the Park's action plan, following approval at the next meeting of the Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee;
- work was taking place with Lincolnshire County Council on producing a comprehensive plan for the restoration of quarries in the Country Park area;
- future management models for the Country Park were being explored, in the shape of a charitable trust or community interest company.

The Chairman thanked the Project Officer for her informative presentation.

**RESOLVED**

That the presentation be noted.

**9. THE NATURAL CHOICE: SECURING THE VALUE OF NATURE – THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WHITE PAPER**

A report by Lincolnshire County Council's Senior Countryside Access Officer was considered, which provided the Local Access Forum with an update in relation to the Government's White Paper entitled 'The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature'.

Members were informed that the White Paper outlined the Government's vision for the natural environment over the next 50 years, backed up with practical action to deliver that ambition. The plans for this were contained within 'Natural Choice', which was the first White Paper on the natural environment in 20 years, and was directly linked to the research carried out for the national ecosystem assessment. This assessment showed the strong economic arguments for safeguarding and enhancing the natural environment and also acted on recommendations of 'Making Space for Nature', a report into the state of England's wildlife sites led by Professor John Lawton.

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The broad theme of the White Paper was to protect and improve the natural environment by working to improve the quality of the natural environment and halt the decline in habitats and species, degradation of landscapes and erosion of natural capital. The Government aimed to achieve this through more joined up action at local and national level to create an ecological network which was resilient to changes and external pressures.

The Forum was specifically provided with an overview of chapter four of the document, which contained a section describing the ways in which the Government aimed to reconnect people and nature.

The report provided details of the Government's £540 million Local Sustainable Transport Fund that had been established to assist local transport authorities to do more to encourage walking and cycling, improve public transport and make better connections between different forms of sustainable transport. It was reported that Rutland County Council had recently been unsuccessful in a bid for this funding, but was advised to re-submit the bid in the second Tranche. This Forum would therefore be updated on the outcome of the re-submitted bid in due course.

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

**10. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATES**

The Local Access Forum was provided with updates on the Rights of Way Improvement Plans from Lincolnshire County Council and Rutland County Council, as follows: -

**i) Lincolnshire County Council**

A report by the Senior Countryside Access Officer was considered, which provided Members with a comprehensive update on progress made in relation to the implementation of the Lincolnshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan. It was emphasised that, in view of the cuts imposed on the service, the Plan could not be progressed as vigorously as originally anticipated.

**ii) Rutland County Council**

It was noted that there was nothing new to report in respect of Rutland County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

**RESOLVED**

That the report and updates be noted.

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11. DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDERS UPDATE

Members were provided with updates on Definitive Map Modification Order work in respect of Lincolnshire County Council and Rutland County Council, as follows: -

i) Lincolnshire County Council

The Forum received a report by the Senior Countryside Access Officer, for information, which detailed the progress of Definitive Map Modification Order work since the inception of the current prioritisation policy, together with an overview of current caseloads following significant workforce change.

ii) Rutland County Council

The Rights of Way Officer informed the Forum that delays were being experienced in relation to the processing of Public Rights of Way legal work, which was now undertaken by the legal team at Peterborough City Council. It was agreed that this should be raised at the meeting between the Head of Highways and lead Members at Rutland County Council due to be scheduled by the Rights of Way Officer, as referred to in Minute number 5 above. An update on this issue would be reported to the Local Access Forum in due course.

In relation to Definitive Map Modification Orders, an update report on those applications currently in Rutland County Council's system was provided to Members for information.

**RESOLVED**

That the update reports be noted.

12. PUBLIC PATH ORDER PROGRESS REPORT

Members were provided with updates on Public Path Order work in respect of Lincolnshire County Council and Rutland County Council, as follows: -

i) Lincolnshire County Council

A report by the Senior Countryside Access Officer was circulated, for information, which detailed the progress of Public Path Order work in respect of the Council's power to divert, extinguish or create Public Rights of Way either of its own volition or following an application to do so from the public.

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ii) Rutland County Council

An update report on those applications currently in Rutland County Council's system was provided to Members for information.

RESOLVED

That the update reports be noted.

13. SALE OF PUBLIC FOREST ESTATE

The Senior Countryside Access Officer from Lincolnshire County Council introduced this item which, following agreement at the Forum's previous meeting, was a standing item on the agenda.

It was noted that there was nothing more to report at this stage and that update reports would continue to be submitted to future meetings of this Forum.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

14. OUTCOME OF INVESTIGATIONS INTO ACCESS ISSUES AT MORKERY WOOD

Lincolnshire County Council's Senior Countryside Access Officer introduced this item and informed the Local Access Forum that various recommendations had been made in liaison with the Highways Agency in relation to access issues at Morkery Wood.

It was noted that this issue was a work in progress at this stage and discussion would continue between the County Council, the Highways Agency and the Forestry Commission.

15. DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the next meeting of the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum be held on Wednesday 12 October 2011 at 6.30 p.m., the venue for which will be confirmed in due course.

The meeting closed at 3.45 p.m.