

**SOUTH LINCOLNSHIRE AND RUTLAND
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM
18 APRIL 2012**

(Meeting held at North Kesteven District Council Offices, Sleaford)

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR BRIAN MONTGOMERY (CHAIRMAN)

Representing Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors David Brailsford and Ray Wootten.

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

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

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from William Cross.

It was also reported that Graham Law had recently resigned from the Local Access Forum due to work commitments.

38. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2012

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum held on 25 January 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

39. IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW OF THE LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS AND RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2007-2012

A report by Lincolnshire County Council's Senior Countryside Access Officer was considered, which provided the Local Access Forum with a review of the first Lincolnshire Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan that was published in April 2007 and ran until 2012.

The Improvement Plan had been implemented under four key themes, as follows: -

- sustainable transport – strategic aim to increase the use of the network for sustainable transport and utility trips;

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- health and wellbeing – strategic aim to make it easier for people to incorporate exercise into their daily lives and lead healthier lifestyles;
- rural economy and tourism – strategic aim to support local businesses and tourism through access improvements;
- social issues – strategic aim to enable more people to enjoy walking and riding.

Comprehensive information on the following aspects of the Plan's implementation were contained within the report, together with a full list of works which was circulated as an appendix: -

- policy development;
- network management;
- publicity and promoted routes;
- community involvement;
- access land;
- affect of austerity measures.

The Council's second Rights of Way Improvement Plan was now in the process of being prepared. It was emphasised that a great deal had changed since the publication of the first Improvement Plan. The second Plan would have to take account of significant changes in national policy and the current economic climate.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

40. UPDATE ON THE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS AND RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN – RUTLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

Rutland County Council's Public Rights of Way Officer reported that he was currently in the process of writing a final report on the Council's first Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which was due to end later in the year.

An updated version of the action plan for the current Rights of Way Improvement Plan was circulated at the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

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41. 'HUDDLE' UPDATE

George Keeping provided Members with an update on the 'Huddle' system as one of this Forum's registered Huddle Champions. Huddle was an online network facilitated by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Natural England for use by Local Access Forums across the country.

It was reported that only three Members per Local Access Forum had been given access to the Huddle system, although it was originally the intention of Natural England for all Local Access Forum Members to be given access. In terms of how each Forum used Huddle, Natural England had not been prescriptive and invited Local Access Forums to use it anyway in which they felt necessary and to explore its various functions. Members were informed of the following key features currently available on Huddle: -

- calendar – events could be posted on this section, such as dates of Local Access Forum meetings or training events;
- people – contact details for all Members of each Local Access Forum and key contacts from organisations such as the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Natural England were available for viewing on this section;
- white board – a function which enabled users to post details via an online notice board;
- discussion area – a function which provided users with an online facility to contact each other through interactive discussion threads;
- file section – an electronic library of documents such as Local Access Forum Annual Reports and associated technical reports.

Members noted that a common view from other users of the Huddle system was that it should be opened up to all Local Access Forum Members, however, the limit of three users per Local Access Forum at this time was due to cost implications.

In closing, Members were invited to view a demonstration of Huddle at the close of the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

42. HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME

This item was introduced by John Law, who had requested its inclusion on the agenda for this meeting.

Further to minute number 31 of the previous meeting of the Forum, Members were provided with an opportunity to comment on the wording of a draft letter to all Parish

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Councils regarding Higher Level Stewardship Schemes in their respective areas. The wording had been finalised and a number of letters had already been sent out, signed by the Chairman of this Local Access Forum.

John Law was also a Member of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum, which had arranged for press releases and questionnaires to be sent out to raise awareness of Higher Level Stewardship Schemes in local communities. Examples of a press release and questionnaire were circulated for information. Members were requested to feedback any comments at the next meeting on the content of both documents.

It was reported that the access subsidy for a number of sites in Lincolnshire and Rutland under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme were due to cease in 2013. These were listed in a document circulated at the meeting and it was suggested that Members may wish to visit the sites and assess them so that they had a better understanding of their individual characteristics.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That Members be asked to feedback any comments to the next meeting in respect of the content of the press release and questionnaire relating to Higher Level Stewardship Schemes.

43. PUBLIC PATH ORDERS

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

The Forum received a report by the Countryside Access Manager, 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.

It was reported that the diversion of public footpath number 1 at Timberland, referred to within the report, had now been confirmed.

The Countryside Access Manager reported that he anticipated Network Rail contacting the County Council in due course regarding level crossings in terms of potentially closing or diverting Public Rights of Way. This would take up a significant amount of

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officer time in a team that was already significantly restricted following cuts in national funding and the implementation of the local core offer.

ii) Rutland County Council

An update report on those Public Path Order applications currently in Rutland County Council's system would be sent to Members via email in due course.

It was noted, however, that the Bridleway Creation Order at Lyndon Top had been abandoned as the Council would be entering into a Compulsory Purchase Order process in respect of this site.

RESOLVED

That the report and update be noted.

44. DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDERS

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

A report by the Council's Countryside Access Manager was considered, 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.

ii) Rutland County Council

An update report on those Definitive Map Modification Order applications currently in Rutland County Council's system would be sent to Members via email in due course.

RESOLVED

That the report and update be noted.

45. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report by the Senior Countryside Access Officer, which outlined the progress made in the development of community involvement in the management of Lincolnshire's public rights of way network.

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During the last twelve months the Countryside Access Team had been working on a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the opportunities for volunteers to become involved in public rights of way work. Such initiatives were reported as follows: -

- ease of use survey – the Ramblers' Association now assisted the County Council to undertake the twice yearly public rights of way condition survey;
- volunteer working groups – partnerships were being formed with a variety of community groups to undertake public rights of way maintenance tasks;
- adopt a leaflet – the Countryside Access Team was developing an 'adopt-a-path' scheme to assist in the management of routes used by the Lincolnshire Walks series of leaflets;
- parish paths partnership scheme – the Countryside Access Team was re-launching the scheme to maximise the value of the partnership to Parish Councils and the County Council.

Discussion ensued on the use of volunteers and problems with insurance that had been experienced by a number of Members in the past when they had wanted to use volunteers. It was reported that Parish Councils usually had adequate insurance cover, dependant on the tasks volunteers were being asked to undertake, but this was a complex issue that the County Council had taken some time to address.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

46. DISTRICTS CORE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

This item was introduced by John Law, who had requested its inclusion on the agenda for this meeting.

It was reported that a number of Core Development Frameworks or Strategies had been published for consultation by District Councils in Lincolnshire. The County Council would be given an opportunity to comment on the content of these documents as part of the formal consultation process and Members agreed that the Local Access Forum should also have an input. Officers agreed to write to the Planning Managers at all seven District Councils in Lincolnshire, requesting that the Local Access Forum be added to the list of bodies consulted upon as part of the formal consultation process.

RESOLVED

(1) That the report be noted.

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- (2) That officers write to all District Councils in Lincolnshire requesting that the Local Access Forum be added to the list of consultees in respect of Core Development Frameworks or Strategies.

47. DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the next meeting of the South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum be held on 4 July 2012 at 6.30 p.m. in Grantham.

The meeting closed at 7.55 p.m.