

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 24 MARCH 2022

PRESENT: CHRIS PADLEY (CHAIRMAN)

Representing Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors I D Carrington and R J Cleaver

Representing North East Lincolnshire Council: Councillor James Cairns

Representing Independent Members: John Beaven, Sid Mill, Angie Tomlin, Peter Hinton JP MBA, Sandra Harrison, John Law and Erica Spurrier

Officers: Matthew Chaplin (Public Rights of Way Mapping Officer, North East Lincolnshire Council), Robert Close (Democratic Services Officer) and Chris Miller (Deputy Head of Environment)

Also in attendance:

29 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR 2022/23

RESOLVED

That Chris Padley be elected Chairman of the Forum for the period from 24 March 2022 to 24 March 2023.

30 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR 2022/23

RESOLVED

That Angie Tomlin be elected Vice-Chairman of the Forum from 24 March 2022 to 24 March 2023.

31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Victor Clark, David Salkeld and Nick Tomlin.

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32 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor I D Carrington declared that he was a member of both Lincolnshire County Council Planning and Regulation Committee and North Kesteven District Council Planning Committee.

33 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were raised.

34 RETIREMENT OF FORUM CLERK - STEVE BLAGG

RESOLVED

That, on behalf of the Chairman, Democratic Services Officer circulate a letter to Mr Steve Blagg, former Forum Clerk, thanking him for his service to the Mid-Lincolnshire Access Forum and the Lincolnshire Joint Local Access Forum.

35 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF LINCOLNSHIRE JOINT LOCAL ACCESS FORUM
HELD 17 NOVEMBER 2021

The Deputy Head of Environment, Lincolnshire County Council (LCC), explained that, in relation to minute 22, government indicated that the cut-off date for the definitive mapping statement, outlined to be 1st January 2026, would not be brought into force. However, the right to apply for public path orders and changes to charging regimes would continue as planned.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the 17 November 2021 meeting of the Lincolnshire Local Access Forum be approved.

36 ENGLAND COAST PATH UPDATE

The Deputy Head of Environment, LCC, advised that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs approved three of the four sections north of Mablethorpe. The fourth section sat at Donna Nook but, following an upcoming site visit seeking to resolve final issues, approval was expected imminently. Once all sections were approved, the establishment phase was due to commence seeking to establish any necessary infrastructure to make the sections operational.

It was clarified that the land would be managed by North Lincolnshire Council, North East Lincolnshire Council and Lincolnshire County Council with support from other stakeholders. Day to day management would be conducted by a National Trail Officer funded 75 per cent by Natural England and 25 per cent by stakeholders.

The section from Sutton Bridge to Skegness was awaiting confirmation by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs following resolution of objections.

Officers were confident that the current offering of parking and public restrooms was sufficient for the stretches of pathway.

RESOLVED

That the England Coast Path update be noted.

37 LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Deputy Head of Environment, LCC, introduced the Forum to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and explained that the current plan was under review with engagement strategies currently being explored.

Some members of the Forum raised disappointment with the extent of input previously offered to the Local Access Forum, adding the other local authorities had created a programme of proactive work to improve specific rights of way. The Deputy Head of Environment, LCC, subsequently advised the forum that, unless there was a significant change to disposal finances to enable the positive growth of rights of way, the best use of resources would be through improvement of existing provisions through external developers. There was some concern amongst some members of the Forum that their prior experience of engaging with planners wasn't indicative of inspired proactive work to improve the benefits of rights of way.

Making reference to the four principles of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, the Forum hoped that the current access tracks throughout the county would benefit greatly from more integration with one another. Moreover, suggestions were made that proactive work was carried out through the planning process seeking to engage developers early to provide the most benefit to rights of way. A suggestion was made more could be done to encourage landowners to allow more permissive footpaths to link up established rights of way.

The Deputy Head of Environment, LCC stated that generally, because access could be revoked at any time, permissive routes were no longer promoted by the Council and are not shown on the definitive map.

A Forum Member shared an experience of an obstruction to a right of way, hindering their opportunity to pass onto an adjacent stretch of access. The Deputy Head of Environment, LCC, observed that, while there was a necessary place for local authority intervention in case of obstruction, partnership endeavours and engagement opportunities with landowners should be explored first.

The involvement of the equestrian community as a consultee was suggested by the Forum, noting that, because of their interest, they had access to sources of funding unavailable to the Council which would be advantageous to all rights of way users. The Deputy Head of Environment, LCC, were advised that all key stakeholders would be consulted and any benefits they could offer to rights of way in the County would be welcomed.

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Exploration into diversions and alterations to the Viking Way were still ongoing through a three-year process. Issues currently awaiting resolution included the crossings at the A46 and A52.

RESOLVED

That the Lincolnshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan be noted.

38 PERMISSIVE ACCESS

Mr John Law, a representative of the Local Access Forum, presented a report, detailing the current situation of permissive access and future funding strategies.

Extensive consultation had been received from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in respect of natural environment and land management schemes. Some Forum Members suggested that moving forwards, the Local Access Forum's view be sought in respect to consultations regarding local access. The Deputy Head of Environment, LCC, explained that consultations could be extended onto the Forum from the Council but ultimately, the Council was the intended recipient of the consultation.

While registering appreciation of permissive footpaths, the representatives of the farming community at the meeting suggested that they didn't feel DEFRA had been forthcoming with funding opportunities. Moreover, lack of parking and public conveniences also negatively affected the experience of rights of way users.

RESOLVED

That the Permissive Access report be noted.

39 COUNTRYSIDE FOR ALL

Mr John Law, a representative of the Local Access Forum, presented a report, detailing promotion of Countryside For All.

The Deputy Head of Environment, LCC, advised the Forum that, should they wish, they would be perfectly entitled to seek the funding of private businesses to fund promotional material for Countryside For All.

Some Forum Members suggested using rural public houses to place promotional material may provide significant value for money.

The Deputy Head of Environment, LCC, suggested that there was not the budget to offer any direct financial support during the 2021/22 fiscal year and wasn't in a position to commit to any future funding yet.

Accessible mapping online was managed through a software system called Countryside Access Management System (CAMS), however, within Lincolnshire, strategic direction sought to incorporate accessible access into a wider highway plan.

RESOLVED

1. That the Lincolnshire Joint Local Access Forum encourage Lincolnshire County Council to fund the relevant version of ExeGesIS Countryside Access Management System (CAMS).
2. That the Countryside for All report be noted.

40 SOLAR PANELS

Mr Sid Mill, a representative of the Local Access Forum, presented a verbal report which brought to the attention of the Forum, the impacts of solar energy farms on the rural landscape of the County and the reduction in agricultural land. He went onto suggest that the Local Access Forum should be approached as a consultee for any future developments.

Some Members of the Forum could appreciate the disappointment at the loss of agricultural land and impact of landscape, however, understood the County's responsibility to facilitate renewable energy production.

Forum Members stressed that protection for Public Rights of Way was included within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), thus local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate were expected to take this into account upon consideration. The Forum shared experiences of infrastructure developments actually resulting in a betterment in rights of way through improvements.

Observing that some upcoming solar farms fell under National Strategic Infrastructure Planning (NSIP) arrangements, the Forum sought assurance that public rights of way could expect the same level of consideration from the Planning Inspectorate as local authority determined applications. The Deputy Head of Environment, LCC, advised the Forum that he acted as a consultee for NSIP developments representing both public rights of way and environmental issues. Moreover, the Planning Inspectorate would make their recommendations based on the same policies as local authorities.

In response to the suggestion that the Forum involve themselves as direct consultees, the Deputy Head of Environment added that the Council sought to prepare an energy statement to which the Local Access Forum's views would be taken on how access should be protected when considering developments. This would allow the Local Access Forum to be involved at a strategic level in energy infrastructure developments.

RESOLVED

- That the Solar Panels report be noted.

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41 FORWARD AGENDA PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Officer presented the Forum with the opportunity to suggest any items of business for future meetings of the Joint Local Access Forum.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

42 DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Democratic Services Officer presented the Forum with the following three dates for the next meeting, requesting that Forum Members confirm their availability with him:

- 9th June 2022 2:30 p.m.
- 23rd June 2022 2:30 p.m.
- 30th June 2022 2:30 p.m.

The meeting closed at 4.13 pm