

**Minutes of a meeting of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum held at
County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday 6 February 2008.**

Present

Mr. R. Denney (Chairman), Mr. B. Sutton, Mr. T. Kirby, Mr. M. Parr, Ms. V. Allen,
Mr. J. Law, Mrs. L. Foreman, Mr. S. Warren, Mr. P. Lancaster, Ms. H. Brown,
Mr. H. Eppel, Mr. J. Hefford, Mr. P. Tame, and Mrs. R. Camamile CC.

In attendance

Mr. W. Carter, Mr. E. McWilliam, Mr. P. Williams, and Ms. J. Bailey.

Action by

161. Introductions and apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were reported on behalf of Mr. G. Mabbitt and
Ms. A. Pyper.

162. Election of Chairman.

It was proposed by Mrs Foreman and seconded by Mr. Kirby that Mr.
Denney be elected Chairman of the Forum.

AGREED:

That Mr. R. Denney be elected Chairman of the Leicestershire Local
Access Forum for 2008.

163. Election of Vice-Chairman.

It was proposed by Mr. Denney and seconded by Mrs. Camamile CC
that Mr. Sutton be elected Vice-Chairman of the Forum.

AGREED:

That Mr. B. Sutton be elected Vice-Chairman of the Leicestershire
Local Access Forum for 2008.

164. Chairman's welcome and opening remarks.

The Chairman thanked members of the Forum for their vote of
confidence, and said that he would be pleased to serve as Chairman
for another year. He welcomed everyone to the meeting and, for the
benefit of the newer members, referred to the procedure for declaring
interests in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting and for
issues which might be raised under 'Matters arising'.

- Action by
165. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2007.
- Mrs. Camamile CC said that she had not attended the meeting, but had sent her apologies. Subject to that amendment the minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2007 were confirmed as a correct record.
- JB
166. Notes of the (inquorate) meeting held on 11 December 2007.
- The notes of the meeting held on 11 December 2007 were noted.
167. Matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda.
- (i) Minute 154 (23 October 2007) - Discovering Lost Ways
- Mr. McWilliam confirmed that the Forum's response had been sent to Natural England (NE), but there had been no reply to this or further feedback on the project from NE.
- Mr. Denney added that he had written to David Taylor MP on the subject, and had received a response from Mr. Taylor and the Minister concerned; the latter offering little by way of encouragement.
- (ii) Minute 156 (23 October 2007) - Common Land
- Mrs Allen said that she had not contacted Parish Councils on the matter, due to pressure of work. It was suggested that the issue might be taken up by the Verges Sub Group in the future.
- Verges
Sub
Group
- (iii) Note 8 (11 December 2007) - Sustainable Community Strategy
- Mr. McWilliam said that members' comments on the Strategy had been welcomed and noted. Mr. Williams would report further later in the meeting (minute 177 below refers).
- (iv) Note 9 (11 December 2007) - East Midlands LAF Conference
- The following members confirmed that they would be attending the Conference on 6 March: Mr. R. Denney, Mr. T. Kirby, Mr. M. Parr, Ms. V. Allen, Mrs. L. Foreman, Mr. H. Eppel, and Mr. P. Tame.
- Mr. McWilliam undertook to forward names to the conference organisers, and also to ask for the inclusion of 'Discovering Lost Ways' on the agenda.
- E. McW

Action by

(v) Note 18 (11 December 2007) - Country Parks

Mr. Williams reported that discussions on the potential sites for disposal were ongoing. He explained that the County Council was seeking to review its landholdings and thereby reduce maintenance costs. The sites concerned were relatively small, and public access would be maintained where possible. It was expected that further detail on the proposals would be available in the early summer.

PW

(vi) Note 13 (11 December 2007) - Walking Festival

Mr. Warren said that he would be taking part in an 11-mile walk from Altar Stones, Markfield, and would take the LAF banner to display.

168. Declarations of interest.

There were no declarations of interest with in respect of items on the agenda.

169. To advise of any other items which the Chairman considers are urgent.

There were no urgent items to be considered.

170. Update on plans for the Seminar.

Mr. McWilliam reported on progress with the LAF half-day seminar on Wednesday 26 March. An agenda would be circulated shortly.

The Forum suggested other individuals and organisations who might be invited, such as local MPs, members of the Regional Assembly, and groups concerned with Eco-Town proposals.

It was noted that the seminar offered an excellent opportunity to promote both the Forum and the individual organisations which were represented on it.

AGREED:

(a) That Mr. McWilliam would email all Forum members with the current list of seminar invitees, asking to be advised of any further individuals or organisations that might be included;

E. McW

(b) That the event be publicised in the local press.

E. McW /
Publicity
Sub
Group

171. Accessibility Forum

Mr. Carter reported on the formation of the new Accessibility Forum, which would deliver the Local Transport Plan (LTP) Accessibility Strategy - one of the LTP's objectives was to improve access to facilities, particularly in areas with high levels of social exclusion. Partners on the Accessibility Forum included District and Leicester City Councils, the health sector, community transport providers, and stakeholders such as Sustrans.

Mr. Carter agreed that there would be some overlap with the work of the Local Access Forum. It was likely that the Accessibility Forum would have a reasonably high profile, given its emphasis on accessibility of the highways network and the possibility of attracting funding via the LTP and other accessibility initiatives. Officers would ensure that there was a constructive dialogue between the Forum and the new body (confusingly also referred to as the LAF - the 'Leicestershire Accessibility Forum').

AGREED:

- (a) That the information about the Accessibility Forum be noted;
- (b) That the minutes of the meeting of the Accessibility Forum's Walking and Cycling workshop be circulated to members of the (Local Access) Forum for information. E. McW

172. Access Management Grant Scheme.

Mr. Carter advised the Forum that although Natural England had previously provided funding through the Access Management Grant Scheme the prospect for the future was uncertain.

The lack of funding hindered further development of open access, and the limited resources now available to the County Council were geared to simply maintaining existing access.

It was noted that information on existing open access areas could be found via the Natural England website - www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

AGREED:

- (a) That the Chairman write to the Chair of Natural England, Sir Martin Doughty, to voice the Forum's concern at the lack of funding to develop open access; E. McW / RD
- (b) That Mr. McWilliam would circulate information on existing open access areas in the region. E. McW

173. Correspondence.

Mr. McWilliam advised the Group of the following items of correspondence -

- (i) A letter from Jonathon Shaw MP, the new Minister for Marine Landscape and Rural Affairs - introducing himself and thanking Local Access Forums for their work on RoWIPs.
- (ii) A letter from the Ramblers Association to all Local Access Forums concerning the extension of the Access Management Grant Scheme (discussed at minute 172 above).
- (iii) An email from Duncan Graham, Chair of the Cumbria LAF, regarding the formation of a National Access Forum (NAF). Mr. Duncan had attended a meeting with Natural England on 24 January at which this had been discussed. It was intended that the purpose of NAF would be -
 - Providing a balanced view to NE, and countrywide feedback
 - Exchanging information
 - Effective and co-ordinated joint lobbying of government
 - Giving accurate information on policy initiatives/objectives
 - Giving feedback on initiatives/implementation
 - Exchanging best practice

The NAF would work from a simple and informal constitution, meeting three times per annum. It would consist of 16 LAF members (two from each region, and some nominated by NE), with a 3-year term of office. Travel and other expenses would be borne by NE.

AGREED:

That updates on the formation and work of the NAF would be brought to future meetings of the Forum.

E. McW

- (iv) An email from the editor of 'Waymark', the journal of the Institute of Public Rights of Way Management, offering the opportunity to subscribe for £30 per copy.

It was noted that County Council officers received the journal, and members agreed that it did not represent value for money for the Forum to subscribe at the present time.

174. Connect2 update.

Mr. Williams reported on the successful Connect2 Lottery bid, which would result in Watermead Country Park receiving around £700,000 of the £50 million prize. That, combined with additional funding from local organisations (including the County Council), meant that £1.4 million would be spent to improve footpaths and cycleways in the area over a five-year period.

Mr. Williams instanced access issues which the funding might be used to address, such as steep gradients, road surfacing, and bridge design. He advised the Forum that a meeting would take place in early April to discuss the project (this was expected to be on 7 April).

AGREED:

That further reports on the Connect2 project be brought to the Forum as appropriate. PW

175. Sub Groups and Working Parties.

(i) Publicity Sub Group

The Chairman reported that the Sub Group had been working on the new leaflet and banner and arrangements for the seminar. Drafts of the publicity material were circulated at the meeting.

AGREED:

That the blue background for the publicity material should be used, and that the photographs should include some people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Publicity Sub Group / E.McW

(ii) Verges Sub Group

Mr. Williams advised that a draft Verges Strategy would be circulated to the Forum at the earliest opportunity. An officer would be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the draft Strategy.

(iii) Membership of Sub Groups and working parties

Mr. McWilliam reported on the replies received to the questionnaire asking for expressions of interest in joining the Sub Groups and noted the additional responses made by members at the meeting.

176. Open Forum.

(i) Reporting problems with footpaths

In response to members' questions Mr. Carter explained the process for reporting problems with public rights of way.

Mr. Carter said that whilst problems were usually resolved, it had been commented that responses to complainants tended to be sporadic. This had been brought to the attention of highways officers and was being addressed. The Forum commented that it did not wish officers to spend a disproportionate amount of time on administrative issues, but it would be helpful for people to know that their reports had been dealt with and responses would encourage public involvement. A one-line email should often suffice.

Mr. McWilliam confirmed that all reports were recorded, helping highways inspectors to identify ongoing or seasonal issues. He undertook to ask about modifying the email reporting process to enable senders to keep a copy of their reports to follow-up if need be.

E. McW

It was commented that rights of way over farmland tended to be well-maintained in Leicestershire, but media coverage of the issue did not generally reflect this. Mr. McWilliam said that the County Council considered that paths across Leicestershire farmland were generally very well maintained and had expressed this view in its press releases.

NOTED:

- (a) That footpath problems could be reported by email at - www.leics.gov.uk/paths or by telephone: 0800 62 62 03.
- (b) That a report would be brought to a future meeting of the Forum to update members on progress with the Rights of Way Implementation programme.

PW

(ii) Conduct of the Local Access Forum

The Chairman referred to Paper E on the agenda, which outlined his personal view for the way ahead for the Forum, particularly with a view to continuing to improve the effectiveness of its meetings.

- Role of the Sub Groups and working parties

Mr. McWilliam said that he expected that the LTP Sub Groups would meet at the start of the next financial year. If particular issues arose meetings, or perhaps more events along the lines of the half-day seminar, could be arranged.

- Times of Forum meetings

The Forum agreed that it might be useful on occasion to meet at 4.00pm, perhaps for a site visit or informal discussion prior to a meeting.

- Achievements of the LAF

The Forum accepted that whilst it had voiced some frustration with the slow progress towards national targets it had made a number of important contributions - Mr. Williams highlighted the Parish area consultations and the seminar.

It was suggested that the Forum might contribute on more site-specific issues. Officers undertook to consider the inclusion of such matters on future agendas.

PW / E.
McW

(iii) Natural England

The Forum discussed the role of NE, and commented on the helpfulness of its local officers - which contrasted with the apparent lack of commitment to progress rights of way issues from the national organisation.

(iv) Network Rail

Ms. Allen referred to proposals for the closure of two level crossings in Leicestershire and Rutland, and suggested that walkers and riders would probably respond differently to proposed diversions.

177. Strategic Planning and the place of the LAF.

Mr. Williams reported on changes to the strategic planning process and the range of Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) under preparation. He explained that following the publication of the Planning White Paper in May 2007 the Government would soon be publishing its recommendations for reform of the planning system. Emphasis was being placed on green infrastructure (ie: country parks, nature reserves, footpaths - areas of open space generally). Funding for identified Growth Points such as the '6Cs' area would contribute to this.

Mr. Williams referred to the draft Sustainable Community Strategy, on which members of the Forum had commented in December, and some of the priority areas which had been identified. This would be delivered through the Local Area Agreement (LAA). A Multi-Area Agreement (MAA) with Leicester would be finalised in June; this included a range of work on environmental issues.

Action by

It was proposed that officers should identify relevant issues in strategic planning publications/consultations and refer these to the Forum's Planning Sub Group (if the volume of work proved too large the arrangement would be reviewed).

AGREED:

That strategic planning consultations be referred to the Forum's Planning Sub Group by officers, as appropriate.

PW

178. Agenda items for the next meeting.

Mr. Williams advised the Forum that the time to consider the issue of a possible Eco-Town would be after the announcement of the Government's shortlist - at which stage the consultation process would begin.

AGREED:

(a) That the next meeting could start at the usual time of 6.00pm.

(b) That the following items be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum -

- Feedback from the seminar
- Presentation by the River Access Group (Ms. Phipps to be invited to attend again)

JB / E.
McW

6.00pm - 8.20pm
6 February 2008

CHAIRMAN