

Borough of Bedford Local Access Forum

Minutes of meeting held on 4th April 2011 at
Committee Room 2, Borough Hall commencing at
6.30pm

Members

Bob Wallace - Chairman

Steve Bunstead

James Russell

Nigel Jacobs

Barry Ingram

Observers

Phill Fox – Bedford Borough Council

Simon Fisher – Bedford Borough Council

Lizzie Barnicoat – Secretary

Apologies

Les Geary

Andy Gerrard

Graham Watson

David Binns

David Mitchell

1. Welcome by Chairman

Bob Wallace welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

2. Public Questions

There were no public questions received, as no members of the public present.

3. Apologies

See above.

4. Minutes of previous meeting held on 21st February 2011 to be agreed

These had been circulated to all members prior to the meeting; it was unanimously agreed by those present to be signed as a true and accurate record by the Chairman.

5. **Matters arising from previous meeting**

5.1 Bedford Borough Local Access Forum website – enquiries had continued to be made by BW and the Secretary with NC regarding the possible use of Project Involve to provide this facility, however, to date no response had been received which was frustrating. It was discussed how to progress this important matter forward, it was agreed that as NC had not been in attendance at recent meetings that Secretary to approach Sue Hinde at Borough Council, and SF/PF to liaise to approach appropriate officer within the Council also. It was noted that following the forthcoming Borough elections and allocation of portfolios including Rural Affairs that the relevant Borough Councillor to be invited to future Forum meetings.

Action

Matter to be pursued – SF, PF and Secretary

5.2 Distribution of logo - PF detailed the background of this to members and reported this is ongoing.

Action

Alternative format of logos to be requested from Design Team - Phill Fox

5.3 Eastern Region Conference feedback – BW reported that himself, SB, PF and SF had attended the event and a full write up by BW will be circulated via the Secretary. Items discussed included the withdrawal of Higher Level Stewardship schemes, a short update was given at the meeting and representatives from Suffolk had organised to meet with the relevant government Minister regarding this. Over the course of the day Darren Braine from Natural England reported that the educational visits aspect of the scheme is being reinstated. Forums in general are also being supported by Ministers and being encouraged to be more influential in relation to statutory requirements as per the big society concept. Other items discussed at the event included: promotional leaflets from Natural England being stopped, Norfolk area maintenance budget reduced dramatically, how Forum's can integrate with planners, and Suffolk changing who is responsible for their country parks. Overall, it was felt that the event had been very interesting and informative, particularly regarding how different local authorities were dealing with the reduction of resources available to them.

Action

BW to forward report for circulation – BW and Secretary

5.4 Submission of comments regarding Goldington Green – the Secretary reported that this had been completed.

5.5 Staffing structure – SF gave overview of the new combined Countryside and Parks team which now falls within the wider community section of the Borough Council, and noted the recent in-house transition made with DSD so that a more direct relationship can be maintained. The department will have a focused approach, SF reiterated that this period of change means that a number of areas are being looked at more closely

including opportunities and constraints regarding greater in-house woodland management such as trees, parks and greenspaces. It was felt that a better understanding for members could be obtained thorough a written structure to be circulated.

Action

SF to forward structure for circulation – SF and Secretary

5.6 Letter of thanks to MB – this had been done. SF detailed the initial responsibilities of the current countryside staff, noting that the resource for a Definitive Map Officer is still available and that over the coming months the workings of the department would be looked at to ensure efficiency but also that statutory requirements and obligations of the Borough as the local authority continue to be met.

At this point of the meeting an additional update was received regarding the progression of the Green Lanes Management Plan, SF and PF reported that the delivery of the document continues to be delayed. The closing date for BRCC and the finalised document is 21st April, members were aware and reiterated the importance of this document and the Forum reviewing it, therefore it was greed that it would be beneficial for the Forum to consider the document at the next meeting.

Action

Future agenda item regarding Green Lanes Management Plan – PF/SF and Secretary

Other items to be covered during the meeting.

6. Rights of Way Network Issues

a) CAMS database – PF detailed the new updated online system installation and noted that the company are coming in tomorrow to talk staff through the new update. This will mean that shortly the GIS system will also be compatible with CAMS which will be of great benefit to the Rights of Way Officers. The new CAMS system does include modules relating to volunteering so once a consistency has been established amongst the team, an approach to wider involvement can then be looked at. Members were keen to understand the realistic timescale for this and PF felt that it would be a few months and it was suggested that a possible approach could be for some volunteers to meet with Borough Officers and go through the working system as a trial to find out the advantages and possible disadvantages of this new approach before access is made available for all. It was also felt that the system should allow people to be able to use the facility to plan walks as well as being a tool for surveying/maintenance matters, and it may well be that in the coming months that only one of these is live.

b) Equestrian access – A supporting document from the British Horse Society was circulated to all prior to the meeting, members discussed aspects of equestrian access including damage horses can do to paths during certain ground conditions as well as current available access for horse drawn vehicles. The correspondence received was in regards to encouraging equestrian representations on Forums, VB and other members were currently representatives of the countryside user group so no further action needed.

c) Responsibilities of rights of way users – the Secretary to circulate draft letter as per

action at last meeting. The members discussed the current signage available from the Borough and other sources to educate countryside users, detailed signs are available to landowners to inform users such as flagging up that livestock are present in the field for example. SB added that signage available from the NFU and it was agreed that it would be beneficial if a selection of available signage was circulated amongst members. It was also felt that it is particularly important to manage both the landowners and users expectations, JR added that he had noticed recently that complaints of misuse had increased. Suggestions discussed to raise awareness included liaison with neighbouring Local Access Forums to see what action others are taking and if a collaborative approach would be better, SB agreed to raise at Central Bedfordshire Access Forum. In addition, the Bedfordshire Walking Festival and farmers open days could be used as opportunities to promote awareness.

Action

Circulation of draft letter of awareness – Secretary

Circulation of available signage – PF and SB

Raising of topic at Central Bedfordshire Access Forum - SB

d) Seasonal Vegetation clearance – BW reiterated that moving to three seasonal vegetation cuts means that the timing of the cuts are now very important, and it was considered how best to engage with parishes so that clearer understanding of which paths should be done. PF raised that the forthcoming Town and Parish Conference event would be a good chance to find out the initial thoughts of parishes on how best to approach this. It was agreed that it would be beneficial for parishes to have a pdf version of the paths within their parish sent to them so they have access to an up to date document and that this would then hopefully trigger greater communication links. JR noted that the Borough should be formulating a future strategy for the management of resources particularly due to the potential savings a longer term maintenance contract can bring, SF and PF gave assurance that this is an area of opportunity that will be looked into in detail shortly.

Action

Circulation of relevant definitive map electronically to parishes – PF

At this point of the meeting SF detailed the most recent update regarding the Network Rail bridge which was raised at the previous meeting, Network Rail have been applying pressure to the Borough. However, MB had researched the matter and found conclusive evidence that a right of way does exist which has been reported back to Network Rail, and to date no feedback.

7. A short break was taken by members.

8. **Annual Report of Forum**

BW reported that the Secretary had formulated a draft report and PF had formatted the document, a draft was circulated to all members present and it was agreed that it was an informative document and a true reflection of the Forum's work in its inaugural year., PF and Secretary to continue working on document.

Action

Completion of document to be worked on – PF and Secretary

9. Rights Of Way Improvement Plan

PF reported that unfortunately since the last meeting there was little to report on the document, however, assured members that the document is now the main focus of his work and 12th April is the deadline for the initial full draft which will work in parallel with the framework of Borough policies. Members discussed the format of the plan in relation to the overall presentation of the plan and policies as mindful that the bulkier the document the less appealing it becomes for people to want to read. It was agreed that the Forum as part of its statutory duty should see the draft document in its entirety before it is presented to Borough Councillors for consideration. The document will then undergo a public consultation period to a large number of stakeholders including parish councils and user groups, suggestions of additional interested parties were welcomed.

Action

Final draft Rights Of Way Improvement Plan to be circulated to Forum members – PF

10. Volunteering Review

BW reported from the Borough's recent meeting held in Bromham on the overview of the initial feedback from the review, DB, BW and NJ had attended. It was highlighted that a lot of volunteering goes on presently through Pride of Bedford and it was discussed how countryside users could be encouraged to engage as well. SF detailed that the review conducted by BRCC is close to completion and when available, which is expected shortly, to be circulated amongst members and discussed in further detail at next meeting. Members gave ideas of how to engage with users and encourage greater participation with the key being to use volunteers to then create more volunteers as Wilstead's P3 group had effectively grown in this way.

Action

Circulation of completed review report to members and future agenda item – SF and Secretary

At this point of the meeting BI took leave.

11. Forum funding and independent Secretariat 2011-12

BW expressed that he felt it worked well with an independent secretariat and proposed that this continued in 2011-12. PF detailed that the local authority access development budget had not been decreased and therefore neither had the Forum's in the forthcoming financial year, however, no assurance of the authority's future budgets was known by officers at present. It was unanimously agreed by all those present that the Forum recommend to the local authority to continue with the independent secretariat till 31st March 2012.

Action

Recommendation to be forwarded to Steve Tomlin – PF

12. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

It was felt due to the numbers of members present it would be appropriate to carry this agenda item forward to the next meeting. Members discussed the current membership of the Forum and felt that it provided a good range of members from a number of different user groups. It was noted that some members had not been in attendance recently so local authority to contact IR, LW and KA, in addition SF and PF to look at additional recruitment.

The dates of the meetings for the year it was suggested to be the first Monday of every other month as this seems to work well. Future agenda items member's suggestions included: review of terms of reference, declaration of interests, Green Lanes management plan, volunteering review, engagement with planning (August) and input from members of the rights of way team (Yvonne Gregory to be invited to June meeting).

Action

Contact to be made by local authority with IR, KA and LW – PF/SF
Setting of meeting programme for 2011-12 – Secretary

13. Any Other Notified Business

No items raised.
Meeting closed at 9.05pm

Signed:

Date: