

Borough of Bedford Local Access Forum

Minutes of meeting held on Monday November
25th 2013 at Borough Hall commencing at 6.30pm

Members

Bob Wallace - Chairman
Nigel Jacobs
Ann Kennedy
Barry Ingram
David Mitchell
James Russell – Vice Chairman
Brian Cowling

Observers

Phill Fox – Bedford Borough Council
Simon Fisher – Bedford Borough Council
Lizzie Barnicoat – Secretary
Mark Fitzpatrick
Karen D’Macy
Stewart Briggs – BBC Director of Service

Apologies

David Binns
Steve Bumstead
Andy Gerrard

1. Welcome by Chairman

Bob Wallace welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanking everyone for attending. Ann Kennedy was welcomed as a new Forum member, and Stewart Briggs Director of Service was introduced.

2. Stewart Briggs – Bedford Borough Council Director of Service containing Rights of Way

SB was welcomed giving an overview of his role and detailing the changes within the directorate, the cuts have resulted in a need for restructure of senior management, so Rights of Way and Access will now be within SB's directorate which also includes leisure and culture. It was noted that overall the Borough Council have reduced the number of Assistant Directors from 4 to 3. The various models had been looked at during the restructure process and one of the areas had been moving Rights of Way over to the Highways team to allow ease of securing funds for projects. The Definitive Map Officer role has been increased as the Borough Council have recognised this as an area that is needed to be developed further, so appropriate capacity has been built in going

forwards.

Forum members asked if there has been any sensitivity analysis done to see if the service is viable, SB detailed the minimum statutory requirement would be used as a baseline.

It was raised whether funding would be allocated on statutory duties within Rights of Way rather than on a discretionary basis, the processing of orders will be done through the highways team, so the work is within one team.

Forum members felt that there needs to be a change in culture within the local authority to allow a more streamlined approach by reviewing working practices with having a clear prioritisation exercise to ensure there is a clear direction going forwards which would also allow the Forum to better advise and assist the local authority.

Members questioned how the local authority will be managing the volunteer base that has been successfully generated, as well as the streamlined reporting system, as there is a worry amongst members that Rights of Way will be forgotten about. SB explained the process and reporting will be done more effectively through the Highways Helpdesk, as well as there being a greater access to funds.

Increasing the links and Rights of Way awareness through the electorate as well as through the local parishes needs to be pursued as well as developing visibility online for members of the public. All these would also allow local people to become more engaged not just with access but the local authority in general.

The Rights of Way guide that had been worked on by the Forum had been circulated to members, as raising awareness is felt to be a key aspect, SB was asked for his view on this document.

In terms of future funding for the Right of Way work streams SB detailed that the local authority would have to look at what has been committed to in the ROWIP by looking at prioritisation and pick out the areas to be focused on and ensure that it is realistic. The review structure of the document was discussed and SB has not decided whether to review the current plan or adjust it when a new plan is produced. It was noted that the Definitive Map work has been omitted from the ROWIP, and that the budget has not been set aside to date. It was confirmed that MB's hours have been increased and will be reviewed in due course but not in next year's budget.

There was a concern raised that through planning there is no current system in place to locate linking a planning application to the location and whether there is a corresponding Rights of Way, which does not help organisations trying to respond it was highlighted.

The reporting Officers for the future meetings would be the Highways Team Leader, Andrew Prigmore, it was noted.

SB was thanked for his time and expressed he was happy to return in a years time to hear the Forums comments.

Promotion of Rights of Way and Access across Bedford Borough

3. The latest guide had been circulated, NJ and JR had contributed greatly to the document with the idea to send it out to Borough Council members, they were thanked for their help. To capture the readers attention is a key item, understanding the purpose of the leaflet would allow for the document to be further refined. The use of the guide to promote the rights of way aspects or the LAF being promoted what felt to be a careful balance.

In the covering letter with the document it is to be highlighted that the LAF is a statutory organisation and the letters need to draw the readers in, highlighting the vast free public

asset. The guide to go out with the covering letter which is then to be ready for wider circulation from January 2014, it is also to be sent to Cllr Tim Hill as a test by the Secretary.

4. **Administrative Matters**

Public Questions – it was raised by a member of the public regarding maintenance of byways is virtually non-existent, Forty Foot Lane photos show the state of a section of a byway. From a number of users perspectives it is a dangerous area, although a management plan is in place, this area of the byways is not seemingly being resolved. The Forum noted BRCC were commissioned to do a plan, and questioned why this document had not been actioned or prioritised with an allocation of supporting funds. As no proper plan is in place the byways have deteriorated, SF detailed that some clearing work has been done in other byways but that there is no specific funding allocation. SF will be undertaking a site visit shortly with the Area Officer, where it is hoped a practical plan can be presented to the local community. Members shared their historical knowledge of how these areas were maintained previously by the appropriate authorities. The discussions highlighted the need for clear planning to be in place with the suggestion of having a prioritised list, then if parishes are willing to contribute then they will be moved up the list.

It was requested that the local authority share their plan for byways and maintenance programme going forwards, as well as consideration for the local authority raising monies from other organisations for a cycle path.

Minutes of previous meetings held in July and October 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.

LAF Annual Report 2012-13 – the final version had been circulated to all members.

Matters arising from previous meeting -

As part of BW's Chairs report which had been circulated there was an update that 2 out of the 40 schemes for the Paths 4 Community fund are within Bedfordshire, which is pleasing.

5. **LAF Engagement Plan:**

The LAF Engagement Plan details the role of the LAF, but shows the authority needs to listen to the users. Forum members felt it could be better if the Plan was acted upon, noting the document sets out the roles of the different organisations in doing this. The document does not address communications with section 94 bodies and this role, having the RoW guide as a useful resource tool may help promote this in the future. It was noted that Sport England, English Heritage, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, and Parish Councils are examples of section 94 bodies.

Having more policy documents to be reviewed by the Forum is an area the Forum should be consulted on it was agreed by members.

6. **Borough Updates**

A number of updates had been provided ahead of the meeting, these included specific comments were welcomed on the Definitive Map Officer report, which included updated work from July, as well as a task plan update circulated by SF. PF had also kept member updated between meetings of the volunteering work.

SF reported that the Orbit homes appeal against the modification against the Rights of Way aspect of the Section 106, the applicants have withdrawn their appeal and agreed to pay the previously agreed amount.

7. **Any Other Notified Business**

None received.

8. **Next Meeting**

A meeting was set for **Monday 17th March at 6.30pm at Borough Hall.**
Meeting closed at 9.05pm

Signed:

Date: