

Borough of Bedford Local Access Forum

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 1st July 2014 at
Borough Hall commencing at 6.30pm

Members

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

Observers

Phill Fox – Bedford Borough Council
Andrew Prigmore – Bedford Borough Council
Lizzie Barnicoat – Secretary
Apologies
Brian Cowling
Mark Fitzpatrick
Mark Egar

1. Welcome by Chairman

Bob Wallace welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanking everyone for attending.

2. Minutes of previous meeting held in March 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.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

It was reported that the **Rights of Way Guide** document had been circulated to all Borough Councillors, Cllr David Sawyer had responded to BW commenting that it was a very informative document.

It was noted that the **by-way action plan** work is ongoing, however, it was added that this has not formally commenced. **Action: Future Item**

It was reported that the **staff structure** document had not been circulated as there are some possible changes to the team structure. **Action: Future Item**

4. Updates from Bedford Borough Council

4.1 Work programme updates

AP updated members that a Rights of Way Officer will be leaving at the end of August, there will be an internal advert placed for a senior member of staff to lead the team. AP has been reviewing the team working over the last few months, with looking at producing a more generic overall work focus rather than area focused working. The possible opportunities and challenges that this presents were discussed, such as having individuals being more work based focus, for example, one individual be tasked with looking at seasonal vegetation cuts for the whole of the borough area, rather than each Officer looking at their own individual area. This new approach will be taken forward as tasks come round.

There has also been a review of embedding the RoWIP which is needed to be taken forward and is currently being built into personal development reviews which are taking place with staff. This new approach is being shared with Officers at present, and as part of the restructure in the department this has led to the role of a senior Right Of Way Officer being recruited for who will be able to offer support to colleagues. Members were supportive of this positive step forwards as well as seeing the greater interaction between the Officers and local Parish Councils. It was suggested that Officers offering to include rights of way in the annual visits that parish Councils get every year regarding highways, would again raise the profile of the network.

AP reported that surveys of the network are currently being undertaken, which is being done in more detail than has been done previously. There will also be a move towards a more structured and streamlined reporting system so people can log, and easily monitor items reported, this was outlined and will not only be for Officers but members of the public to access. A web based tool was detailed which is felt to be the easiest going forward for users, the reporting system would also allow you to see other items that have been reported in the area so their progress can be monitored too.

Members enquired how the local authority intend to use volunteers effectively with an example being give of how Central Bedfordshire Council use their volunteers. Members reiterated that it is important for volunteers to feel valuable. It was highlighted that CBC is resourced differently to Bedford Borough Council and that the local authority are aware of the volunteer resource base and how to expand and develop this.

It was noted that Pertenhall is being used as the trial parish in terms of the path surveys which are being done in greater detail, a new methodology is being trialled as well and then following a review of the feedback this will be rolled out. The surveys will be a whole team approach and the next parish will not be looked at until all data has been in putted for the current parish that the team are working on, to ensure complete data sets are produced. This is being done by looking at the RoWIP, the number of kilometres to be covered as detailed within the plan and then the team working together to get this done. Members questioned how realistic would it be for the team to secure appropriate software that would support the immediate uploading of information while the Officers are carrying out the surveys, which is something the local authority are looking into.

The circulated work programme update was discussed further, including a question from a member regarding the SVC's and a number of overgrown areas they had seen in Riseley and Wootton. PF welcomed the feedback, noting that in general there had been no phone calls received reporting issues, the only issues that had been reported were where farmers had not always cut a headland path. Issues were welcomed to be reported wherever possible so they could be addressed, as this is the first time that the work had been done in-house by the local authority so it would expected that there may be some issues. It was noted that at a future point like with highways were local parishes receive a grass cutting contribution in terms of highways, that this would be offered to

local parishes in respect of the SVC's.

From the work programme report it was commented that feedback to the local Parish Council is vital, and that it is still not getting though, though the team are being encouraged to do this at every opportunity. It was also suggested that user groups should be communicated with as well as often where work has been done covered a number of parishes. Communication amongst the team was also highlighted by members as being important so Officers are not working in isolation.

AP will be meeting the Portfolio Holder next week, so will raise the matter of representation a Forum meetings and the department will also be inviting the Mayor to attend the Bedfordshire Walking Festival.

4.2 RoWIP update

There had been documents circulated by PF ahead of the meeting relating to the progress made to date with the coding system used outlined. The areas feedback by Forum members had been highlighted so the priorities could be seen and certain actions had been deleted such as the Green Wheel associated items. PF welcomed further feedback and comments from members, highlighting that team members work programmes will be aligned to this revised document though their personal development plans. There is also a target included to the 2016 deadline regarding the excluded area map work. PF detailed to members the significance of the gated blocked way in Queens Park and what precedent this may potentially set with a public enquiry on this expected in November. There is a known time-scale which will allow quantifiable time to be allocated to the excluded area map work, as the local authority are aware of this and will ensure that Officers are given appropriate amounts of time to deal with this work. The Forum felt it would be useful to see the size of the workload and task to understand how much Officer time and resources may be needed for this. Other headlines within the Plan continue to be surveying (which has commenced), waymarking posts, capital investment, volunteer engagement as well as the excluded area map work in addition to promoting the benefits of the network. It was agreed to review any further members comments at the next meeting. **Action: Members**

Rights of Way Guide

5. This had already been covered and it was felt the natural next step would be to send the document to all Parish Councils. It was agreed to consider sending a follow up letter to elected members. **Action: PF/Secretary/BI**

Administrative matters

6. **6.1 LAF Annual Review Form** It was noted that the Secretary had sent this document in.
6.2 Annual BoBLAF Report This is being collated. **Action: Secretary**

Any Other Notified Business

7. There was the suggestion of a potential new route from the Retail Park to the Park N' Ride going under the railway and through the new development. PF detailed that there are historic public access issues with Network Rail and so it is unlikely the local authority would be able to secure such a scheme.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair BW had previously expressed wish to stand down from the role of Chair, it was agreed that JR to continue as Vice Chair with SB to be the new Chair.

BW was thanked for his sterling work as Chair and dedication to the role.

9. **Next Meeting**

A meeting was set for Thursday 4th September 2014 **at 6.30pm at Borough Hall.**
Meeting closed at 9.15pm

Signed:

Date: