

SOMERSET LOCAL ACCESS FORUM
MINUTES FOR THE MEETING HELD ON
12TH MAY 2016
AT RUISHTON VILLAGE HALL

SLAF Members present:

James Bateman, Anthony Gray, Alan Carr, Virginia Jones, Ann Finn, Roger Conway, Hugh Warmington, Julia Gadd, and Cllr David Fothergill. Suzy Dymond-White was on telephone conference.

SCC Officers present:

Pete Hobley – Rights of Way Service Manager, Sarah Littler – Project Manager (Rights of Way), Emma Parsons and Natasha Tremelling – Joint Secretaries to SLAF.

Guest:

Andrew Chester - from Natural England.

Welcome, Apologies and Notes of absence:

Roger Conway welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were made around the table.

Apologies were received from David Lovejoy and Trish Coombes.

Election of Chairperson

Roger Conway reminded everyone that he is stepping down as Chairperson on advice from his doctor.

Trish Coombes proposed Hugh Warmington for the position of Chairperson.

Hugh Warmington proposed Julia Gadd for the position of Chairperson, Virginia Jones seconded this proposition. Julia Gadd was unanimously voted in as Chairperson.

Election of Vice Chair

Pete Hobley reminded members that Trish Coombes had also stood down from her position of Vice Chair.

Hugh Warmington proposed Ann Finn for the position of Vice Chair, this was seconded by Roger Conway and the members voted unanimously in favour.

Minutes & Matters arising from previous meeting held on the 7th October 2015

Minutes from the previous meeting held 7th October 2015 were approved.

Item no: 7.10.15a – Pete Hobley advised that there are currently enough members of SLAF to meet the minimum requirements and a recruitment exercise is not needed at present. **No Action.**

Item no: 7.10.15b – Pete Hobley reported that the total list of missing bridges was about 32 and that these were spread throughout the county with no particular area being significantly affected. There is a healthy capital budget but priority is on repairing dangerous bridges ahead of missing bridges.

Item no: 7.10.15d – Anthony Gray asked for an update in relation to the problem of landowners not clearing maize thereby preventing walkers from accessing legitimate Rights of Way. A discussion took place as to the demarcation point of when maize may become a problem. Suzy Dymond-White commented that it would be at the point when the footpath cannot be accessed. Pete Hobley informed members that Officers work with a rule of between six inches to one foot height. Pete Hobley also informed members that serial offenders are sent letters annually to remind them of their responsibilities. **Done.**

Item no: 7.10.15f – Pete Hobley reported back to SLAF members that following his conversations with SCC's Tree Officer a survey of every tree adjacent to every route within the county is not possible. Pete Hobley informed members that the issue was about having a proportionate response to danger. **Done.**

England Coast Path – Axe route options – Andrew Chester, Natural England

Andrew Chester from Natural England introduced himself to the SLAF members as the team member responsible for the Somerset section of the England Coast Path project to establish a 2,700 mile continuous path around the entire English coastline.

Andrew Chester updated SLAF members on the opening of the new stretch of the England Coast Path in West Somerset from Brean Down to Minehead which took place in March of this year.

Andrew Chester informed SLAF members of his duty to consult them on the final part of Somerset's section of the England Coast Path which aims to connect Brean Down with Weston-Super-Mare. Andrew Chester proposed to fulfil this duty by his attendance at this meeting and by prompting a discussion on the options put forward by Natural England. An enclosed map includes the options and analysis presented by Natural England.

Andrew Chester indicated the blue route marked on the map as Option 1. This route offers views of the sea, as expected of a coastal route, followed by river views leading to the first crossing point at Brean Cross Sluice. The difficulty with this option

however, is the Roost Sites for mixed Waterbirds at High Tide as indicated by the red shaded areas on the map. Andrew Chester informed the members that Natural England would almost certainly not be able to propose a route which may disrupt the habitat of these birds as they are protected under European Law. Andrew Chester reported that dropping this proposed path down the bank to give a greater distance from the birds' habitat would also be problematic as the expected views from a coastal path would be eliminated.

Andrew Chester indicated the orange route from Brean village centre to Brean Cross Sluice as Option 2. Andrew Chester indicated strong local support of this 'shortcut' alternative which could be accessible for pushchairs and wheelchairs and cyclists.

Ann Finn asked whether horse riders had been considered and whether the orange route could also serve as a Bridleway.

Andrew Chester pointed out that this option was originally proposed by Greenways & Cycleroles Ltd, and that group would be best placed to answer those questions. Some discussion was had as to where the Bridleway would link to and the usefulness of an unconnected Bridleway. Ann Finn pointed out that the beach was frequently used by horse riders.

Hugh Warmington questioned the 'coastal' aspect of a route which cut across land so as to miss out the spur of land which is Brean Down.

Andrew Chester agreed that this was a weakness of this route and added that an anomalous result of Option 2 would be to make the seaward land of this route fully accessible, by rights, to the public at large.

Andrew Chester presented Option 3 as a hybrid of the first two options; whereby the blue route would serve as the major Coastal Path and be accessible during the time of year when the protected birds would be least disturbed; the orange route however, would be available all year round and serve in place of the blue route when it required closing to protect the birds' habitat.

Anthony Gray asked how long the blue route would be closed for annually and at what time of year.

Andrew Chester indicated that it could be for half the year or longer but would be unlikely to be through the summer months.

Councillor David Fothergill asked how the closure of the route would be enforced.

Andrew Chester indicated that it would make sense to use the same process as is currently used on a route in Steart which is also only available for certain times of the year. This includes signed lockable gates installed at both ends of the route as well as fingerposts at earlier relevant junctions that can be switched as needed.

Suzy Dymond-White pointed out that it would make sense for the Natural England website to indicate the variation in any route according to time of year.

Andrew Chester agreed with this and remarked that the date of the gates being opened and closed each year would remain the same.

Sarah Littler remarked that the route at Steart was a great success and there was positive feedback from user groups.

Ann Finn asked for clarity with regards to the rights of access to the public with the land seaward of any coastal route.

Andrew Chester pointed out that the land seaward of the orange route consisted predominantly of caravan parks and farmland; caravan parks are excepted under the general rule of full access but the farmland is not. Andrew Chester remarked that no user group or individual had relayed to Natural England that this was a positive outcome of choosing this route. Option 3 bypasses this anomalous situation as a consequence of the blue route remaining as the main route.

It was agreed to conclude the consultation two weeks from today to give SLAF members time to comment. Andrew Chester gave out the team email address of westcoastalaccess@naturalengland.gov.uk for these comments.

Julia Gadd asked SLAF to send comments to her in the first instance so that she could compile them to send on to Natural England.

7pm Councillor David Fothergill, Sarah Littler and Andrew Chester left the meeting.

Terms of Reference – Roger Conway

Roger Conway requested this item to be on the agenda for the purpose of considering what proactive measures SLAF members and user groups could take considering the restrained budgets of the County Council and the resources available amongst the membership in terms of a breadth of expertise.

Roger Conway stressed that this was not a demand to take on extra work but an exploration of options available if the membership so wished.

Roger Conway indicated a wish for the organisation to not wholly concern itself with the monitoring and reporting of issues but to get into actual work and so help Rights of Way. He pointed out that within the SLAF membership and that of the main 'user' groups there existed a wealth of knowledge and expertise that could be used to progress the work of RoW, both in the office and in the field.

Pete Holey agreed that Rights of Way were limited by resources available and acknowledged that their input to the forum was greatly reduced when compared with

past years. Pete Hobley remarked that this should not stop the forum from exploring options and extending their remit.

Ann Finn remarked that other LAF organisations do go further and become involved in Rights of Way work.

Both Suzy Dymond-White and Julia Gadd indicated past and present desires to be more proactive.

Pete Hobley said that he would be happy to receive any examples from other counties of LAF organisations becoming more closely involved in Rights of Way work.

Roger Conway asked for a vote in principal of revising the SLAF's Terms of Reference, Virginia Jones seconded the vote and it was passed unanimously.

Feedback from LAF National Conference

David Lovejoy could not be present at this meeting but a message was passed on through Emma Parsons which indicated that there was a positive move amongst LAFs nationally to become more proactive. Any questions please send to David by email and he will be happy to answer.

Bridges & Structures Inspection and Maintenance policy – Pete Hobley

Pete Hobley referred members to the draft documentation provided drawing attention to one subsequent change to the Monitoring of closed bridges (page 4).

Roger Conway expressed his welcome to documentation, procedure and the standardisation of bridge design.

Pete Hobley remarked that the design had been reached through a common sense approach to reach a satisfactory hybrid of recommendations. The advantages of standardising the design would be fewer resources needed to build and maintain Rights of Way Bridges & Structures.

Any Other Business

Ann Finn enquired as to how many officers were now processing Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs). Pete Hobley replied that his department had recently lost two of the three officers that performed this role. The three posts remain however and interviews have been held for these roles.

Ann Finn asked how many DMMOs had been processed this year. Pete Hobley indicated that he will report back to the members with that figure.

Having attended a public consultation over the development of the A358/A303, Ann Finn expressed concern over an apparent lack of awareness of Rights of Way by the

developers. Pete Hobley informed the members that he had been to a consultation meeting for this development.

Pete Hobley informed the members that underpass route connecting Hatch Beauchamp and the Neroche Herepath Trail has reopened. This follows on from SCC successful work with the forestry commission; whereby a letter has been drafted which will be sent out to the relevant District and Parish Councils, driving the matter forward.

Anthony Gray raised the issue of Bulls being kept in fields where there is a public Right of Way. A discussion followed with regards to safe access to Rights of Way and duties of responsibility. Pete Hobley informed the membership that there is responsibility on both sides with regards to the use of Rights of Way through privately owned land.

Pete Hobley drew the members' attention to SCC's launch of a new interactive mapping website called Exploring Somerset. Pete Hobley emphasised that this website had been given a 'soft' launch as the data migration to it experienced some difficulties initially. Pete Hobley expressed the expectation that this new website would be found to be more user friendly, particularly in terms of the panning tool, and that its search facility was more intelligent than previous. A member of the public who attended the meeting agreed that it was very user friendly and to send on her congratulations to the team.

Pete Hobley informed the members that The Deregulation Act 2015 would not result in much deregulation with regards to Rights of Way. However the changes are prompting a major policy reform. The right to apply for diversions and several changes to modifications legislations means the policies will need reviewing. The forum will be consulted and this may involve a possible extra meeting. Pete Hobley will be in touch.

David Lovejoy made a representation that he found afternoon meetings easier to attend overall.

Roger Conway pointed out that historically evening meetings had been used as an opportunity to run a field or case study event during the afternoon.

Julia Gadd suggested Langport as a location for the next meeting. Pete Hobley raised the point that the current membership of SLAF appeared to be from the east of the county and Langport may be a more convenient location. Julia Gadd expressed confidence that Langport Town Hall would be a useable venue.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting has been provisionally agreed to be held on Thursday 27 October 2016 in Langport Town Hall.

Summary of Actions Arising

Item No	Details	Action	Update/Outcome
12.05.16a	Comments from members in relation to the Axe Route Options of the England Coast path to be collated by Julia Gadd before passing on to Andrew Chester of Natural England.	All SLAF members by 26/5/16	
12.05.16b	Research and forward to Pete Hobley any examples from other counties of LAF organisations becoming more closely involved in Rights of Way work.	All SLAF members	
12.05.16c	Pete Hobley to report back to members the figure indicating how many DMMOs had been processed this year.	Pete Hobley	