

SOMERSET LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF 15TH MAY 2013 AT RUISHTON VILLAGE HALL, TAUNTON

Slaf Members attending:

Greg Jones - Chairman, Hugh Warmington, Ann Finn, Cliff Puddy, Trish Coombes,

SCC Officers attending:

Pete Hobley - Rights of Way Service Manager, Laurence Smith - Rights of Way Legal Manager, Sally Vickery, Rights of Way Warden and SLAF Secretary

1. Apologies:

Apologies accepted from Paul Heal, Penny Richards, Peter Kidner, Wendy Welland, Roger Conway, and David Perris.

He asked for member's thoughts on the position of those members who do not give apologies and do not turn up. The two elected Members had not attended any meetings during 2012 nor had they participated in any e mail consultations and it was agreed that as all members are volunteers they should be contacted to see if they wanted to continue.

ACTION: Contact SCC Councillor David Hall and WSDC Councillor Morgan to say that if they cannot attend then SLAF needs to find replacement members.

2. SCC Rights of Way Officer Update:

Pete Hobley updated members on changes to Rights of Way (RoW) since their last meeting.

The group had been restructured from April 1st 2013 and are now in Highways Group, managed by Geoff Dight. Highways are a large section within the Council, with Rights of Way a small section sitting within that group, but this offers lots of opportunities for better joined up working. Group Managers in Operations have reduced in number from eleven to four and Sarah Littler, formerly Rights of Way Service Manager has moved to working on the Hinkley project. SLAF administration would now be dealt with by the Business Support group and the secretary role would move to that section. Harvey Siggs is the portfolio holder for highways, replacing David Hall for Rights of Way.

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) savings have been agreed, with some capitalisation of salary which will reduce capital expenditure. There are cuts of £55,000 in the RoW revenue budget over the next three years with RoW Wardens still at risk of redundancy with their number proposed to be cut from seven to six.

To meet some of these changes RoW are trying to work differently - with more onus on landowners' duties and scaling back development work with a reduction on the Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding.

Volunteers still play an important part in engagement with the public and their RoW network. Last year the RoW volunteers surpassed a target of 10,000 hours by 1,000 hours and there is now 90% coverage of the county by Parish

Path Liaison Officers (PPOs) and 37 volunteer strimmers. Hence there should be a decrease in vegetation clearance costs.

Inevitably with reduced resources, the 'ease of use percentage' measurement figure has fallen to 77.7% from 80.2%. Possibly the wet conditions last year contributed to the reduction as well. The target continues to be to maintain or improve every year but the impact is expected to show over the next two or three years. Members agree that it could not continue to decline and maybe some radical thought was needed. The parish of Kingston St Mary was mentioned as they assign a path to each volunteer. SLAF members agreed this was an excellent idea to promote to those parishes not already involved with the PPO scheme and that the best way to reach those parishes might be through the District Councils with a motivated individual. PH agreed that a more holistic approach was needed as lack of future funding might curtail management of many different schemes.

3 The Future of Somerset Local Access Forum

The Chairman proposed and led discussion on this topic with the key question being 'how useful is the Forum?'. The last year was seen as being inactive in SLAF and at the Regional meetings other Forums seem to be more proactive, especially relating to Planning and access projects and fed into Local Plans. It was agreed that more involvement could not be practically undertaken on two meetings a year, plus the Local Plans in Somerset were now in place. The Green Infrastructure, in particular its provision of open space, may be a good platform for SLAF to lobby about access issues. There is a need for SLAF to approach District Planning authorities to be valued consultees on higher level planning principles. The Forum's expertise is very wide when working as a body but needs to identify cogent consultations. The Forum considered that two structured meetings a year with the possibility of two flexible meetings a year may be a useful working framework. With shrinking RoW budgets the Forum could campaign or lobby on wider fronts for investment into access. The Natural England (NE) Paths for Communities (P4C) schemes are a useful way to help localised projects and active communities to achieve what they are striving for. Local Access Forums are generally consulted about such schemes and engagement by SLAF lends weight to their chances of receiving the funding.

Members agreed that they were happy to remain at two formal meetings each year but would respond to more flexible meetings set up to consider national or local consultations.

4. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

The re-election of Greg Jones as Chairman was proposed by Hugh Warmington and seconded by Trish Coombes.

Greg was voted unanimously as Chairman.

Penny Richards was proposed as Vice Chair by Greg Jones and seconded by Hugh Warmington.

Penny was voted unanimously as Vice Chair.

5. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th October 2012 were approved and signed by Members and the Chairman.

6. Matters Arising

- **Public participation;** A letter in support of a cycleway from Bishops Lydeard to Taunton had been drafted, approved and sent to Paul Partington.
- **Item 3;** Julia Gadd would be forwarding a letter to the secretary
- **Item 3;** Agreed to send the link to parish clerks
- **Item 6;** Will be sent once compiled

7. Landowner Co-operation and Responsibilities

The Forum discussed the lack of, or at best the very tardy, compliance of a particular landowner with their responsibilities on two local paths. It was agreed that it is primarily the duty of the Highway Authority to pursue any non compliance by landowners with legal requirements. Intervention by the Forum in individual cases is not within the intended role of the Forum, which is one of a strategic overview of the management and development of access in the county.

8. British Horse Society Definitive Map Modification Order Applications

Laurence Smith(LS) addressed the concerns from a Forum member, also a BHS member, that some applications submitted had not yet been added to the Register of modification applications received. The plans accompanying the applications did not all have the routes highlighted on them - which is a requirement for the application to be accepted. A BHS member attending the Forum meeting, and instrumental in delivering the applications, was invited to come into County hall to notate the plans so the applications could be registered. She pointed out that Notice could only be served on the landowners once the application was on the Register, and their absence was holding up this process.

9. The date of the next meeting will be 16th October 2013 and will be in the North Petherton Village Hall starting at 2:00pm.
Meetings for 2014 will be on;
Wednesday 30th May and Tuesday 14th October. Venues to be confirmed.
