

Minutes of the meeting of the Local Access Forum

Date: Wednesday 4th March 2009

Venue: Committee Room, Leigh Town Hall



Action

1 Introduction

EE welcomed the group and introduced the two new members, Ruth Killen representing landowner interests and John Gurhy, Chair of Ataxia North West and Wigan and Leigh Disability Forum, representing disabled interests. EP informed that Eileen Rybka has stood down as Secretary of the Standish & District Bridleway Group, a new representative will be identified.

Present:

Edgar Ernstbrunner	Ramblers Association - Manchester area
Trevor Boardman	Cycle Liaison Group
Peter Burns	Peak & Northern Footpath Society
Pauline Thomas	Standish & District Bridleway Group
Jackie Roberts	Crankwood Bridleways Group
Barry King	Long Distance Walkers Association
Brenda Gaskell	Leigh, Atherton & Tyldesley Bridleways Group
Ruth Killen	Landowner
John Gurhy	Disability Forums

Officers:

Elizabeth Parry	Public Rights of Way Officer.
Vicky Bowskill	Rights of Way Improvement Plan Officer

2 Apologies

John Pimblett	Wigan and District Ramblers Association
Eileen Rybka	Standish & District Bridleway Group
Judith Burton	British Horse Society

3 Greenheart Presentation – Joanne Harrop

- 3.1 Joanne Harrop was unable to attend to deliver a presentation. EP explained that Joanne is leaving Wigan Council at the end of March but that Gary Harold would attend the next LAF meeting to give a presentation.

3.2 EP then read through a Greenheart update Joanne had prepared, see appendix A for the full update. The main area of concern was the new name given to Bickershaw Country Park, now 'The Rushes'. There was a general consensus that this is not a suitable name and objections had been made by several members. There is a feeling amongst the group that 'Bickershaw' should remain in the name to preserve the heritage of the area. EP said she would investigate how this decision was made. Discussion ensued.

Action

EP

4 Minutes of the last meeting

4.1 The minutes were accepted without amendment.

5 Matters arising

5.1 3.2 – EE asked if there had been any progress on making the Claims Register available on line. EP explained that she had been following this up with IT and that it should be available on line by the time of the next LAF meeting. BK asked if it would be possible to have a demonstration at the next meeting and EP said this should be possible but that she would need to follow this up with IT to make sure. EE thanked EP for her work towards making this possible.

EP

5.2 4.3 Leigh Guided Busway – EP highlighted that she and JR had not had a chance to talk about writing to GMPTE but that she had checked the original documents and would email some documents to JR. BK stated that works would need to commence within the next 14 months and that the best course of action would be to await the results of the review currently being carried out, this should be complete by the end of April this year.

EP & JR

5.3 9. Definitive Map & Statement – EE asked if there had been any progress on this. EP stated that a new updated definitive map had been printed and laminated and is now available to view at the Civic Buildings, A4 extracts can now be produced as appropriate. The next target is to complete the dedications for Martland Park and to produce a first definitive map for Wigan which can then be built on.

EP stated that there had been some progress in making the map available on line, although a disclaimer would have to be written regarding the unresolved anomalies present on the definitive map. An internal trial is planned to see if IT systems are compatible and if this is successful a link will be built into the Definitive Map page on the Council's public website.

EP/DS

	Action
<p>EP stated that the matter of making the definitive statement available had not been progressed as efforts had been put into setting up the rights of way inspection regime. This has meant that no time had been allocated to work towards making the statements available via our Countryside Access Managements System (CAMS) computer system, however this will be the next priority.</p>	EP/DS
<p>EE asked about the List of Streets and EP informed that this is looked after by Steve Winstanley, Highways Asset Manager in Environmental Services. EE thought that access to this could be important to the LAF regarding gating orders.</p>	
<p>BK asked if the gating orders were available on line as they should be linked in with the List of Streets</p>	
<p>.5.4 10.1 – BG asked about Leigh 177 & 178 at Moss Industrial Estate. EP stated this would be looked at in April and that there are issues to follow up with Engineers and Environmental Health.</p>	EP
<p>5.5 10.2 – EP gave an update on the Rights of Way Maintenance Officer vacancy. The job description has been amended to include a greater emphasis on enforcement and this is still with Personnel being reevaluated. There is currently a freeze on recruitment until April at which time it is hoped that this vacancy can be advertised and filled.</p>	EP
<p>5.6 4.7 – RK asked if there was a new Manager at Haigh Hall yet. EP stated that she had not heard anything but would follow it up.</p>	EP
<p>6 English Access Forum (EAF)/NW Regional LAFs (NWLAF)</p>	
<p>6.1 NWLAF, Regional LAF Coordinator – one application had been received from Lancs County Council but no appointment has yet been made.</p>	
<p>6.2 EAF – the next meeting is week commencing 9th March in Sheffield. Any issues that LAF members would like taken to the EAF should be forwarded to EE.</p>	All
<p>6.3 Draft Access Policy – EE is trying to obtain a copy of this document and will circulate it, or a link to it, when available.</p>	EE

7 CROW Funding

- 7.1 EP recently attended a seminar on rights of way funding generally, including the ROWIP and it was mentioned that CROW funding is still being made available to local authorities. Wigan ROW has never received any of these monies, however there is an issue around identifying CROW money as it is not ring fenced and it is up to local authorities how they distribute funds. Terence Cavanagh from Oldham has received correspondence from Defra regarding this matter so EP will ask him to forward this to EE so the matter can be taken to the NWLAF.

EP & EE

8 Gating Orders

- 8.1 EE asked if anyone in the group was aware of any problematic gating orders as he can make objections on behalf of the LAF if necessary. BK noted that he looked at a particular gating order in Platt Bridge but that it would help if any possible links to open ground etc could be made clear on the plan. The current plans are small giving no context to the wider implications, a site visit is necessary to properly assess the impact of an order. EP noted that following the presentation regarding gating orders made at the Highways User Group (HUG) the comprehensive minutes had been circulated to the Environment Panel and had received a strong reaction. The outcome of this is not yet clear.
- 8.2 JG asked why a route at the health centre in Platt Bridge had been blocked off. EP explained that the public footpath was now open and efforts were being made to get a route to the access road of the health centre.

9 ROWIP Implementation Progress

- 9.1 VB stated that for all routes being upgraded under the ROWIP, the new legal status does not take effect until the upgrade is advertised following completion of works on the ground. It was also requested that horses in particular are encouraged not to use newly stoned routes for a few weeks in order to let the new surface settle. This will reduce disturbance of the surface and increase the life of the surface.
- 9.2 Leigh 155 – the new bridle bridge is now in place and surfacing works are underway. This route is closed whilst works are carried out, works are due to be complete by the end of March.

- 9.3 Abram, Kingsdown Flash – Surfacing works are ongoing and are due to be complete by the end of March. A number of barriers have been removed on the new public bridleway close to the Flash and other barriers not on public rights of way have been improved in conjunction with the Council's Environmental Planners as landowner. There is still one barrier to the north of Kingsdown Flash that needs to be improved by Planning when funds become available. The removal of barriers has caused some local concerns regarding illegal motorbike access, people experiencing problems should be encouraged to report them to the police, yellow signs will be put up on site to raise awareness of this course of action. There is a 'missing link' between Kingsdown Flash and Park Lane which remains a public footpath, the reason being that this section is in private ownership and we are attempting to work with the landowner towards dedication of this section to complete the bridleway between Kingsdown Flash and Crankwood Road.
- 9.4 Bickershaw Lane to Low Hall Park (Traveller Site) – works are due to commence on this route by mid March and are expected to take about a month to complete. There was some concern raised regarding loose horses from the Traveller site and the possible danger to users of the new bridleway from stallions in particular. BG raised the point that the Council's animal control department will also deal with loose horses and this has now been reported to them.
- 9.5 Towpath – VB and EP are working with British Waterways towards improving the section of towpath between Dover Lock and Bamfurlong. The intention is to dedicate the route on the eastern side as public bridleway, improving the surface accordingly for cyclists and equestrians, and to improve the surface and access on the western side for pedestrians and disabled users. This is likely to be delivered in two phases over the next two financial years according to availability of funds.

VB/EP

10 Access for All and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

- 10.1 EP gave an update on issues of disabled access on public rights of way, particularly regarding the suitability of various barriers and an incident that has occurred where a mobility scooter has become stuck in an approved design of kissing gate. JG stated that Wigan Council has adopted the British Standard 5709:2006 Gaps, Gates & Stiles in the Access for All document and this should be adequate for most disabled users if correctly installed.

10.2 VB has drafted a policy document on Accessibility on Public Rights of Way for Wigan Council and copies of this first draft were distributed for consultation. Feedback on this document was requested and should be sent to VB.

VB

10.3 Reduction in barriers can raise concerns regarding illegal motorbike access on rights of way. Incidents should be reported to the police in order to provide evidence of the real extent of any perceived problems. Only with evidence of a significant problem in an area can the Council and the police allocate resources accordingly. Wigan Council is drafting a policy regarding illegal motorbike use and the emphasis is now on 'Education, Enforcement and Engineering' in that order so efforts will be made to address the issue through education and enforcement, working with partners, before looking at engineering solutions (i.e. barriers) which also discriminate against some legitimate path users.

11 Any Other Business

11.1 JR stated that she had an email from Mike Orrell in the Local Transport Plan team regarding works to the section of NCN Route 55 between Hindley Green and the crematorium. Cllr Richard Clayton responded to MO raising a number of queries about the scheme. There is a perception of a motorbike problem in the area, evidence will need to be gathered about the real extent of this before Wigan Council can take it into consideration.

11.2 BK noted that there seem to have been a lot of field paths ploughed up that have been undisturbed for a number of years. This can cause difficulty for path users, either where the path is not reinstated, or where the reinstated surface is less easy to use than it was before ploughing.

EP explained that whilst the line of the path must be reinstated landowners are entitled to drive along the route of paths, which often exist along vehicular access across land, for the purposes of land management. This can affect the convenience/attractiveness of the route for path users but is a legitimate activity for landowners.

Discussion ensued regarding the increasingly wet ground conditions over the past few years and the problems this is causing for both land use and public rights of way. PB asked if rubble can be used to help reinforce paths, BG and others explained that this is not effective and also not possible due to licensing and the longer term effects on cultivated land.

Action

12 Date and Venue of Next Meeting

12.1 The next meeting will be held at Wigan Town Hall on Wednesday the 3rd June 2009. Sandwiches and refreshments will be provided from 18:00 with official business starting at 18:30.

Appendix A – Greenheart Update

Greenheart update March 2009

The sites and activity that Greenheart will focus on for the period 2009/10 have been broadly identified as part of a Delivery Plan. These are largely the sites that have been identified as 'Gateway sites' and key secondary sites, and range from projects on the ground to feasibility studies and strategies.

As projects develop, consultation with local people and expert groups will take place to make sure that the detail of schemes is right. Funding will then need to be identified and secured on a project-by-project basis as there is no overall budget for delivering Greenheart.

Rights of Way Officers are being engaged when developing initial ideas to make sure that good access is integrated into schemes.

Current work that is being undertaken includes:

- Access Strategy – An Access Strategy for Greenheart is currently being developed. This is looking at the various schemes being delivered or planned – whether Rights of Way, improvements to canal towpaths or the Whelley Loop Line and looking to identify opportunities to increase partnership working. The strategy will also identify any gaps in the network between Greenheart sites and look for opportunities for more efficient working. Greenheart is looking for ways in which it can help partners deliver their schemes, helping to connect people into Greenheart sites. This strategy will be brought to the next meeting for consultation.
- Wigan Flashes – A feasibility study is currently being undertaken to establish what level of facilities the site could sustain if funding was available. The site is in need of facilities if it is to be able to attract additional visitors. Currently there is no funding available, but it was felt that there was a need to explore the long term aspiration to develop a visitor centre on the site to enable it to fulfil its' potential.

We are currently looking at a potential funding opportunity for investment in the Westwood SBI area of the Flashes. This would need to be focused on making the site an attractive place for investment and local visitors, and is likely to try and improve access into this part of the site.

- Amberswood – A piece of work is currently being undertaken that looks at Amberswood – what's on the site, what the key habitats are, where the key access routes are, what the issues are and so on. This will be followed by the development of a number of options, on which consultation with local groups, residents and interested parties will take place in the future. It is hoped that funding will be secured to deliver a number of projects on the site which will help to make the site fulfil its role as a Community Gateway for Greenheart.

- Kirkless – Partners are currently looking at what could be undertaken on the Kirkless site to enhance it and make it more useable for local people in the northern area of Greenheart. The site is now better connected with the Whelley Loop Line and, with the presence of the canal, has the potential to be an interesting site in the network of Greenheart sites.
- The Rashes (previously known as Bickershaw Country Park) – Bickershaw will be a key Gateway site for Greenheart. The project is progressing well, with the construction of the Golf Course due to commence in spring this year. The completion of work on the site is scheduled for 2011.

A communication event has been arranged for Thursday 5th March (6 - 8 pm), Leigh Town Hall to provide a project update. This will be a drop-in session for everyone to come along and see the plans for the proposed visitor centre and The Rashes Activity Park. All are welcome.

- Strategies for the future of other key Greenheart sites need to be developed, most importantly Haigh Country Park, Pennington Flash and the Three Sisters. These are managed by Wigan Leisure Culture Trust and are very important to Greenheart.