



Rutland County Council

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Minutes of the **MEETING of the RUTLAND COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM** held via Zoom on Wednesday, 16th June, 2021 at 2.00 pm

Present: H. Baines
R. Brett
Councillor A. Brown
J. Clarkson
Councillor W. Cross
R. Harris
Councillor M. Jones
R. Linford
J. Williams

Apologies: J. Law
T. Plummer

In attendance: S. Crook – Highways Asset Management and Policy Manager
E. Dearsley - Governance Officer
P. Dadford – Project Manager (Oakham Canal Green Corridor Project)

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

It was proposed by Cllr Jones and seconded by Mr Linford that Cllr A Brown be appointed as Chairman of the Rutland Countryside Access Forum. Before moving to a vote, a question was asked about the Terms of Reference relating to the position of the Chairman as these stated that the Chairman should be Independent to the Council. Mr Crook, the Highways Asset Management and Policy Manager, confirmed that although this was stated, there was precedent elsewhere that a Councillor could be appointed to this position. In view of this and with no further nominations, the recommendation was put to the Forum and the appointment was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED

That Cllr Brown be **APPOINTED** as Chairman of the Rutland Countryside Access Forum for the municipal year 2021/22.

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Mr Linford proposed Mr Baines as Vice-Chairman of the Rutland Countryside Access Forum which was seconded by the Chairman. There were no further nominations put to the Forum and this was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED

That Mr H Baines be **APPOINTED** as Vice-Chairman of the Rutland Countryside Access Forum for the municipal year 2021/22.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr J Law and Mr T Plummer.

4 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Forum reviewed the Terms of Reference and comments were raised regarding Point 4, bullet point 2. The wording of this was currently as follows:

‘The desirability of conserving the natural beauty of the area for which it is established, including the flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features of the area’

It was felt that the word ‘desirability’ was not appropriate and should be replaced with:

‘**Have regard to the conservation of the** natural beauty of the area for which it is established, including the flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features of the area’

The amended wording was agreed unanimously.

It was raised whether the Forum was funded by Natural England. It was confirmed that there was no money ring-fenced from Natural England even though the Forum was a statutory duty. Mr Crook confirmed he had asked for a representative to attend future meetings.

RESOLVED

That the Terms of Reference be **AMENDED** to reflect the comments above. The new wording for point 4 (bullet point 2) being as follows:

‘**Have regard to the conservation of the** natural beauty of the area for which it is established, including the flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features of the area’

5 BUDGET SAVING PROPOSALS - PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

The Forum received a report from Mr S Crook, regarding the budget savings proposed to the public rights of way (PLA-035). Members were asked to consider the likely impact of the proposed budget savings on the improvement of public access, open-air

recreation and the enjoyment of the area and provide advice to the appointing authority (as per section 94(4) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000).

Mr Crook advised that the Council had set a budget which used £2.4m of reserves but required in-year savings of £1m. As a result, the budget for the rights of way service had been reduced to around £35k (revenue) and any capital works would need to be bid for from the Integrated Transport Capital Funding block.

It was proposed that:

- a) the maintenance budget be reduced; with a focus on only high priority works.
- b) only replacement gates be provided, installation to be done by landowners; and publications to be produced electronically (removing printed leaflets)

The Forum discussed only providing replacement gates and Mr Crook advised that Landowners may not accept a kissing gate as a replacement for their stiles due to the additional costs for installation. It was suggested whether people could donate to the price of the gate in memory of a loved one similarly what was done with public seating. It was agreed that a Sub-Committee was not necessary to take this forward but could be a topic for discussion at a future meeting as there was a lot more involved to it than just allocating a gate to a person.

AGENDA

Public funding of gates to be discussed at the next meeting

The Forum expressed concern about only producing publications in an electronic format i.e. no print copy. It was confirmed that a printed leaflet was produced for wheelchair users and it was queried if businesses could be approached to help with its funding. It was also suggested that NHS and/or Health Authorities could be approached for funding as being outside in the countryside was a benefit for mental health and physical wellbeing. Health benefits were always high on the agenda for the Council and it was agreed that this would be better raised with the Adult and Health Scrutiny Committee. Mr Crook advised that the PCT were a potential funding stream and that parishes were also being approached as they were in receipt of Section 106 monies from new developments to spend where they felt fit.

ACTION

Mr S Crook agreed to circulate to the Forum the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the Statutory Guidance for Local Access Forums.

The Forum was concerned that Council could approve a reduction on this service's budget by up to 66%. Although it was recognised that adjustments needed to be done to help with the budget shortfall, it was not felt that this amount was reasonable.

ACTION

The Chairman would be raising this concern with Council.

Questions had been received from member Mr J Law, who could not attend the meeting.

Mr Law had made requests for the Forum to be informed of the top 3 high and low cost projects with appropriate cost benefit, that would not be able to be funded due to the reduced maintenance budget. The response was that it was not possible to

answer this yet because bids were required to go through the process. A response may be able to be received at the next meeting in October.

Cllr Cross stated that the Forum should focus more on what the priorities were to inform officers. Parishes had been asked to look around their areas and to help identify the number of users of their right of way paths as not all pathways had a high usage and were therefore not a priority.

ACTION

Mr Linford advised that 150 bridle way improvements had been identified and he would circulate details to members.

The Forum noted that not all the footpaths were round Rutland Water and that more should be done to promote the local pathways etc and attract visitors, particularly walkers, to the area and so help local businesses.

6 IMPROVEMENTS TO ACCESS ALONG THE OLD OAKHAM CANAL

The Forum received a presentation from Mr P Dadford, who was the Project Manager for the Oakham Canal Green Corridor Project. It was agreed that the slides would be circulated with the minutes and published on the website.

ACTION

Presentation to be circulated with the minutes and published on the website

Members were advised that the Oakham Canal Green Corridor Project aimed to create a linear heritage, environment and leisure facility to the north of Oakham, based around the former Oakham Canal. It aimed to work with landowners, tenant farmers and other groups to:

- Engage the local community in developing and maintaining the leisure corridor.
- Preserve the remains of the Oakham Canal as a heritage asset and provide historical interpretation.
- Enhance the environment, improving footpaths and public access while developing habitats and diversity.

The green corridor would start at the Springfield Estate in the south and end close to the Oakham Enterprise Park. Ultimately, it could be possible to extend the corridor further north towards Rocks by Rail.

The project had a large amount of support from around the community and communication was ongoing with other users namely the Anglers Society and landowners to continue moving the project forward.

The Forum congratulated the team on the positive work that had been done and fully supported the project. It was agreed that a letter should be sent from the Chairman of the Forum showing its support.

ACTION

Mr Crook and Governance would draft a letter which would be sent to the Chairman to agree and sign off before being sent.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members raised the issue of dog walkers and the impact on livestock. There had been some incidents especially during lockdown, which had seen an increase in the number of people walking and not thinking about the control of dogs when they were off the lead. A point was raised that warning signs could be placed on the new kissing gates.

AGENDA

Dog walkers and new signage would be discussed at the next meeting.

ACTION

Mr Crook to place the revised Countryside Code onto the website.

ACTION

Mr Law to circulate information on the joint exhibitor's booth at the Virtual Choice Unlimited event with Lincolnshire Joint Local Access Forum.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was 6 October 2021.

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Chairman closed the meeting at 3.13 pm.

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