

Herefordshire Local Access Forum Meeting

19 April 2024 11.00am at Plough Lane

ATTENDANCE		
LAF members: Arthur Lee, chairman. Nicola Short. Duncan Green. Peter Newman. Cllr Justine Peberdy. Ian Carr. Sue Enfield. Angela Martin. Members of the public: Andy Parr David Irwin Chris Fowler Malcolm Louch John Thompson Chris Marsden Mick Goodwin Cllr Highfield	Herefordshire Council: Ed Bradford Callum Bush Stephen Organ Cllr Price	
APOLOGIES		
Vivien Burden, Hugh Vernon, Joanna Weightman, Bruce Evans		
AGENDA SUMMARY		
1.0	Welcome and apologies for absence	
2.0	Address from Chair	
3.0	Minutes of LAF meeting on 26th January 2024	
4.0	Matters arising	
5.0	Recruitment Process	
6.0	Volunteer Development Officer Update	
7.0	IT Sub-group Report	
8.0	Rights of Way Report	
9.0	Questions from members of the public	
10.0	Any other business	
11.0	Proposed dates of 2024 meetings	
DISTRIBUTION		
LAF Members, Ed Bradford, Bruce Evans, Callum Bush, Herefordshire Council website		
MINUTES AND CHECK LIST		ACTION
1	WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
	Apologies were noted as above. Everyone introduced themselves.	
2	ADDRESS FROM CHAIR	
	Chair to address the group with reference to voting a vice-chair	

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19 April 2024 11.00am at Plough Lane

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<p>The Chair stated that due to issues at the previous meeting and possible thoughts that he was not the right person to chair, he would like a vote of confidence. Justine Peberdy proposed. Duncan Green seconded this.</p> <p>A vote for the Vice chair was taken. Joanne Wiseman was happy to stand. The Chair proposed this. Sue Enfield seconded this.</p>	
<p>3 MINUTES</p>	
<p>To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2024</p> <p>Cllr Price stated that the point re additional funding for footpaths was incorrect. The money was given to Herefordshire council who had not reappropriated the funding yet. £445k.</p> <p>P 4, item 7, Duncan Green wanted to be involved but not to chair it.</p> <p>The minutes were approved.</p>	
<p>4 MATTERS ARISING / ACTION POINTS</p>	
<p>To discuss any matters arising from previous minutes</p> <p>Item 4. Re parish councils: The email had said that parish councils need to submit an expression of interest. These details were not made known. Ed Bradford responded that parish councils had submitted enquiries. These will be responded to in due course with next steps.</p> <p>Page 1, item 10, capital expenditure. Duncan Green volunteered.</p> <p>P 2, Styles. Duncan stated it was wrong to put stiles in, and self-closing gates were the preferred option.</p> <p>Item 9, statutory response time. Ed Bradford will look at this and stated Bruce Evans had replied to the member of public the previous day. Duncan Green questioned if response time was 14 days as it had taken 2 months for a response. Ed apologised and stated this would be better in future.</p> <p>Angela Martin wanted clarity on volunteer expenses. Ed Bradford stated that a ROOD had been put together and was awaiting Mark Averill's signature. This would bring this in line with officer expenses within the council. Ed Bradford thought this would be from now, not backdated. Stephen Organ was trying to get to the bottom of this and had Angela's travel claim, he would look at this fully and recognised that volunteers were out of pocket. Angela Martin stated she had checked with Talk Community who said there was a blanket policy in place for volunteers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action: Stephen Organ to talk to Talk Community re: expenses. <p>Action: form to be available at next meeting for expenses. Stephen Organ will arrange this.</p>	<p>SO</p>
<p>5 RECRUITMENT PROCESS</p>	

Herefordshire Local Access Forum Meeting

19 April 2024 11.00am at Plough Lane

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<p>The Chair stated that until we are able to pay expenses recruitment of volunteers will be difficult.</p> <p>Stephen Organ stated that there was an action to recruit new members. Stephen wanted to make sure that all the members were users of PROWs. Communication with landowners is important, and to have one on panel would be useful. Stephen had a document which he would send out to panel.</p> <p>Owners and occupiers of access land. Stephen Organ would look at this, and how we can get landowners involved.</p> <p>Firstly, how do we encourage landowners to join the group? Duncan felt that writing to representatives like the NFU would be a useful exercise. Also, while writing to parish councils a paragraph could be included about this. This would include farmers and estates who have PROW. Stephen stated he would like to get a wide breadth of knowledge. Justine noted that this knowledge was available to each member, and they could list these. Stephen pointed out that this had to be open and transparent and done properly. A lot of large estates are run by land agents who run more than 1 estate, and these would be useful contacts to get on board.</p> <p>Clr Price suggested that the CLA, the NFU, and the tenant farmers associations should be approached and asked to sit on the panel. These organisations would have different views and usefulness. The NFU, he felt, would be keen to put forward a representative to sit on this panel.</p> <p>Stephen will organise a sub group to look at this. Letters would be written and responses could be discussed next time ACTION: Stephen to contact organisations.</p>	SO
6 VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER UPDATE	
<p>Update on volunteering.</p> <p>Stephen Organ had met as many people as he could over the last few months. All feedback was really positive, and all were happy Stephen was on board, but there was feedback that there was little training on roles and responsibilities. Some had created their own role and had had information passed on from the previous incumbent. Some didn't know what the role entailed and needed support and training. Stephen stated they were doing great work and it was not being noticed. Stephen stated he would champion this and celebrate this work.</p> <p>PFO scheme outline. Stephen was looking at every aspect of this, including role profiles for PFO's. This would include what it takes to be a PFO, do's and don'ts, and a code of conduct.</p> <p>Induction training and a volunteer handbook was being developed. PFO's could then go to Stephen with queries they may have, or for additional training – for example, stiles of gate training. The procedure for way marking paths would also be included.</p> <p>Duncan Green stated that he was a member of a volunteer group for ramblers, but none are PFO's. He felt the communication needed to be more general to make sure</p>	

Herefordshire Local Access Forum Meeting

19 April 2024 11.00am at Plough Lane

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<p>the right people saw it. Duncan stated there was a willingness to train people and that he would be keen for more young people to come along.</p> <p>Angela Martin asked if inclusion had been embedded as there were subtle things that needed to be included. Angela would be keen to do more work on this.</p> <p>Duncan talked about dog walkers cutting through fences and stated the dog walker problem had become more acute since covid. Peter Newman asked if dog stiles had been considered Stephen Organ stated not currently, but that he would look into this.</p> <p>Cllr Price noted that half of the paths are absolutely unacceptable to any user, and will present an enormous challenge. A discussion was needed at some point about what we want to achieve. The Chair noted that paths don't have to be consolidated or solid, the biggest obstacle being stiles or gates that people can't get through, and that we are not looking for tarmacked paths everywhere.</p> <p>The Chair stated that for the volunteer handbook, maybe Stephen could use data from other LAF's. Stephen responded that a member of public had sent one from Somerset which included useful information, and this provided a good base to create one from. Stephen had also spoke to Worcestershire about this. Duncan asked for this to be made available online to minimise use of paper. Stephen agreed.</p>	<p>SO</p> <p>SO</p>
<p>7</p> <p>IT SUB-GROUP REPORT.</p>	
<p>Duncan Green met with Ed Bradford and Stephen Organ after the last meeting to discuss a council IT strategy meeting later in March.</p> <p>Duncan asked if things had moved forward. Ed stated that this was linked to the highways contract, and a meeting would be held this month. The councils Thrive programme has a digital factory, and we are moving forward to get a developer to look at making these changes. This will also be across highways and waste.</p> <p>At the moment we are waiting for how this will roll out, and making tweaks behind the scenes. If emails are sent to the PROW inbox, these are automatically confirmed freeing up Jill's time. Duncan felt that any system should be able to produce a report. It should be possible without changing anything to produce a report for a parish to include all faults.</p> <p>Ed stated this is what is being looked at, it will categorise efficiently any faults etc. Ed can get these reports, but needs to check that these are not person dependent. Dashboards for parishes are being looked into. Duncan felt that if reports could be provided this would help with accuracy.</p> <p>ACTION: Ed to progress and provide and update. •</p> <p>Ed stated that it was important to know what information people want to see included in this and asked for people to come back with this over the next few weeks. Duncan stated the key performance statistic required is faults and how many have been dealt with.</p>	<p>EB</p> <p>CB</p>
<p>8</p> <p>RIGHTS OF WAY REPORT</p>	

Herefordshire Local Access Forum Meeting

19 April 2024 11.00am at Plough Lane

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<p>Callum stated there had been some feedback since the last meeting. Some diversion requests had come in, 6 since January. 3 previous applications have been completed. The main aspect is closures and the reason behind closures. There have been more recently due to rain. 16 had been extended by 6 months for a variety of reasons i.e. potential landslip. 49 paths were currently closed. Reasons: Bridges down, things are overgrown. One was historically washed away at Pembridge. As water levels drop, hopefully a few of these can be rectified. Looking at a target of zero closures.</p> <p>Priority list of capital projects. Quite a few being scoped re: how to implement or replace bridges. There are 2 currently being looked at to reopen the route, by diverting to a smaller bridge. The big concern is footpaths being closed for more than 2 years. Some require significant funding. Some smaller scale projects are being worked on as a priority. There are a few obstacles to overcome and this will not happen overnight.</p> <p>Duncan Green stated that in the Amey days, volunteers did build bridges etc. but Balfour Beatty would not let volunteers build bridges. Now this is back in house, Duncan did not see any reason why this could not re-commence. Callum agreed and said some plans had been received and were being checked to ensure they were fit for purpose. Duncan stated that when landowners were involved they would be able to transport these kits. Callum stated that there are projects underway presently, with farmers assisting. This time next week, there should be news of a brand new state of the art bridge that has been opened.</p> <p>Ed stated that now we are in a new financial year there should be funding available. Over the next 12 months, hopefully some of these closures can be dealt with by the right people who can help. Duncan stated the group would help with knowledge of important locations etc.</p> <p>The Chair commented that it was not good for local tourism to have closed paths, and was looking forward to a significant improvement.</p> <p>Duncan asked how many enforcement issues had gone into a proper legal process. There are a small percentage of landowners who deliberately obstruct and requested a report on this. Ed responded that there have not been any that have gone to court. Duncan said it needs to be in legal process to be dealt with.</p> <p>ACTION: report on the outcome of the cases who had warnings issued.</p> <p>Duncan has been lobbying Jesse Norman to change the law on this. Each costs 20K. This is unaffordable and unsustainable to the council. Duncan is trying to get this process changed and corrected. There needs to be a national process. We can give influence via Jesse Norman. Cllr Price stated he would help with this. CB ran through the report. LAF members to feed back what they would like to see in future reports.</p>	<p>CB</p>
<p>9. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC</p>	
<p>A member of public asked if there was a PFO rep on the LAF. The Chair responded that there was not. The Chair stated that applications would be welcomed. It was suggested that the communications to landowners should include a request to come on board the LAF.</p> <p>ACTION: Consider how to administer this.</p> <p>ACTION: Stephen Organ to write to PFO's and invite them to apply.</p> <p>A member of public asked a question regarding the 250k funding that came up during a meeting. Can the parish councils be notified that this is happening? Ed Bradford stated an email had gone to all parishes about this, and that there would be further information as we get it. There are some parishes we don't hear from. It was stated that Upton Bishop and Longtown had not received the information. Stephen Organ would will check the list of clerks. All parish clerks should have received the notice, but may not have communicated it.</p>	<p>SO</p> <p>SO</p>

Herefordshire Local Access Forum Meeting

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	<p>A member of public asked a question regarding enforcement. He had written letters and had been chasing responses for 2.5 months about a variety of obstructions that were in process, and had sought advice from a solicitor after 6 weeks of no response costing £1000. Ed Bradford responded that he would pick this up with Bruce Evans.</p> <p>Duncan Green noted that footpaths that terminate on bridleways fall into a void with BBLP and felt a sub group to consider these would be useful. A volunteer to chair this sub group was sought, and Cllr Robert Highfield indicated he would be happy to do this.</p> <p>Action: Cllr Robert Highfield to chair sub group</p>	<p>EB</p> <p>EB/RP</p>
10.	AOB	
	<p>Any business submitted to the Chair prior to/or at the beginning of the meeting. To be discussed time permitting at the discretion of the Chair.</p> <p>Duncan Green commended the top table for the professionalism shown during the meeting</p>	
11.	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	<p>26th July2024 – 10.30 for refreshments meeting starts at 11am held in the Hereford Suit at Plough Lane Offices</p> <p>25th October Meeting closed at 13.15</p>	

Chairman: _____

Date: _____