

Lancashire Local Access Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 12th July, 2022 at 10.30 am in Teams Virtual Meeting - Teams

Present:

Chair

Richard Toon, Independent

Committee Members

County Councillor John Shedwick
Peter Edge, Lancashire Association of Local Councils
David Kelly, Ramblers Association
Chris Kynch, Lancashire Association of Local Councils
Mike Prescott, Cycling UK

Officers

David Goode, Lancashire County Council
Lorraine Mellodey, Blackburn with Darwen Council
Paul Withington, Blackburn with Darwen Council
Garth Harbison, Lancashire County Council

2. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair, Richard Toon, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Paul Cocker, representing the Peak and Northern Footpaths Society, and, Much Hoole Parish Council, was welcomed to the meeting as an observer.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from County Councillor Cosima Towneley and Steve Kirby.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 January 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising

The forum was informed that there was now a Local Transport Plan for Lancashire. There was also the Statement of Priorities and the Rights of way Improvement Plan. The forum was informed that the Statement of Priorities would be renewed in due course.

The forum enquired if the Rights of Way Improvement Plan was incorporated into the Local Transport Plan for Lancashire. There was a request for a report on this for the next meeting of the forum.

Regarding roadside signs the forum was informed that they were done on a district wide basis not on an ad hoc basis. Two contracts would be put out to the districts, one for surveying and one for fixing the signs as a result of the survey. There was a request for a list to be sent out stating which districts were going to be surveyed and in which years.

5. Ranger Service - Footpaths that are not a Right of Way

It was reported to the forum that the decking on a footbridge on the north side of Winter Hill was rotting. The question was raised about who actually looked after the footbridge. It used to be looked after by the Ranger Service but this service was now virtually non-existent. There was concern about who was now going to take over responsibilities.

It was pointed out that United Utilities owned the land and had an access remit at Winter Hill. They had done quite a bit of work in that area. The forum was informed that Lancashire County Council's Environmental Projects Team no longer existed. It was not known if the county council had any more interest in the area or how many rangers United Utilities had in the area.

It was pointed out that footbridges not on public rights of way were generally assumed to be the responsibility of the landowner.

There was concern that there were a lot of concessionary routes that nobody was taking responsibility for and something had to be put in place to sort this.

6. The Current Situation in Public Rights of Way

It was noted that the Public Rights of Way Team had now got an extra post for doing public path orders and there were two extra posts for frontline officers geographically based.

There was an increased effort in terms of the assistant solicitors for helping process the Definitive Map Modification Orders. There was a low response in applications for these posts but the quality of applicants was excellent.

The Public Rights of Way Team was confident that together with its colleagues in Legal Services and Planning progress would be made. There was real optimism that the Public Rights of Way Team could really make a difference with what it had now.

It was not just about resources but it was also about the changing landscape due to the pandemic.

Due to the increased response from Legal Services a lot more enforcement notices were being served now and with the extra staff within the team there was now the ability to catch up with some of these.

Another thing that had changed over the last year or so was the sheer volume of development around the county. There were whole housing estates being built over rights of way that Lancashire County Council did not find out about beforehand. There were so many planning applications coming in that they could not all be monitored. The Public

Rights of Way Team were looking at a scheme to get more parish councils and user groups involved to keep an eye on this situation.

It was stated that this should be an issue to be picked up by the planning departments at district level. There was a training session in August with planning officers from the districts to raise awareness of this situation.

It was felt that parish councils could be involved as well as they covered a lot of territory where the public footpaths were. Parish councils had small discretionary budgets which they could use for repairs on footpaths, bridges and stiles. It was noted that areas that were not parished might actually have a higher proportion of user group members so Lancashire County Council could work with these user groups to keep an eye on the patches where they were living.

There was concern over Open Access areas. There were large areas of the county which were now designated as Open Access. Since the demise of the Environmental Projects Team there was nobody in the Countryside Service really looking after any issues in these Open Access areas. The forum was informed that some issues were being picked up by the AONB.

7. Any Other Business

The forum was informed that a planning application for glamping pods on a property near The Long Causeway on the outskirts of Burnley. There was a request from County Councillor Cosima Towneley and Chris Peat for an ancient highway to be reopened through the property which on the Lancashire side was a footpath but on the Calderdale side was a bridleway. As part of the owners of the property glamping pod scheme there was a request for cyclists and horseriders to use this route. The route had been used years ago and user evidence was trying to be collected. The route had not been used for about 20 years since the new owners of the property had arrived. The owners had allowed walkers to use the route but not cyclists and horseriders.

There was a request for the forum to write a letter of support for the horseriders and cyclists to upgrade the route to its proper status which was Ancient Highway. The owners of the property had written a strong letter of objection to the request for the upgrade of the route. The Lancashire Local Access Forum did not get involved in specifics. The request was effectively about creating rights rather than recognising existing rights.

It was pointed out that on the Lancashire side of the route it was not actually recorded as a footpath. There was a footpath but it was not on the same line as The Long Causeway.

It was stated that this situation was more a matter for the Public Rights of Way Access Forum rather than the Lancashire Local Access Forum.

There was a request for the next meeting for a report on what was happening with the section of the England Coastal Path going from Blackpool to Liverpool which had been approved. The forum was informed that the whole lot of this section had not been done yet but there was confidence that the end was in sight. This would be on the agenda for the next meeting.

8. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Tuesday 10 January 2023 at 10:30am.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston