

DUDLEY BOROUGH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Tuesday, 15th May, 2012 at 6.05pm in Committee Room 2
at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

PRESENT:

Mrs T Boothroyd (Chairman)

Mr D Bates, Mr R J Brooks, Mr R Burgess, Mr P Greenaway, Ms A Nicholls,
Councillor Ms Partridge, Mr N J Williams and Ms S Yeadon.

Officers:

Ms S Orton – Head of Museums, Greenspaces and Bereavement Services, Mr
D Jacobs – Project Engineer, (Traffic and Transportation) and Mr D Keeley –
Countryside Manager (All Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Mrs K
Taylor – Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Corporate Resources)

54. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mr R
Broome, Mr A Cutler, Angela Hodgetts (West Midlands Police), Angela
Smith (Natural England) and Councillor J Woodall,

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Ms S Yeadon declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 4 – Coombeswood
Green Wedge, as a Member of the Friends of Coombeswood.

Mr R Burgess declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 4 – Coombeswood
Green Wedge, as a Member of Coombeswood Canal Trust.

56. MINUTES

AGREED

That the Minutes of the Forum held on 27th March, 2012, be
approved as a correct record, subject to the deletion of the word
“Monarchs” and its substitution by the word “Mucklow” in
paragraph 12 of Minute no. 44 – Coombeswood Green Wedge.

57. COOMBESWOOD GREEN WEDGE

A verbal update was presented by the Countryside Manager in particular
on recent discussions in regard to the drainage on the cricket pitch,
confirming that no official feedback had been received by Planning and
that the matter would be investigated further.

In responding to a question from the Chairman requesting an update in relation to the land transfers, the Countryside Manager advised that the land transfers were currently being dealt with by Legal.

It was further reported that interviews had taken place in respect of the new part-time Warden's post, and discussions were currently taking place between Human Resources as the one applicant had requested to work on a job-share basis. The Countryside Manager explained that if an agreement could not be reached then it was likely that the post would be advertised externally.

In responding to a question from the Chairman in regard to an air raid shelter at the site, the Countryside Manager advised that it would not be possible to fill in the shelter immediately due to a lack of funding, and that aspects such as public safety would be addressed upon handover. Discussions had taken place with the Friends of Coombeswood for suggestions on future use of this feature.

AGREED

That the information reported on at the meeting be noted.

58. PATHS FOR COMMUNITIES

On behalf of Angela Smith from Natural England, the Countryside Manager presented a powerpoint presentation in relation to Paths for Communities fund, in particular on the aim to encourage and enable local communities to work with land owners, develop and enhance local public paths and ways to deliver a wider benefit.

He advised that the scheme could appeal to visitors and tourists of local Rights of Way networks to contribute to the rural economy and provide better support for local services.

It was noted that the key principles included competitive proposals offering best value for money, voluntary path creation agreed with landowners, improved infrastructure on the ground and future maintenance considered upfront.

Areas such as gates suitable for multi user access, drainage/occasional surfacing, Waymarks, signs, notices, Preliminary Action Plans (large schemes) and expenses of staff/consultants could be funded through the scheme.

The Countryside Manager advised that it was essential to ensure best value for money in order to encourage schemes to seek match funding, however it was considered that small scale local projects and groups did not have the experience of handling cash flow.

It was noted that if bids were submitted, then the Forum would have an opportunity to make comments, and that clear guidance on eligibility and funding criteria was available on the website:
www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/access/rightsofway/p4c.aspx

The Countryside Manager advised that the local grants officer would be Angela Smith, who would work with applicants to develop the proposals maximum potential.

In responding to a question, the Chairman advised that the scheme was not specifically aimed at the Council, and suggested that it would be an opportunity for the Friends Groups to consider.

There followed a discussion between members and officers in regard to the ownership of public pathways on privately owned land and the ongoing maintenance of pathways.

The Chairman suggested that members consider any pathways that could be considered for discussion at a future meeting.

AGREED

That the information reported on at the meeting be noted.

59. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

No items were raised.

60. ACCESS/RIGHTS OF WAY ISSUES

A verbal presentation from the Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation was given in respect of the Principles of Public Path Planning Orders using a Cornish Example. A copy of the Order was attached to the Agenda, and photographs were submitted at the meeting providing aerial images.

The Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation provided a detailed account of the case, and highlighted the errors made by the Local Authority that resulted in a public enquiry.

Mr D Bates referred to the Hurst Hill Woodland off Bilston Street, Sedgley and the 7/8 acres of land alongside. He advised that Severn Trent had installed sewerage works a number of years ago on the land alongside the woodland, which had direct access from Bilston Street.

He further advised of the problems that heavy rainfalls had caused on the sewage underground interceptor units, and that sewage flowed into the brook approximately twice a year. He advised that discussions had taken place with Severn Trent who proposed that the land could have been used as a wetland in order to collect any sewage that overflowed.

Mr Bates advised that the land had since been sold for £5,000 and confirmed that local residents were worried as to how the land would be used.

He further reported that the woodland had been damaged by youths, but that it was difficult to raise funding and support, as both the woodland and

land did not belong to the Council.

He also referred to the entrance at Bilston Street with particular concerns expressed in regard to vehicles accessing the path.

AGREED

That the information reported on at the meeting be noted.

61. GATING ORDERS

The Project Engineer – Traffic and Transportation advised that the report in relation to the application for the Gating Order in Kilburn Drive, Kingswinford had been submitted, and that the decision was to proceed with the Order.

He further advised that a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum in relation to two applications received for the Gating Orders in areas by Merry Hill and Leasowes Park.

AGREED

That the Project Engineer – Traffic and Transportation be requested to submit a report in relation to the applications for the Gating Orders in areas by Merry Hill and Leasowes Park to a future meeting.

62. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Chairman submitted photographs highlighting the rights of way work that had been completed last year.

She advised that the improvement projects had been selected based on a grading system which looked at areas such as: frequency of use and objections / complaints received.

It was suggested that it would be very beneficial if a plan identifying the schedule and length of time could be presented to the Forum.

Following further discussions in relation to footpaths that required improvement Mr Greenaway advised that the main problem in relation to the flooding at Cotwall End Valley was due to the blockages of the culvert. The Countryside Manager undertook to contact the Environment Agency to discuss the matter further.

Reference was made to Roper Way in Sedgley and the S106 Agreement; Mr Bates advised that Council Officers were in the process of contacting the current developer in regard to the obligation for the construction of a footpath.

Mr Brooks advised that the pathway at High Arcal School would be resurfaced.

AGREED

- (1) That the information reported on at the Meeting be noted.
- (2) That the Countryside Manager be requested to liaise with the Environmental Agency in regard to the flooding at Cotwall End Valley.

63. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME AND DRAFT ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT OF THE FORUM

The Chairman requested Members suggestions on any items they wished to consider for the future work programme of the Forum to be submitted at the next meeting.

She also advised that a meeting would be arranged between herself, Mr Burgess and Ms Yeadon to prepare a draft Annual Report for discussion at a future meeting.

Concerns were raised in regard to promoting the work of the Forum, and Councillor Partridge suggested that a briefing note would be beneficial for all Councillors as a reminder on how to access information in relation to rights of ways in their ward areas.

AGREED

- (1) That the Chairman, Mr Burgess and Ms Yeadon meet to prepare a draft Annual Report of the Forum for discussion at a future meeting.
- (2) That the Project Engineer – Traffic and Transportation be requested to produce a briefing note for all Councillors to include information on how to access information in relation to right of ways for their ward area.

64. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- (a) Reference was made to an article that had been discovered by Ms Nicholls in relation to the Catchment Restoration Fund for England, and of the funding available for group members organisations of the Local Access Forum, to help them clean up local rivers by tackling pollution, restoring wildlife habitats and enabling fish to migrate.

It was reported that the funding had been created by Defra who would provide up to £10 million each year over a three year period and support projects that would reduce the pollution that came from the way the land was used and improve the landscape through which water flows. Further information was available on www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/136182.aspx

- (b) Ms Yeadon referred to a conversation between herself and John Tennant who wished to attend the Forum to give a presentation about the Monarchs Way. She advised that John was unable to attend the next two meetings, and would invite him to a future meeting of the Forum once the dates had been arranged.
- (c) The Project Engineer – Traffic and Transportation alerted the meeting to a public consultation launched by Defra on a proposed package of changes to the processes for recording, diverting and extinguishing public rights of way.

He advised that should the Forum wish to make any comments, they needed to do so before the consultation ended on 6th August, 2012.

It was AGREED that the consultation be added to the next agenda of the Forum meeting in July, 2012.

A copy of the consultation paper, supporting documents and a response pro-forma could be viewed and downloaded at www.defra.gov.uk/consult/2012/05/14/improve-rights-of-way/.

- (d) Mr Burgess advised that the leaflets produced by the Coombeswood Canal Trust, publicising the walks around the Coombeswood Green Wedge should be completed within four weeks for consultation. He advised that he would email the leaflet to the Forum email address, which could then be forwarded to all members.

65. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT AGENDA PLANNING MEETING

It was noted that future Agenda Planning meeting of the Forum would be held on:-

- Monday 18th June, 2012 – 11am – Committee Room 4, The Council House, Dudley.

66. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on:-

- Tuesday 17th July, 2012, at 6pm.

The meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN