

Minutes of the Dudley Borough Local Access Forum

Wednesday 15th September, 2021 at 1.00pm
Meeting Room 1 at 3-5 St James's Road, Dudley

Present:

T Boothroyd, R Burgess, P Greenaway, A Nicholls, N Williams and S Yeadon.

Officers:

D Jacobs (Project Engineer), D Keeley (Countryside Manager), A Radford (Maintenance Manager) and K Taylor (Democratic Services Officer).

1. **Election of Chair for the 2021/22 Municipal Year**

Resolved

That T Boothroyd be elected as Chair of the Forum for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

2. **Appointment of Vice-Chair for the 2021/22 Municipal Year**

Resolved

That the appointment of Vice-Chair for the 2021/22 municipal year be deferred to the next meeting of the Forum.

3. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor C Barnett, R Brooks, Councillor P Lee and T Pritchard.

4. **Declarations of Interest**

R Burgess declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 11 - Access/Rights of Way Issues and Updates, as Member of the Halesowen Abbey Trust.

S Yeadon declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 11 – Access/Rights of Way Issues and Updates, as Chair of the Friends of Coombeswood Wedge.



5. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21st April, 2021, be approved as a correct record.

6. **Black Country Plan**

Members were referred to the Black Country Plan, which had been prepared by the four Black Country local authorities (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton) to identify and allocate sufficient land for housing development and employment needs for the next 15 years.

The Chair indicated that development of approximately 6% of greenspace had been proposed and considered that further clarification was needed on the quantity and location of the identified sites. The importance of considering and utilising brownfield sites, derelict buildings and vacant land before greenspaces was emphasised. It was suggested that greenspace should be assessed and utilised under exceptional circumstances only.

Members raised concerns regarding the eight-week consultation period between August to October and whether this would be a sufficient amount of time for residents and stakeholders to put forward their queries and concerns.

Prospective developers should be encouraged to consider the design of future housing developments, taking into account the Government's target of prohibiting sales of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030 and hybrid vehicles by 2035. The need to ensure all new housing developments provided sufficient car parking and electrical vehicle charging points was emphasised in order to address the legal issue of trailing cables on pavements. The Forum agreed that consideration should also be given to increased capacity of school places and General Practitioners (GP's) to accommodate the impact from additional housing.

N Williams suggested the possibility of the Local Authority reviewing all vacant sites within the Borough for developing car parking or community facilities and referred specifically to a site near the entrance of Leasowes Park. In responding, the Countryside Manager confirmed that discussions had already taken place however the Local Authority would be required to consider the development of local amenities against the need for additional housing.

The Project Engineer provided an overview of four areas of interest in Dudley that had been proposed within the draft Black Country Plan. Members made comments and observations and requested that the following statements be submitted to be considered as part of the consultation exercise on behalf of the Dudley Borough Local Access Forum:-

1) Worcester Lane, Norton

There was no objection to the development of this site but it was strongly recommended that the development should be sympathetic to an existing highly used public right of way which should not deviate from the line or take away from the existing character.

2) Kingsway – Wollaston

Supported the view that path S52 be retained and grass surface be protected on any potential future developments.

3) Summerhill Kingswinford Triangle

Suggested that in respect of any future planning applications for the Kingswinford Triangle, that the Western part of the site below the ridgeline should be kept open so as not to impact on the surrounding land near the A449. However the Dudley Borough Local Access Forum would not oppose development on the eastern part, in principle, subject to viewing the planning application. The group considered there to be a direct existing well-worn path off the A449 to the Summerhill School, which should be recognised as a Public Right of Way in any development.

4) Holbeache Lane

There was no objection to development of this site but it was strongly recommended that the opportunity be taken to establish a public open space and public footpath network linking to the Wombourne to Pensnett Railway.

Action

That the comments of the Dudley Borough Local Access Forum, as outlined above, be submitted to the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise for consideration as part of the Black Country Plan consultation exercise.

Officer/Member

Democratic Services Officer

Please refer to the minutes of the Forum held on 8th December, 2021 for subsequent discussion.

7. 9 Mile Walk

The Countryside Manager provided an update and referred to the Colliery footpath, as mentioned at previous meetings, in particular, that the area would be

maintained once a definitive line had been confirmed. It was evident that a significant amount of improvement work was needed, and any capital works would require an application for funding. Members were advised that the Colliery Path had been included on the annual scheduled maintenance programme, and funding secured for repairing the steps off Carters Lane, Halesowen.

In referring to the progress in reviewing sections of the 9 Mile Walk that could be made accessible for disabled users, the Countryside Manager undertook to discuss further with the Senior Warden.

| Action | Officer/Member |
|---|-----------------------|
| That the Countryside Manager be requested to discuss the issues of accessible areas with A Ravenscroft (Senior Warden). | D Keeley |

8. Leasowes Park, Access, Footpath Network, Signage and Interpretation

N Williams updated Members of the Forum on the issues affecting Leasowes Park including discussions held in relation to next steps going forward. The long-term ambition in restoring the historic route within Leasowes Park with appropriate signage, way-making and interpretation was mentioned, however it was noted that some areas were complex, and a permissive path may be required. Regular consultation with Halesowen Golf Club was essential in progressing the project.

Reference was made to the ongoing issues in relation to access via the Golf Course, in particular, the complications arising given that the land was owned by the Council and leased to the Golf Course. It was reported that the Golf Club had removed a private access signage that had recently been erected, and steps had been taken to identify an alternative route, however the delays in progressing was acknowledged due to the complex nature of the project.

N Williams emphasised the importance of maintaining the link between Leasowes Lane and Manor Way, and that a right of way or permissive path may be required along the South to North Route. The Countryside Manager acknowledged the comments made and indicated that the preferred option would be to consider permissive paths, and that the main objective was to confirm a route to allow public access, with flexibility built in. Legal advice was currently being sought and the Forum would be updated accordingly.

The Countryside Manager provided an overview of the draft Green Gateway Project and in doing so Members emphasised the importance of producing easy-read and accessible documents for all users.

| Action | Officer/Member |
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DBLAF/4

That the item remain on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum.

Democratic
Services Officer

9. **Rights of Way Improvement Plan – Future Maintenance Programmes**

The Maintenance Manager commented on the significant increase in footfall across greenspaces over the past twelve months and referred individually to the seven footpaths programmed for improvement for 2021/22.

10. **Planning Applications**

The Project Engineer commented on the proposed development on Marriott Street, Netherton, and Members were advised that the development would require the diversion of the existing public right of way which would provide open space to the Canal. The diverted realignment as shown by the developer would need to be changed for that the gradients and widths were acceptable.

Members commented positively on the proposed development, however the Chair emphasised the importance of ensuring there was adequate car parking and electrical vehicle charging facilities.

11. **Access/Rights of Way Issues and Updates**

(a) **Lower Illey between Path 107 in Dudley and Path 6 in Worcestershire**

The Project Engineer stated that the process was near completion and that there had been no objections received from landowners. All legal documentation had been collated and prepared and would be signed shortly.

(b) **Footpath H115 Site of Hawne Colliery and Footpath 116 Rear of Oil Refinery Shelah Road, Halesowen**

The Maintenance Manager referred to the issues in relation to the funding of the signage.

(c) **Public Right of Way H124 and H125 Hawne Bank/Park, Belle Vale to Hawne Lane, Halesowen**

It was noted that due to the issues surrounding accessibility to the definitive path, an alternative route had now been cleared and included within the 9 mile walk. In responding to previous requests made by the Forum, the Project Engineer confirmed that the path could not be made dismissive.



Following a brief discussion, the Maintenance Manager advised the Forum that a request had been made for the 124 steps to be included on the future programme of maintenance work and requested that R Burgess contact him directly regarding additional areas for improvement.

| Action | Officer/Member |
|---|-----------------------------|
| That the item remain on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum. | Democratic Services Officer |
| R Burgess be requested to provide further details in relation to the additional areas for improvement to the Maintenance Manager. | R Burgess / A Radford |

(d) Footpath S454

The Project Engineer reported that a response had not yet been received in relation to the assessment of the deed documentation and undertook to pursue the matter and update the Forum at the next meeting.

| Action | Officer/Member |
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| The Project Engineer be requested to pursue a response in relation to the landlords' deed documentation assessment and provide an update at the next meeting of the Forum. | D Jacobs / Democratic Services Officer |

(e) Footpath H398 Manor Way to site of Fordrove Bridge, Halesowen (Not shown on the definitive map)
Footpath H359 Amber Way to Chancel Way, Halesowen (Not shown on the definitive map)

The Project Engineer advised on progress made and undertook to provide a further update at the next meeting.

| Action | Officer/Member |
|---|-----------------------------|
| That the item remain on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum. | Democratic Services Officer |

12. **Any Other Business**

Lutley Paths 137, 137A and 161 (Green lanes)

The Maintenance Manager confirmed that the paths had been included on the future programme of maintenance work.

Hasbury Paths 183 and 174 (Barbed wire fence encroaching over definitive line making the useable width very narrow)

The Maintenance Manager confirmed that the hedge along H174 had been cut back.

Hawne Paths 115 and 116 (Alongside the River Stour)

It was noted that this item had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

Illey Path 112 (steps down to Illy Brook)

Action

Officer/Member

That the item remain on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum.

Democratic Services Officer

Illey Path 109 – Field path to Warstone Farm track (Barbed wire fence restricting width)

Action

Officer/Member

That the item remain on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum.

Democratic Services Officer

Illey Path 105 – Paddock Wood field (Barbed wire fencing restricting width)

Members were advised that the landowner had been informed of the obstruction.

Public Right of Way No. 215 – rear of Oldnall Lane, Cradley

The Maintenance Manager confirmed that the public right of way had been included on the future programme of maintenance work.

13. **Future Meeting Date and Time**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Wednesday 8th December, 2021 at 1.00pm. The Chair advised the Forum that there would be four meetings scheduled each year going forward in May, June, September and December. Additional meetings would be scheduled to allow the Forum to consider any planning applications, and confirmation of future dates would be circulated to the Forum accordingly.



DBLAF/7

Action

The Democratic Services Officer be requested to discuss with the Chair the scheduling of future meetings and circulate to the Forum for information.

Officer/Member

T Boothroyd/
Democratic
Services Officer

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm



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DBLAF/8