

DUDLEY BOROUGH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Tuesday, 17th July, 2012 at 6.00pm in Committee Room 3
at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

PRESENT:

Mr D Bates, Ms T Boothroyd, Mr R J Brooks, Mr R Burgess, Mr A Cutler, Mr P Greenaway, Ms J V Lea, Ms A Nicholls, Councillor 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), Mr D Keeley – Countryside Manager (All Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Miss K Fellows - Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

AGREED

That Ms T Boothroyd be elected Chair of the Forum for the period up to the Annual Meeting in July, 2013.

2. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

AGREED

That Mr R J Brooks be elected Vice Chair of the Forum for the period up to the Annual Meeting in July, 2013.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor Woodall.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Member made a declaration of interest.

5. MINUTES

AGREED

That the Minutes of the Forum held on 17th September, 2012, be approved as a correct record.

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

The Head of Museums, Greenspaces and Bereavement Services reported that the Chairman, and Forum Members Mr R Burgess and Ms S Yeadon had been compiling details for completion of the draft Annual General Report of the Forum and referred to a pro forma that had been completed. The questions on the pro forma were read out to Forum Members for their comments to be noted.

In responding to Members' questions the Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation referred to open area access to land advising that restrictions could be placed upon access under certain circumstances which were defined under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

There followed a discussion in relation to open access to land and the definitions, access designations and the possible restrictions that may follow.

The various areas that had been considered by the Forum in relation to Local Planning Authorities, the Forestry Commission and gating orders were also referred to.

Members agreed that the virtual secretarial service operated by the Council had enabled Forum Members' queries and questions to be directed to relevant Council Officers.

In responding to a question from a Member the Head of Museums, Greenspaces and Bereavement Services confirmed that Forum members should represent one of the following categories as defined in the CROW Act.:

- (a) Users of local rights of way or open access land.
- (b) Owners or occupiers of access land over which PROW subsist.
- (c) Any other interests relevant to the appointing authority.

It was agreed by Members that the priorities of the Forum for the next municipal year would include looking at recruitment of Members, and initiating understanding of the legal implications of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Following further discussions it was agreed that priorities should also include training Members in relation to the Council's definitive Mapping System.

Members agreed that barriers in delivering priorities included the degree of enthusiasm, costs and funding.

Following a suggestion by a Member it was agreed that the Report should include details of matters considered by the Forum during the last municipal year.

Councillor Partridge suggested that the relevant Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet Members should be invited to attend future Forum meetings, in order to make them aware of the Forums' functions

Following further discussions it was:-

AGREED

- (1) That:
 - (a) The Chair would submit a draft Annual General Report to a future meeting of the Forum.
 - (b) The Head of Service would provide a Briefing note to the relevant Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet Members in relation to the functions of the Forum.
 - (c) The Head of Service would circulate the final Annual General Report to all Members of the Council.
- (2) That the Chair and Head of Museums, Greenspaces and Bereavement Services report to a future meeting of the Forum in relation to the Regional Forum Meeting in Worcester.
- (3) That Democratic Services be requested to:-
 - (a) Provide the Chair with details of the issues considered by the Forum during the last municipal year.
 - (b) Advise the Leader of the Council of the dates of the future meetings of the Forum.

7. COOMBESWOOD GREEN WEDGE

The Countryside Manager reported that a Warden had now been appointed for Coombeswood Green Wedge and that the post would operate for three days each week over a five year contractual period.

He also reported on tasks across Coombeswood and Monarch's Way in relation to clearing and urged Members to contact the temporary Warden should they have any information in relation to Coombeswood Green Wedge as work was being conducted upon a survey in relation to the site.

He also indicated that in relation to wider planning issues an informal inquiry was planned regarding the Olive Hill School site, the use of the cricket pitch had been deferred to next year and the Council was in the process of completing the relevant land transfers.

There followed a discussion in relation to the Air Raid Shelter which was in situ on the site and its possible use for educational purposes. Sue Yeadon agreed to provide the Countryside Manager with the details of the relevant Woodland Trust representative in order that he could convene a meeting to discuss the above and possible funding streams.

In responding to Members questions the Countryside Manager advised that the temporary fixed term post for the Coombeswood Warden had been filled by a Member of staff from the Leasowes on secondment and confirmed that the recruitment process was underway to backfill the Leasowes post and that Members would be provided with further updates in relation to this process.

There followed a discussion in relation to the leaflets provided by the Coombeswood Canal Trust. Mr Burgess requested Members to provide comments in relation to the same and agreed to include within the leaflet contact details of the Leasowes Countryside Wardens' Office.

Mr Burgess confirmed that once the leaflets has been finalised they would be distributed by the Coombeswood Canal Trust to Dudley Council Plus, Libraries and Wardens.

Following discussions in relation to conservation projects at the Coombeswood Green Wedge, Ms Yeadon agreed to provide contact details of the Woodlands Creation Advisor to the Countryside Manager in order that possible funding could be discussed with them.

Following further discussion it was

AGREED

- (1) The Countryside Manager be requested to:-
 - (a) Convene a meeting with the Woodland Trust representative to discuss the possibilities of utilising the air raid shelter on the Coombeswood site and possible funding streams for this and report upon any progress in this matter to the next meeting of the Forum.
 - (b) Forward to Members the Job Description for the Coombeswood Green Wedge Warden.

- (2) The Head of Museums, Greenspaces and Bereavement Services be requested to circulate to Members the leaflets provided by the Coombeswood Canal Trust with a request that any comments be forwarded to the Secretary of the Forum by Monday 30th July, 2012.
- (3) That Mr Burgess be asked to ensure that the leaflet produced by the Coombeswood Canal Trust and referred to above include the telephone contact details of the Leasowes Countryside Wardens Office.

8. DEFRA CONSULTATION – “IMPROVEMENTS TO THE POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY –
www.defra.gov.uk/consult/2012/05/14/improve-rights_of_way/

The Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation provided an overview in relation to the DEFRA Consultation, reporting on the three areas of definitive map records and the proposals that Local Authorities should have better lines of communication with landowners in order to address right of way issues.

The Project Engineer Traffic and Transportation requested Members to forward any comments in relation to the Consultation to him by Monday 6th August, 2012 in order that these comments may be included within the Council’s response to the Consultation document.

Councillor Partridge also referred to the Council’s policy in relation to the above and suggested that the views of the Council’s Development Control Committee were also sought in this regard.

AGREED

That Members be requested to forward any comments in relation to Consultation document referred to above to the Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation by 6th August, 2012.

9. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

It was noted that there were none to be considered.

10. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Forum’s Representative, Richard Brooks advised that as there was a Rights of Way Improvement Plan Meeting shortly, an update in relation to this would be provided to the next meeting of the Forum.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was reported that Mr Brooks had raised concerns in relation to a leaflet entitled "A mini guide to cycling and walking around Dudley" which didn't include canal towpaths and it was requested that this be discussed at a future meeting. A request was made by a Member that a report be presented to the next meeting of the Forum relating to the affect the future of the Forestry Authority would have upon the Dudley Borough.

The Countryside Manager also indicated that he had made contact with British Waterways and asked that a representation attend a future meeting of the Forum.

He also advised that in relation to the Paths for Communities Scheme the Map had now been released by Natural England which had deemed the Dudley Borough to be an urban area and therefore not eligible for funding under the scheme.

AGREED

That the Countryside Manager be requested to:-

- (1) Invite the author of the leaflet referred to above and to make a presentation report to a future meeting.
- (2) Provide an update to the next meeting of the Forum in relation to the future of the Forestry Authority's Woodland Report and the affect this would have upon the Dudley Borough.

12. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted, that the next meetings of the Forum would be held on:-

- Tuesday 25th September, 2012
- Tuesday 20th November, 2012
- Tuesday 12th February, 2013
- Tuesday 26th March, 2013
- Tuesday 14th May, 2013
- Tuesday 16th July, 2013

It was noted that all future meetings would be held in Committee Room 3 and not as previously Committee Room 2.

All meetings to start at 6.00pm

The meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN