

## **STOCKPORT LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

Meeting: 16 November 2021

At: 6.00 pm

### **PRESENT**

Councillor David Gosling (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Kathy England (Vice-Chair); Councillors Dave Butler, Edgar Ernstbrunner, Phil Featherstone, Debbi Hall, David Sedgwick and Chris Walsh.

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Liz Morgan.

The Chair reported that it was a statutory requirement that local access forums should have between 10 and 22 members, and that the Stockport Local Access Forum currently had 12 members. However, it was noted that a number of those members had not attended for a significant period of time. It was requested that the Secretary make contact with those members who had not attended a meeting of the Forum recently with a view to removing any barriers to participation that may have prevented or discouraged attendance.

It was further stated that further representation from a wide range of interests would be welcomed on the Forum.

### **2. MINUTES**

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 19 July 2021 were approved as a correct record.

It was stated that while the minutes were accurate insofar as they recorded the discussion that took place at the meeting, it was noted that it was members' expectation that with regard to Statutory Registers, that this would remain as a standing item on the agenda for future meetings of the Forum.

### **3. MATTERS ARISING**

- (i) Update on Progress on Statutory Registers for Rights of Way (Minute 9 of 19 July 2021 refers)

It was stated that while it had been anticipated that additional IT resources would have been allocated to this area with the intention of making significant improvements to the information provided on the website, this remained outstanding in the light of other demands that had been made on that resource. However work had taken place to ensure that the current dataset on the website was not missing any new applications.

The Chair stated that it did not appear that there had been any significant changes to the format of the information published on the website, and the Forum continued to urge that action be taken in this regard.

(ii) A555 Public Rights of Way Update Report (Minute 10 of 19 July 2021 refers)

The Chair reported that since the last meeting of the Forum, there did not appear to have been any changes made to the online mapping service that reflected changes to rights of way in the borough. In response, it was stated that officers were working with legal services to allow the mapping service to display those changes that had been made and sealed subsequent to the last consolidation.

The Chair stated that the Forum would need to maintain an ongoing overview of this matter until satisfactory progress had been made.

(iii) Notification to PNFS, Ramblers and BHS of any rights of way affected by current planning applications (Minute 11 of 19 July 2021 refers)

It was reported that an agreement had been reached that the Rights of Way service would forward any development applications that would have an impact on the rights of way network to interested stakeholders. While it was acknowledged that this was a positive development, it was stated that direct notification by the planning service was far more preferable.

(iv) Establishing a Volunteer Footpath Clearance Group (Minute 13 of 19 July 2021 refers)

It was stated that many voluntary groups did work on an informal basis on the rights of way network and that there was a tension between working more closely with the Council, and the resultant bureaucratic burden that this placed on volunteer groups. It was further suggested that an increased formality of such a relationship may disincentivise people from volunteering.

#### **4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members of the Forum were invited to declare any interests which they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations were made.

#### **5. INSPECTIONS OF PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY IN STOCKPORT**

A representative of the Director of Place Management submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an explanation of the process for the inspection of public rights of way and how this was prioritised.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- It was commented that the majority of the inspections undertaken on the rights of way network reflected a reactive approach to maintenance.
- There appeared to be an absence of a systematic review of the network on a rolling programme.

- It was suggested that some inspection work had been done in the Bredbury and Romiley areas some years ago, however this did not appear to have been cascaded boroughwide.
- In response to these points it was stated that surfaced routes were inspected as part of a rolling programme for highways maintenance. However, it was acknowledged that a similar approach had yet to be deployed for unsurfaced routes.
- Work was taking place to transition between paper-based inspections and computerised logging systems to drive efficiencies in the current inspections regime.
- It was suggested that members of the public should have the ability to report faults and issues with the rights of way network online in a similar way that faults with the highway network could be reported. The Cabinet Member for Citizen Focus stated that this service fell within his portfolio area and he undertook to request that officers investigate whether this functionality could be readily added to the existing online reporting service.
- Concern was expressed that some issues that had been reported, such as broken fencing and overgrown vegetation had not been attended to.
- It was understood that there were limited resources available to the Council that meant not all defects could be addressed immediately.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

## **6. FEASIBILITY WORKS 2021 -22**

A representative of the Director of Place Management submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining the public rights of way locations having feasibility work undertaken and the timescales involved.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- The limited budgetary resources available meant that feasibility works could only be progressed as quickly as that permitted.
- The progress that was being made was welcomed.
- It was suggested that it would be helpful to have the 'future schemes for feasibility' identified in the report mapped out so that their locations could be more readily understood.
- It was further commented that future reports should identify the type of route that was being referred to rather than just the route number.
- There needed to be a means through which the schemes identified in the report would be prioritised.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

## **7. ACCESS BARRIER POLICY**

The Chair reported that this item had been placed on the agenda at the request of the Vice-Chair.

The Vice-Chair reported that the Council's current policy for access barriers was discriminatory and that it needed to work towards the removal of barriers or alternative make them accessible. Concern was expressed that the Council had not yet come

forward with a policy that aimed to remedy this and an associated package of funding to support the work that was necessary to achieve this.

In response, it was stated that work was taking place on this and that there would be an opportunity for the Forum to have an input into this alongside a public consultation in the New Year that would involve all stakeholder groups.

**RESOLVED** – That the Director of Place Management be requested to place an item on the agenda of a future meeting of the Forum allowing the Forum to consider and comment on the proposed revised access barrier policy.

The meeting closed at 6.58 pm