

STOCKPORT LOCAL ACCESS FORUM (OUTSIDE BODY)

Meeting: 15 July 2024

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

David Gosling (Chair) in the chair; Debbi Hall (Vice-Chair); Jonathan Broad, Kathy England, Edgar Ernstbrunner and Liz Morgan.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED – That David Gosling be elected Chair of the Stockport Local Access Forum for the period until the next Annual Council Meeting.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED – That Debbi Hall be appointed Vice-Chair of the Stockport Local Access Forum for the period until the next Annual Council Meeting.

3. MINUTES

The minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 11 March 2024 were approved as a correct record.

4. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Phil Featherstone and Councillor Grace Baynham.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

No declarations were made.

6. MATTERS ARISING

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- (i) The Chair requested an update on what actions had been taken since discussion of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) report at the previous meeting. In response, the Forum was advised that the report had been circulated to other bodies and fora as discussed at the previous meeting. Once feedback has been sought from them, the report and comments would go to the Cabinet member for Parks, Highways & Transport Services at which point a final version would be published,
- (ii) Members enquired as to whether there had been any feedback from legal services regarding outstanding Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) as a result of the

ROWIP report at the previous meeting. In response, member of the Forum were advised that concerns had been raised with the Head of Planning and Highways who has suggested that they will raise it with their manager, and that as of yet there had been no response but that officers will continue to pursue this.

- (iii) Members enquired as to whether the Council or Local Access Forum could support any external funding to share the cost of repairs on the path at Lowerdale Farm. In response, members of the Forum were advised that whilst this was possible, the Council would first need to identify what work needed to be done before deciding whether funding needed to be done entirely by the Council or with funding applications to other bodies such as the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).
- (iv) Members enquired as to whether it was in itself a significant cost to produce an estimate for a project such as the path at the bottom of Lowerdale Farm. In response, members of the Forum were advised that there was a significant funding pot available to enable investigations into the site. This was because the cost of producing an estimate was large as it can involve putting people into danger.

Debbi Hall in the Chair Due to Technical Difficulties

7. DISABLED RAMBLERS PRESENTATION

A representative of the Disabled Ramblers attended the meeting to provide a presentation on the work of the Disabled Ramblers.

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- The Disabled Ramblers reported that their planned routes were fully planned, tested, risk assessed and then given a grading of 1-3, and that they ran an annual programme of 24 rambles.
- It was reported that they actively campaigned for the removal of man-made barriers in the countryside, without wanting Tarmac everywhere. This was partly done by working with relevant bodies such as Sustrans and some members of the Disabled Ramblers are also members of their respective Local Access Forums.
- It was reported that there was some confusion regarding the rights of mobility scooters, and it was stated that they had the same right of access as walkers, although access to footpaths is dependent on barriers, terrain and type of scooter.
- It was reported that the Disabled Ramblers felt that there were two main barriers to accessing the countryside which were the physical barriers such as A frames and box kissing gates; and people's understanding and perception. It was stated that this barrier of perception stems from lack of understanding about mobility scooter capability; an assumption of there being assistance for people using mobility scooters; and concern over illegal access often overriding a clear understanding of legal access. Additionally, language which was not inclusive could be a barrier to this misunderstanding, although this was starting to be addressed by uses of the words "wheeler" and "wheeling".
- It was reported that the most commonly used accessible gates were the one-way bridle gate, the two-way bridle gate, and RADAR key operated gates. However, these all came with issues which can take time to overcome. Solutions had in different forms from various local authorities, including creating separate gates which can allow vehicle access whilst maintaining a chicane to prevent people

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walking straight out onto the road; laying down rocks in the gap next to a vehicle gate so as to prevent quad bike access; and changing vehicle gates to have RADAR key locks to allow access.

- The Chair commented that much of the content of the presentation was familiar to the Forum, with access barrier issues forming part of discussion in previous meetings, and that barrier issues obviously created a significant problem for a significant portion of the population. Additionally, this could create conflict when discussing the need of barriers to prevent motorcycle access and for safety reasons, but that this should not be a reason to stop lawful use.
- Members enquired as to whether there was similar category grading for people who were disabled but could walk as for mobility scooter users. In response, members of the Forum were advised that joining instructions were issues prior to rambles which would indicate this, including a map of the route and a description, including the length and if there are any steep hills.
- Members enquired as to whether the Disabled Ramblers taught people how to use the scooters prior to the rambles. In response, members of the Forum were advised that training was provided and that a large obstacle for some people was that they loved walking earlier in their life and were hesitant to take up use of a scooter but found it liberating once they started using them. Additionally, all scooter users were assessed, including through a medical questionnaire. They were also talked through all of the controls and given practice.
- Members thanked the representative of the Disabled Ramblers for the presentation, adding that they would like to see the entirety of the Trans Pennine Trail made as accessible as possible, and that the example from Lymm had shown that these changes were transformational to accessibility.
- Members enquired as to whether the Disabled Ramblers had ever made a legal challenge to any local authorities in regard to barriers on the basis of discrimination. In response, members of the Forum were advised that the Disabled Ramblers had never personally made a legal challenge as this would require specific local knowledge as well as a greater amount of funding, and that they tended to work with larger organisations which had a greater degree of influence than they did such as Natural England and Sustrans.
- Members commented that the evidence from Sustrans suggested that the removal of barriers increased the usage of footpaths and that this would reduce anti-social behaviour as it was more difficult to commit anti-social behaviour when the footpath was being used more.
- Members noted that in Stockport there had been motorcycle tire tracks on the path from Tiviot Way in the A frame barriers, proving that the barriers did not prevent illegal access but only legal access by disabled users.
- It was reported that many wheelchair and mobility scooter users struggled to get on footpaths near Reddish Vale Visitor's Centre, and nor could a mobility scooter access the Community Garden.
- The Strategy Growth and Improvement Manager provided an update on the implementation of barrier policy. Namely, that the policy had been adopted and funding had been secured, with the placement of initial priorities being undertaken. However, this was undermined by the changing of delivery abilities as Totally Local Company ceased to take on much of the work. A new company to deliver on this had to be found, and as a consequence the only work which had taken place was on the gates at Bramhall Park. Some money had been carried forward from last year's plan and further work was being done on priorities. However, at least one of

the sites would have to go through Area Committee, with specific approvals from ward members, but the reports were being drafted.

- Members commented that they would continue to press the Council as best they could to get action on some of the barrier issues in Stockport.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

David Gosling Back in the Chair

8. NATIONAL HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SURVEY

The Strategy Growth and Improvement Manager provided a presentation on the National Highways and Transport Survey.

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- It was reported that this presentation had come to the Forum following a request during the Rights of Way Improvement Plan item at the previous meeting.
- It was reported that the survey was part a 12-page questionnaire which covered a lot of data, and that the most relevant data had been pulled.
- It was noted that there had been some variance in the data over the years in which it had been collected, both positive and negative.
- It was reported that whilst not all of the data was positive feedback, Stockport fell broadly in line with other local authorities.
- It was reported that this data was used to get a feel for local input and what can be done about the less agreeable areas in terms of local provision. However, it had been found that some of this was outside of local control, and that if things were not generally going well in the news and nationwide then it would affect the satisfaction ratings that respondents give.
- Members enquired as to how the survey was conducted and who was chosen as a recipient. In response, members of the Forum were advised that the survey was undertaken by a company called Measure to Improve using Ipsos Mori, and that they had issued a set number of surveys randomly. The Council had paid for one issue of the surveys and then a secondary issue of the surveys to those who had not responded yet, with around 700-800 people responding which did not seem to be a number that could be raised by any sort of promotion as there was no personal gain from filling it out.
- Members enquired as to whether the walking and cycling questions pertained to those who walk and cycle to work or everybody. In response, members of the Forum were advised that recipients were asked whether they were regular walkers or cyclers but did not ask for what purpose.
- Members noted that equestrians were not included in the survey at all.
- It was reported that the questions were decided nationally but that the Council did put forward suggestions when they felt that changes could be made. However, the value of the added questions would have to be weighed against the value of those removed. Additionally, other local authorities make similar suggestions as this is a national survey so this may only have an impact of other local authorities were also calling for this change to the survey.

- Members commented that they understood why there was a low partition rate, as 12 pages of questions was a large quantity for no reward.
- Members noted that positive responses to satisfaction with public rights of way had generally been declining, with a slow decline since 2017, particularly on the question regarding vegetation.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

9. DISCUSSION ON MEMBER TRAINING

Members of the Forum were invited to discuss options for training sessions for the Forum.

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- Members commented that it would be useful to have training in regard to the law around access and rights of way.
- Members commented that it would be useful to have training over the function of the committee and whether it met its functions, possibly to be given by Natural England.

RESOLVED – That the item be adjourned to the next meeting.

10. RECENT ACTIVITY UPDATE

The Strategy Growth and Improvement Manager provided an update on recent activity.

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- Members enquired so to why some members had not received notice for the proposed extinguishment at bridleway 16HGB to be replaced with a parallel bridleway. In response, members of the Forum were advised that following a request to update the consultee list, and that officers would be in touch with the relevant officer to find out what that list is, to ensure the relevant members are contacted for consultation.
- Members enquired as to the progress of the Heaton Mersey Common work, as no date had been confirmed as to the start of this work. In response, members were advised that officers would follow up on this and provide a response, as information sharing and communications had been an issue.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11. NEW RIGHTS OF WAY

Members were invited comment on a proposed reoccurring New Rights of Way sub-group.

The following comments were made/issues raised:

- The Chair reported that one way in which footpaths come into existence is through historical or current usage, and another way is as a result of developments as part of the planning process. The Chair further requested that a sub-group be

introduced inviting an opportunity to look at the Stockport map and see if there is a case to be made for new rights of way.

- Members commented that it would be a good idea and it would be good to look at Council owned land first as the Council should be sympathetic to the creation of new footpaths.
- Members commented that it would be good to get the view of the Council on new rights of way.
- Members commented that the Forum's input on this issue could be useful as the current rights of way map is disconnected, and that using small pieces of land to connect rights of way and urban areas so as to avoid roads would be good for the network.
- Members commented that new paths should be inclusive of all users, including equestrians and mobility scooter users.
- Members were advised by a Senior Transportation Officer that no rights of way were unconnected as both ends are usually connected to the highway network, as rights of way are all highways and consequently, creating a new right of way would not necessarily resolve any issues when improving part of the existing network could. Members were additionally advised that not all places with connections were rights of way.
- Members were advised by the Strategy Growth and Improvement manager that there would never be a refusal of a plan from a Councillor in principle but that this would need to be accompanied by detail for anything put forward as it could not be committed to without knowledge of the impact on the local area.
- Members commented that potential new rights of way could be contentious in certain green spaces.
- Members were advised by a Democratic Services officer that it may not be within the committee's gift to form a sub-group but that this will be looked into.

RESOLVED – That the discussion item be noted.

12. FORWARD PLAN

The meeting closed at 7.42 pm