

Powys Local Access Forum

Annual report 2020\21

Introduction

The current Powys Local Access Forum (LAF) was established in February 2020 shortly before the first Coronavirus lockdown. This report covers the work undertaken by the LAF up to the end of March 2021 and sets out the proposed work programme for 2021\22.

Background

Local authorities in Wales have a statutory duty to establish a LAF in their areas. Their main function is to give advice to the Council, National Resources Wales (NRW) and others on public access to land for open-air recreation and enjoyment, taking into account the needs of land management and the natural beauty of the area.

Membership

Powys County Council (PCC) is the appointing Authority for the LAF. In undertaking this task it is required to ensure that the membership includes:

- users of local access land and local rights of way
- owners and occupiers of access land and land with rights of way
- other interests especially relevant to the area

In January 2020 PCC advertised for applicants and made appointments in February 2020. The current membership is as follows

Graham Taylor (Chair)
Michael Brennan (Vice Chair)
County Councillor Roger Williams
Annette Turner
Brian Jones
Charles De Winton
Chris Ledbury
Emyr Davies
Jill Kibble
John Rowlands
Josie Pearson
Katherine Shaw
Robert Hyde
Tony Cooke

There is a separate LAF for the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP).

Work during 2020/21

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a significant adverse impact on work to improve access in Powys and as a consequence it has been an unusual year for the LAF. Nevertheless the LAF has endeavoured to work in a different way through virtual meetings and email contact and has been able to offer advice on access matters to the relevant authorities. This has included:

Offering thanks and support to Countryside Services (CS) who look after rights of way in the area for the work they have been able to do in very difficult circumstances.

Advice to NRW on its draft Forest Resource Plans.

Advice to PCC on the projects to be undertaken with the help of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), Access Improvement Grant.

Advice to PCC on their draft Work Plan for 2021/22. The LAF expressed concern that insufficient priority was being given to improving signposting, waymarking and dealing with obstructions. Some improvements to make the plan more user friendly and informative were also suggested.

Comments on the plans to undertake improvement to the Monks Trod between Pont Elan and the Ceredigion border to make it suitable for use by motor cycles. This is a complex issue and the LAF advised the Council that it was not in support of the proposed works.

Suggesting to PCC the development of a bridge rebuilding programme

Ideas for publicising the new Countryside Code.

A detailed response to work on the WAG plans for Access Reform. This was generally supportive but concern was expressed about the costs and practicalities of allowing cyclists to make use of all footpaths.

A request to the Council not to make further reductions in the budget of CS in 2021/22. This request was unsuccessful.

Initial comments on the proposed Global Centre for Rail Excellence on common land (Nant Helen).

Discussion with CS about the frustrations felt by users of rights of way with the condition of some parts of the network and the

difficulties in getting problems with obstructions and route finding addressed in a timely manner.

Welcoming efforts to make more information about rights of way on line and, in particular, the aim to get a user friendly definitive map on PCC's website. It is hoped these efforts to improve the on line presence will come to fruition soon.

Comments on the update version of the Landholders guide on Rights of Way which it is hoped will be published shortly.

Appointing a member to serve on the new Canals and Communities Well Being Project.

Offering support to the newly appointed Bio Diversity Officer working on the Powys Nature Recovery Action Plan and pressing PCC to continue funding for the post when he runs out after 12 months.

Pressing the Council to develop a programme to discharge their statutory duty to erect signposts where rights of way meet a metalled road.

Expressing concern about the time being taken to resume volunteer working parties.

Offering support to CS in their efforts to find a solution to the issues at the Glasbury canoe launch point.

Expressing concern about the long delays in resolving 2 outstanding access issues at Moelfe City and Devil's Gulch.

Supporting NRW and PCC's work to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Offa's Dyke National Trail.

Proposed work 2021/22

Planned work for the current year includes:

Input to a review of the CS Enforcement Policy.

Input to a review of the Grants to Landholders Programme.

Input to a review of the Guide on Rights of Way for planning applicants.

Further input into the WAG Access Reform Plans and their plans for supporting agriculture.

Presentation of this Annual report to the PCC Planning and Rights of Way Committee – this wasn't able to happen in 2020/21.

Annual meeting with the PCC Chief Executive and Cabinet Member responsible for Rights of Way - this wasn't able to happen in 2020/21.

Monitoring and review of the Rights of Way Work Plan 2021/22.

Input into the Work Plan 2022/23.

Input into the forthcoming review of the Local Development Plan.

Further input into the Rights of Way issues for the proposed Global Centre for Rail Excellence – this may include a site visit.

Advice to NRW on Forest Resource Plans

Advising on funding opportunities for rights of way work.

Input into further discussions about the Monk's Trod and continuing to press for a resolution to the long outstanding issues at Moelfre City and the Devil's Gulch.

Reviewing how other parts of the Council, besides CS, contribute towards improving the rights of way network.

Supporting efforts to ensure users of rights of way do so responsibly and that landholder discharge their responsibilities for rights of way.

This is not an exclusive list as there will be other issues that emerge during the course of the year.

Further Information

There is a dedicated page on the PCC website to the work of the LAF - [Local Access Forum - Powys County Council](#)

This gives dates of future meetings and minutes from past meetings. The public are welcome to attend meetings. Arrangements for doing so should be made through CS by contacting rights.of.way@powys.gov.uk

Graham Taylor
Chair, Powys LAF
July 2021