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Alistair Gordon, Chair of the SLAF; Paul Heal, Vice Chair

SOMERSET LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MEETING - minutes WEDNESDAY 25th FEBRUARY 2007 AT WATCHFIELD VILLAGE HALL, near HIGHBRIDGE

Forum members present

Alistair Gordon (Chair), Roger Conway, Greg Jones, Shaun Matthews, David Perris, Penny Richards, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Hugh Warmington, Stephanie Wheeler,

Somerset County Council Officers

Sarah Littler Manager, RoW Maintenance and Development, Sally Vickery- RoW Officer SLAF Secretary,

Apologies: Howard Brunton, Phoebe Judah, Paul Heal, Hillary Mead, Henry Hobhouse

Election of Chair and Vice Chair; Alistair Gordon was elected as Chair and Paul Heal was elected as Vice Chair.

New members; Greg Jones, Roger Conway and Hugh Warmington introduced themselves. Sally Whittaker will also be invited to join the Forum.

Previous minutes agreed as correct

Matters Arising from the Minutes

Item 6; Problems with database acknowledged; modifications to the whole system are being made. Suggestion that a feedback/comment form should be available for members of the public.

ACTION: members to use the system, to be found at

(<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/somerset/ete/rightsofway/interactivemapping/>

Check and feedback their experience and comments to

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/somerset/learning/rfl/feedback/>

Renaming SLAF; The name "Local Access Forum" "does not inform the public about the purpose of the forum. It is confused with disabled access to shops and services rather than the wider, recreational access to the countryside. Devon has renamed itself to Devon Countryside Access Forum, DCAF, and similarly Hampshire to HCAF

ACTION; members to think about possible, more enlightening names for discussion next time.

The Role of SLAF; To be postponed until Paul Heal is able to attend and present his findings. Any thoughts/comments from SLAF members welcome.

Multi User Path Surfaces ; Surfaced paths are constructed by Highways under the Atkins contract, who tend to use higher, highway standards. Rights of Way advise Highways to use the standards set out in The Countryside Agency 'On the right track: surface requirements for shared use routes' which can be found on the Natural England publications page or by phoning 0870 1206466 for free copies.

<http://naturalengland.twoten.com/NaturalEnglandShop/product.aspx?ProductID=d09b8836-2de5-48e0-9b5d-32822fa85511>

SCC is now recruiting a cycling officer. Members hoped the officer appointed would include horse riding in their route development.

South West LAF Regional meeting; Jim Clarke, Regional Director of Sport England, emphasised that LAFs should have a role in advising on how to increase the number of people taking active recreation. The emphasis in Sport England is to increase active recreation in a wider experience than purely organised sport. LAFs could be partners in Regional Sports Bodies and should be involved in county-based strategic sports partnerships. The recent 'Active People' survey involved an unprecedented 350,000 people and its results should be useful to bid for funding through such channels as Primary Care Trusts. BHS promote Riding for Health, to include mental health as well as physical health benefits. RoW officers will be conducting a public survey at this summers shows as a follow up to the initial ROWIP consultation and more counters are being fitted within the county's rights of way to monitor path usage. The Coleridge Way project officer has been monitoring tourist business activity along the route through business workshops. Mendip have set up a web site 'Active Mendip' as a one-stop shop for physical recreation activities in Mendip.

ACTION; *Sarah Littler to find out who is the Sport England contact in SCC*

SLAF Sub Groups; Appendix attached of various groups and their members.

Improving Liaison group will be assisting Grant Turner, RoW Community Development officer, at meetings to involve parishes and local groups in the Community Paths Partnership.

ACTION:members to suggest any questions or approaches that may be made by SLAF members at these meetings. Grant Turner to be copied in.

Parishes should be aware they receive recreational development money from every house given planning consent in their patch, and parishes may be encouraged to consider spending it on their Rights of way access to benefit their community.

Waterlinks; SL explained the project and her role on the fringe of the project advising on various RoW elements. It has been successful in attracting a £500,000 grant for its initial development and will be one of the 7 televised bids for the public to vote for in December. The winning project will attract a £50 million award to develop it fully. Visit the SCC web page at

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/somerset/latestnews/pressreleases/details.cfm?releaseID=1168>

ACTION The Forum to write a letter of support for the main thrust of the project prior to 28th May. The letter will reflect the Forum's concerns that the development should take care to fulfil its sustainable objectives and not compromise the natural characteristics of the Levels. Secretary to circulate a draft for approval.

AOB:

- SL noted concerns of rapid erosion of the riverbank following the sewage outfall construction at the Taunton Park & Ride development and advised members the RoW team are looking into it.
- There will be a low-key launch of the Coleridge Way riding route on 18th May, followed by a higher profile one when all the landowner agreements are finalised. The launch will be at the Coleridge Livery. Statistics received from future fitted route counters to be sent out to SLAF members. <http://www.coleridge-way.co.uk/>
- SL considers that the development of new routes, and continued promotion and further development of related routes for long distance routes, needs a dedicated Trails Officer, even if only a part time post.
ACTION; SLAF to send a letter of support to Paula Hewitt/Sonia Davidson-Grant for a Trails Officer
- British Standards require self-closing gates on bridleways to open in both directions, except where they open back into a field from a road.
ACTION SLAF to write to Centrewire to suggest they make this clear in their catalogue. It is also vital that gates are installed correctly as gates that do not open and close easily cause problems and hence bad feelings between landowners and users.
- SL updated members on changes to the procedures for modification investigations. There will be more emphasis on applicants doing more research to support the application and attempting to resolve the problem without need of a modification application. A member of the audience reminded the officers of previous difficulties in getting a bridleway dedication accepted because of costly works required to bring it up to acceptable standards. However, if a modification has strong evidence and is likely to be successful, a realistic assessment of requirements for the route to be adopted should be made and weighed against the cost and bad feeling generated by a modification application.

Date of next meeting; Wednesday 25th July at 6:00pm in Neroche Village Hall, Bickenhall.

It will be preceded by an afternoon site visit to view elements of the Neroche Project. Steve Jenkinson of the Kennel Club will speak to the Forum. View 'You and Your dog in the countryside' leaflet and more about the Kennel Club and a recent study in Hampshire at <http://naturalengland.twoten.com/NaturalEnglandShop/product.aspx?ProductID=cdd17a1e-3112-4e68-acf1-cf3143964c52> and http://www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/archive/presscentre/Talking_the_walk.asp